



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Appropriations Committee Hearing 6/19/20 Questions & Answers

Federal stimulus grants:

Question: When will Connecticut receive the money?

Answer: Connecticut's application has been approved and we already have the ability to drawdown the \$111 million in Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief funds. Of this amount \$99 million will be distributed to districts.

Question: Is the application process for districts ready; what is the timeline for districts to receive funds?

Answer: Districts will apply for their entitlement through the department's electronic grants system. The application is scheduled to go out today June 19th. Upon approval of their application districts may draw down funds through the department's cash management system as they need them.

Question: What is the status of the competitive grants?

Answer: The department is applying for the Rethink K-12 Education Models competitive grant. There is \$180 million set-aside for this purpose and the application is due to the federal government on June 30th.

Question: What sort of assistance is SDE providing to districts?

Answer: The Department has provided districts with guidance on the 4 main areas of focus that we believe the CARES Act funding should be focused on (equitable access to technology, equitable access to high quality online curriculum, education recovery and reopening schools and social and emotional well-being). The department will also be prepared to assist districts as necessary when the application process begins.

Question: Will SDE be preparing a comprehensive update on these funds, (the allocations as well as the program usage), for the legislature?

Answer: The department is required to provide regular reports to the United States Department of Education and will make them available to the legislature as they are released.

Question: How will the state be using the money from the CARES Act that can be distributed at the state level (for emergency needs as determined by the state ed agency, 9.5-10% of the grant total)?

Answer: This has yet to be determined in detail.

Status of Reopening Schools:

Question: Does the Reopening subcommittee have formal plans they are considering for fall?

Answer: The department is working hand in hand with the Governor's Office, OPM and DPH, with the advice and consultation of the re-opening committee, to finalize a plan for the fall that takes both the educational needs and the safety needs of our students, faculty and staff into consideration. The department will make a re-open recommendation to the Governor for his consideration in the coming days.

Question: What is the timeline for choosing a plan, and will the legislature receive the detailed copies of the various plans?

Answer: The Governor has announced publicly that schools will be open in the fall and that he hopes to make an announcement within the next few days, at which point the plan will be shared publicly.

Question: How will magnets not in compliance with SDE be handled when schools reopen?

Answer: CSDE has no intention of financially penalizing magnet school operators in FY2021 for non-compliance due to choices made by families to keep their children close to home during the COVID-19 pandemic. CSDE staff will, when student enrollments are reported to the Public School Information System in October and final numbers are confirmed, work with magnet school operators to develop compliance plans aimed at helping each school achieve goal numbers (as it does every year) to address any enrollment consequences from the public health crisis. In the meantime, department staff is working with operators to assist in providing a safe and healthy environment for students, staff and administrators in our magnet schools and to promote enrollment in the fall.

Question: How will vocational-technical schools be handled if "shop" related class cannot be held?

Answer: We are working on a multiphase opening plan which would give priority to students during their trade cycle. We will have 4 phase options depending on current health threat level at the time. We anticipate plan finalized by end of the month.

We have a committee working on this while we are simultaneously in negotiations with the teachers' union. The committee is working toward a plan that prioritizes in person trade settings when safely allowable (partial school attendance connected to grade and trade), and includes synchronous distance learning connected to a schedule for all students.

Question: Is there a plan to change “resident students” for ECS purposes, for the FY 22 calculation, since it’s possible lots of parents will choose to homeschool this academic year (impacting the October count)?

Answer: This is not a decision the department can make in isolation of the Office of Policy and Management and the legislature. To modify the resident student count would require a legislative change. Because we use the October 1 data of the previous year in the calculation, it will not be a problem in FY 2021, however it is something we may consider for FY 2022.