



## Regional Cooperation Between Local Boards of Education

### Background

In April 2015, the PRI committee authorized this study to examine the prevalence, advantages, and disadvantages of regional cooperation and identify factors related to implementing, replicating, or expanding beneficial efforts.

Regional cooperation between boards of education refers to the voluntary joint provision of services, programs, activities, or operations. Cooperative efforts can occur between two or more school districts, between school districts and regional educational service centers (RESCs), or between school districts and other entities such as the State Education Resource Center (SERC) and the Connecticut Association of Schools (CAS).

Regional cooperative efforts vary widely, from two school districts arranging to share a bus route or football team, to the creation of a regional school district serving children in grades K-12. PRI staff examined nearly 90 collaborative efforts that could occur within three instructional categories (special education, general education, and professional development) and three operational categories (pupil transportation, administrative and back office functions, and cooperative purchasing). Agri-science centers, designated high schools, and formal cooperative arrangements pursuant to C.G.S. Sec. 10-158a, were also examined.

Because there is no centralized place where information on regional cooperation between school districts is collected, PRI staff developed a database of such information. A key source of this information was structured telephone interviews with 56 (46 percent) of the 122 school district superintendents of non-regional K-12 schools. Additional information was also obtained from the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), Connecticut's six regional educational service centers (RESCs), and the Connecticut Association of School Business Officials (CASBO).

### Main Staff Findings

**Almost all school districts studied participated in at least one cooperative effort in each of the three instructional areas** of general education, special education, and professional development. Also:

- **Smaller school districts cooperate in relatively more instructional areas** than larger school districts; however, **there are also many cooperative efforts occurring in middle sized school districts**
- Depending on the school district's geographic area, RESCs played a larger or smaller role in certain special education areas.
- School districts in more affluent communities are less likely to partner for physical therapy, occupational therapy, or psychological services.

With the exception of pupil transportation, **there were generally fewer partnerships between educational entities in the operational areas:**

- Nearly three-quarters of school districts collaborated on special education pupil transportation
- **School districts are more likely to partner with local municipalities for cooperative purchasing** of, such items as heating oil/gas, and health insurance.
- **School districts are more likely to partner with local municipalities for administrative and back office functions** such as snowplowing, grounds maintenance, and auditing.

Superintendents identified **factors used in deciding whether to form or continue a collaboration including whether effort:**

- saves money or contains costs
- results in efficiencies or improves quality of services
- satisfies a need of the school district
- benefits all collaborating parties
- benefits or positively impacts students
- logistics can be worked out
- meets the needs of local control, politics, and good relationships
- to collaborate is known by the school district

### PRI Staff Recommendations

**Share more information.** Publicize collaborative opportunities in training, ride-sharing, and food services. Provide information on special education membership model, and software licensing and hosting rates.

**Create financial incentives.** Cover start-up costs of new cooperative efforts.

# Acronyms

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<b>ABA</b>	Applied Behavior Analysis
<b>ACES</b>	Area Cooperative Educational Services, a RESC serving the southcentral part of the state
<b>ACIR</b>	Advisory Committee on Intergovernmental Relations
<b>AFT</b>	American Federation of Teachers
<b>ASTE</b>	Agricultural Science and Technology Education
<b>AT</b>	Assistive Technology
<b>C.E.S.</b>	Cooperative Educational Services, a RESC serving the southwest part of the state
<b>CABE</b>	Connecticut Association of Boards of Education
<b>CAPSS</b>	Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents
<b>CAS</b>	Connecticut Association of Schools
<b>CASBO</b>	Connecticut Association of School Business Officials
<b>CBA</b>	Collective Bargaining Agreement
<b>CEA</b>	Connecticut Education Association
<b>CIRMA</b>	Connecticut Interlocal Risk Management Agency
<b>COG</b>	Council of Governments
<b>COSTA</b>	Connecticut School Transportation Association
<b>CREC</b>	Capitol Region Education Council, a RESC serving the northcentral part of the state
<b>CSDE</b>	Connecticut State Department of Education
<b>CTHSS</b>	Connecticut Technical High School System
<b>EASTCONN</b>	RESC serving the northeast region of the state
<b>ESA</b>	Educational Services Agency
<b>ESEA</b>	Elementary and Secondary Education Act
<b>ESL</b>	English as a Second Language
<b>GED</b>	General Equivalency Diploma
<b>IEP</b>	Individualized Education Program
<b>IT</b>	Information Technology
<b>LEARN</b>	RESC serving the southeastern part of the state
<b>MORE Commission</b>	Municipal Opportunities and Regional Efficiencies Commission
<b>OPM</b>	Office of Policy and Management
<b>OT</b>	Occupational Therapy
<b>PD</b>	Professional Development
<b>PT</b>	Physical Therapy
<b>RESC</b>	Regional Educational Service Center
<b>RSD</b>	Regional School District
<b>SBE</b>	State Board of Education
<b>SERC</b>	State Education Resource Center
<b>SRO</b>	School Resource Officer

## **LIST OF PROGRAM REVIEW COMMITTEE STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 1. Have CSDE publicize the benefits of the special education program membership model as a way to promote replication of these models in Connecticut.**
- 2. Legislature should consider either establishing a new grant or loan program to provide (seed) money for start-up costs for new cooperative efforts among local boards of education, or resume funding of the Technical Assistance for Regional Cooperation grants (C.G.S. Sec. 10-262t) to support plans that implement cost-saving strategies.**
- 3. In coordination with SERC, the RESC Alliance should develop and publicize a comprehensive list of training opportunities for school personnel. The opportunities would include both special education and general education topics sponsored or planned by school districts, RESCs, SERC, and other entities, that are open to other school districts.**
- 4. RESCs should look for structured ways to facilitate communication between districts about opportunities to share rides to out-of-district destinations.**
- 5. CSDE should disseminate information to school districts about the possibility of realizing efficiencies through either sharing food service directors or sharing food service operations. Such dissemination efforts could potentially be supported by CASBO, CAPSS, and the six RESCs.**
- 6. The RESC Alliance should develop a centralized listing of all available opportunities for districts to obtain reduced rates for software licensing or hosting and each RESC should include links to this list on their websites to facilitate district access to such opportunities.**