



Parents Legal Guides



The Nuts & Bolts of How Your Child's School is Funded



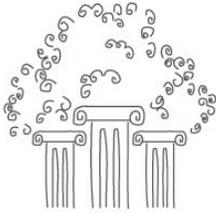
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Sowing the Seeds of Justice...



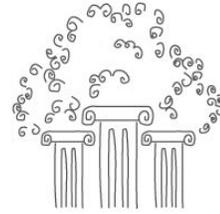
Access to Education

Financial Access and Opportunity

Access to Health Care



Connecticut Appleseed
Sowing the Seeds of Justice...



Access to Education

Financial Access and Opportunity

Access to Health Care

The Nuts & Bolts of How Your Child's School is Funded

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How to Use This Guide

This guide is a resource for parents on the laws and their rights. It is intended to provide parents with information so they know how to best support their child.

As you read through this guide, you will find terms highlighted in bold and you can find the meaning of those terms in the next section, "terms you should know."



You can find helpful checklists by looking for



And this means key ideas to remember

Toward the end of the guide you will find sample letters to help you in written communication to your child's school. The final page of the guide contains lists of local organizations and/or sources of support.

Terms You Need to Know

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP): the minimum performance level that schools and school districts must achieve each year to meet state reading and math goals. A school district's report card informs parents whether or not a school has made AYP.

District Reference Group: a classification system for school districts that is based on student enrollment, family income, poverty levels, the number of single-parent families and non-English language homes, and other socio-economic information that is used to cluster similar groups of districts.

Education Cost Sharing (ECS) Grant: the grant that provides per pupil funding for education from the state to individual towns.

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA): a federal law that funded K-12 education by providing funds for professional development, instructional materials, resources to support educational programs, and parental involvement promotion. **ESEA** was replaced by the **No Child Left Behind Act** of 2001.

Mill Rate: the amount per \$1000 of assessed value that property owners pay in local taxes. With a mill rate of 27.95 and an automobile with an assessed value of \$1000, a resident would owe \$27.95 in taxes. On an automobile with an assessed value of \$10,000, the property owner would owe \$279.50 in taxes.

Minimum Budget Requirement: the percentage of ECS funds that school districts are allowed to spend on non-education expenses.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB): A federal law that aims to hold school districts responsible for student performance. Under the law the Connecticut Department of Education must:

- ⇒ Develop high quality class work for all students
- ⇒ Test students to make sure they have learned skills in core subject areas (math, science & reading)
- ⇒ Provide a highly qualified teacher in every classroom

Property Taxes: taxes that are paid yearly to a town or taxing district on property such as a house or car.

Racial or Socio-Economic Segregation: the policy or practice of separating people of different races, classes, or ethnic groups, in schools, housing, and public or commercial facilities “as a form of discrimination”.

Racial Integration: the process of ending systematic racial segregation. In addition to desegregation, integration includes goals such as eliminating barriers and creating equal opportunity.

Title I School: This relates to a set of federal government programs to improve the learning of children from low-income families. The U.S. Department of Education provides Title I funds to states to give to school districts based on the number of children from low-income families in each district, which generally means those districts with a large number of students eligible for the free/reduced price lunch program. All Title I schools must not only comply with the **No Child Left Behind Act** but are supposed to involve parents in deciding how these funds are spent and in reviewing the school’s progress.

Transportation Services: providing a child with a disability with transportation to and from school, transportation for travel between schools, assistance with travel in and around school buildings, and specialized equipment.

Common Terms in District Budgets

Dues & Fees/Debt Service Accounts: Dues and fees, as well as payments made on the bonds issued by the district for building projects and rental payments to the town.

Employee Benefits: This category of accounts covers payments made by the district on behalf of employees. Such payments are fringe benefit payments and, although not paid directly to employees, are part of the cost of personnel.

Other Purchased Services: This refers to services rendered by companies that are not on the payroll of the school district, including transportation, tuition for out-of-district placements, property and liability insurance, etc.

Purchased Professional and Technical Services: includes such items as pupil services costs, student testing services, legal and auditing services, professional services, sporting event officials and software support.

Purchased Property Services: includes costs for the physical maintenance of schools such as emergency repairs for roofs.

Professional & Technical Services: services provided by persons or firms with specialized skills and knowledge (such as software, SAT Preparation, evaluation and testing services, auditing services, etc.).

Property & Program Improvements: equipment, and property that are considered part of fixed assets.

Purchased Property Services: expenses to operate, repair and maintain property under control of the Board of Education. These services are performed by persons other than school district employees.

Salaries: This category of accounts includes amounts paid to both permanent and temporary district employees, including personnel substituting for those in permanent positions. Also included are stipends paid for sports and activity advisors.

Supplies: items that are consumed, are worn out, or have deteriorated through use such as maintenance supplies, fuel, utilities, textbooks, and library books.

Where Your School District's Money Comes From

School and school district's money comes from three sources:

1. Local tax revenues
2. State funding
3. Federal funding

Local Funding

Local property taxes are used to fund the town's share of the public school budget. In theory, this means that the higher the value of a town's taxable real estate, the more capable is that town to fund its public schools from property taxes.

Overall, more than half of schools' funding in Connecticut is raised from local property taxes. In some smaller towns, as much as 80% of the town's budget, raised primarily through property taxes on houses, apartment buildings and commercial properties, goes to support the local schools. In communities where property values are growing very slowly or declining, paying for the increasing needs of schools aggravates the local property tax burden. This is especially a challenge in communities that are home to large proportions of low-income residents and/or people living on modest fixed incomes (such as senior citizens)

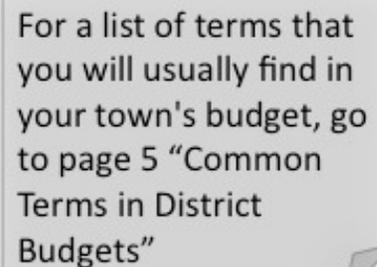
In recognition of that problem in 2008, the Minimum Expenditure Requirement (which outlined the minimum amount towns needed to spend of their own funds towards education) was replaced by the **Minimum Budget Requirement (MBR)**. **MBR** allows towns to divert from 35% to 85% of their state funding increase for non-education use like property tax relief. The only towns not allowed to do so are ones that are in their third year or more of failing to make **Adequate Yearly Progress** in math or reading as outlined by **No Child Left Behind**.

TOWN/CITY BUDGET PROCESS

The budget process depends on the structure of your town or city. Overall, education money that is determined by the **Education Cost Sharing Grant** is sent to towns and put into their general fund and then spent as shown in the town's budget. Just because money is received from the **Education Cost Sharing Grant** does not mean that the money is required to be spent only on education.

In some cities, town officials are responsible for reviewing, modifying, and approving school budgets every year. The budget created by the school is then sent to the Board of Education for approval. After the budget is approved by the Board of Education, they send the budget to the town finance committee for its recommendation. Final approval of the budget is in the hands of the City Council and/or Mayor.

Other towns also use referendums or town meetings under which the budget is presented by the town for approval by residents. Referendums, which are also referred to as initiatives or ballot measures, are processes by which the budget is presented to the public to vote by ballot to accept or reject. If a budget is rejected, then a new budget is drafted and re-presented for a vote. If a budget is not accepted by the start of the fiscal year, the local government shuts down.



For a list of terms that you will usually find in your town's budget, go to page 5 "Common Terms in District Budgets"

Town meetings are a form of government when residents of the town or school district gather once a year and vote on budgets, laws and other matters. Votes are taken by voice, and if close, by show of hands. If a Town Meeting rejects a budget, a new Town Meeting must be called to consider the next proposed budget. State law allows the Board of Selectmen to adopt an estimated tax rate and continue operating based on the previous budget in the event a Town Meeting hasn't adopted a new budget in time.



Five ways YOU Can Impact Your Towns Budget Process

- ⑤ Learn as much as you can. Get a copy what your town's line item budget and find out the budget process and timeline. For a sample letter asking for a copy of the budget, flip to page 19.
- ④ Attend the city council meeting/town hearing on the budget. Most towns' budget hearings occur in the spring, typically in mid-April. To start, find your town's website at:

<http://www.citytown.info/Connecticut.htm>

- ③ Host a PTA/PTO meeting on the school budget
- ② Meet with your city councilman

AND...

- ① Write letters to the editor about articles on the budget and its impact on your school and your child's learning.

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State Funding

As Connecticut's funding to towns has decreased over the last decade, local funds have had to increase to fill the gap. Between 1990 and 2008 in real dollars that account for inflation, state spending on education increased by just \$97 million, a mere 5.67% increase. To understand the impact of the state's funding to public schools, it is important to understand how state school funding is calculated and distributed in Connecticut.

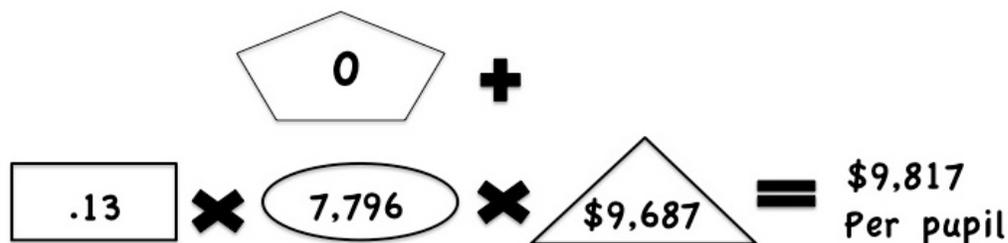
THE EDUCATIONAL COST SHARING GRANT

Cities and towns in Connecticut receive state aid for education through the **Educational Cost Sharing (ECS) Grant**. Each town's **ECS Grant** is computed by a formula that reflects the state's effort to balance the ability of the state's municipalities to fund their public schools.

The **ECS Grant** Formula is:



For example, using the **ECS** Formula for Milford for the 2007-08 school year, the **ECS** per pupil grant would be:

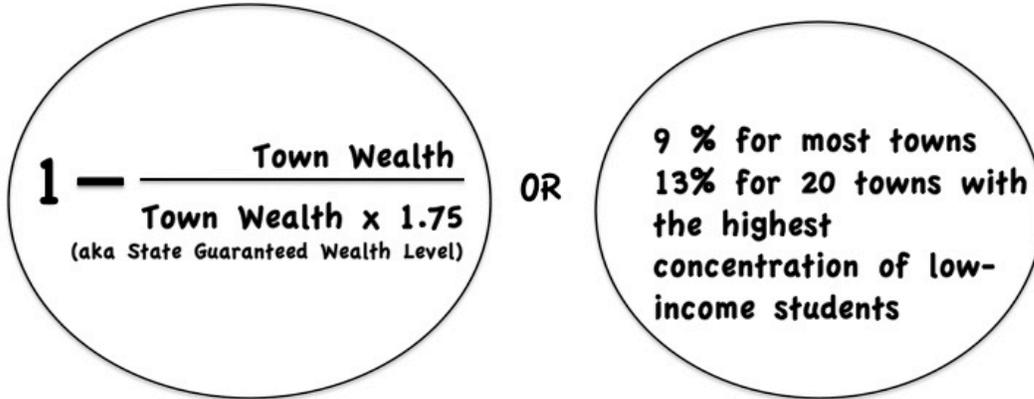


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Base Aid Ratio

is determined by comparing a town's wealth to that of Connecticut's other municipalities. The richer a town is, the lower is its base aid ratio. The minimum base aid is 9%, which ensures that every town, no matter how wealthy, gets an **ECS Grant**.

The base aid ratio is whichever of the following options is larger:



Need Students

is calculated from the number of students attending all public schools in the town and then adjusted upward to take into account the additional costs of educating students who are poor or have limited English Language Proficiency (ELP). The "need student" formula is:

$$\# \text{ of Resident Students} + 33\% \text{ of Poverty Students} + 15\% \text{ of Limited English Proficiency Students}$$

Foundation

The foundation is the level of weighted per-student **ECS Grant** for towns. In 2008, the foundation was increased from \$ 5,891 to \$ 9,687 and will hold at that amount until 2012.

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A per-student bonus for towns that are part of regional school districts. The bonus is: \$100 per student in K-12 regional districts; \$46.15 per student enrolled in a 7-12 district; and \$30.77 for each student enrolled in a 9-12 district.



Seven Ways YOU Can Impact Connecticut's Budget Process

- ⑦ Learn the system. The Connecticut General Assembly holds year-round tours on the history and legislative process. For more information call: 860-240-0222.
 - ⑥ Prepare ahead of time. Learn what is spent now, how it is spent, and who oversees the spending.
 - ⑤ Don't go at it alone - you probably aren't the only person concerned about the budget! Get involved with local parent groups or try the resources listed on page 24. Ten voices are always stronger than one - plus you can carpool up to the capitol.
 - ④ Be prepared with your story. You don't have to do a lot of research, but think through what you are going to say. Practice on a friend if that helps.
 - ③ Go and visit your state representative. To find out who your local state representative is, call: 860-240-0400/860-240-0500 or visit: <http://www.cga.ct.gov/maps/Townlist.asp>
 - ② Attend hearings - especially when the Department of Education Commissioner testifies.
- AND...
- ① Testify and/or submit written testimony to the Education or Appropriations committee's public hearing on your part of the budget.

Education committee's schedule: <http://www.cga.ct.gov/ed/>
Appropriation committee's schedule: <http://www.cga.ct.gov/APP/>

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DRGs AND STATE FUNDING

District Reference Groups are a mechanism to classify school districts into categories. These categories are used to cluster similar districts with respect to student achievement/test scores, socio-economic status, and size of district. The most affluent districts are DRG A and the poorest are DRG I.

However, it is important to note that the **DRG** categories have nothing to do with a town's education funding from the state because for several years the funding from the state has been based on an annual increase of the prior year's funding, instead of based on the **ECS formula**. But it is still valuable to look at trends in **ECS** funding by **DRG's**.

Since the total number of the children in DRG A differs from the total number of children in DRG I, it is important to understand how money is allocated per pupil. According to analysis by Connecticut Voices for Children, when the **ECS** funding was increased for the 2007-2008 school year, funding for DRG A was increased by 53.9%, while DRG I received a 12.2% increase. However, that 12.2% increase translated into an additional \$792.82 per pupil, while the DRG A schools' 53.9% increase resulted in an additional \$130.44 per student.

However, over time funding across most **DRG's** has decreased. Between 1996-2008 the **ECS** per pupil funding by **DRG** was:

DRG	Percent change
DRG A	318.5%
DRG B	-8.5%
DRG C	-13.4%
DRG D	-7.4%
DRG E	-14.4%
DRG F	-9.5%
DRG G	-1.9%
DRG H	4.2%
DRG I	-5.4%

(Source: Connecticut Coalition for Justice in Education Funding)

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Federal Funding

Federal school funding is determined by the U.S. Congress in the fiscal year before it will be used. In 2004-2005, approximately \$536 billion was dedicated to education and given to the states. On average, it amounts to roughly 5.4% of Connecticut school districts' funding.

The reason why the Federal government's share of education funding is small is because traditionally school funding was considered the responsibility of the states. Federal funding by law is intended to supplement state funding, but not to replace state funds.

That said, the **No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)** increased both federal funding and the federal role in public education. **NCLB** requires more testing of students in grades 3-8 and provides new funding for the federal **Title I** program, which is designed to serve low-income students.

NCLB is actually a reauthorization of the **Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)** of 1965, which provided additional funding for elementary and secondary school programs for children from low-income families, as well as school library resources, textbooks, and other instructional material. These funds also go towards supporting supplemental education centers and services, strengthening state departments of education, and for professional development for teachers.

How Other Public Schools are Funded

Charter Schools

Charter schools are public schools that are created by a law that allows specifically for their creation. To operate, each charter school must be granted a license or charter, which must be renewed periodically.

Charter schools are funded by the state and can also receive federal and private funds. Each year, state charter schools receive an operating grant from the state of \$ 8,650 for 2008 (and \$9,300 in 2009) for each student. The **ECS Grant** is not given to charter schools, nor is it paid to the student's home district.

For transportation of students to charter schools, the school district where the charter school is located must provide transportation to the students attending the charter school. When the child attending the charter school resides outside of the district, the child's resident district may provide transportation. School districts providing transportation are eligible for state reimbursement for those costs, but the reimbursement is based on a sliding scale that depends on the district's wealth.

Inter-District Magnet Schools

Magnet schools are public schools with a particular curricular emphasis. Connecticut recognizes two kinds of magnet schools: "host" magnets, which are operated by the school districts where they are located, and Regional Education Service Center (RESC) magnets, which are operated by regional education service centers.

Magnet schools are funded by state and local funds, and can receive federal and private funding. Part-time arts magnet schools may also charge tuition. Capital projects at magnet schools are reimbursed by the state.

The funding of operating costs is based on the type of charter school. "Host" magnet schools that enroll more than 55% of their students from a single district receive \$6,730 in 2009, \$7,440 in 2010, and \$8,158 in 2011 per pupil. RESC magnet schools that have less than 55% of their students from a single district receive \$7,620 in 2009, \$8,180 in 2010, and \$8,741 in 2011 per pupil.

Magnet schools offering summer school programs for their students receive additional grants. Additionally, funding for transportation is made available through the normal state school transportation grant program for students transported to magnet schools in their home districts, and through a separate grant of up to \$ 1,300 per student for students transported out of the district. Schools may be reimbursed for expenditures over the \$1,300 limit.

Open Choice Schools

The Open Choice program allows students from urban school districts to attend suburban schools and vice versa, where space permits. The Open Choice Program is coordinated by RESCs. Like magnet and charter schools, Open Choice addresses **racial, ethnic, and economic segregation** and works to improve academic achievement.

A school district that accepts students from other districts receives up to \$2,500 annually for each out-of-district student it educates under the Open Choice program. The student's home district receives 50% of its regular per pupil **ECS Grant**. Meanwhile, the school accepting students from other districts receive 50% of its regular per student **ECS Grant**. Excess grants may also be available if the actual enrollment in the program is lower than the number of students for which funds were appropriated.

Impact of Lawsuits on Connecticut's Education Funding

Lawsuits against the state of Connecticut have been instrumental in working toward equality in the funding of public schools in the state. In fact, the Supreme Court of Connecticut has held that the state of Connecticut has a constitutional responsibility to provide every student with “a substantially equal educational opportunity.”

During the 1970's, Horton v. Meskill resulted in significant changes to how schools in Connecticut were funded and brought about the **ECS Grant** formula. In its decision on Horton v. Meskill, the Connecticut Supreme Court found that the state’s funding allowed income disparities of towns to illegally deprive some students of their fundamental right to a free public education. The Court held that the state of Connecticut had a duty to ensure that “wealth discrimination” did not cause funding disparities to public schools. As such, the Court required lawmakers to revise the state’s educational formula to ensure that all students were given an equal enjoyment of their right to a free public education.

While the **ECS Grant** formula addressed some issues in educational funding, it did not address the state’s socioeconomic segregation, which also perpetuated educational inequities. In Sheff v. O'Neill, the Connecticut Supreme Court held that socioeconomic segregation, and the boundaries of school districts in Hartford, Connecticut, caused students in urban areas to receive a poor education and to attend **racially segregated** schools. The Court charged school districts and the state legislature with remedying this problem. This resulted in the creation of interdistrict and regional magnet schools that would allow for **racial integration** of some public schools in Connecticut.

Recently, another lawsuit has been filed against the state of Connecticut. The lawsuit, Connecticut Coalition for Justice in Educational Funding, Inc. v. M. Jodi Rell et al., alleges that the state has failed to maintain a suitable and adequate education system for children, which deprives students of their constitutional rights.

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Specifically, the complaint points to disparities in educational resources, outcomes, and shortcomings in the **ECS Grant** formula, state funding for special education, and other state education grants. As of August 2008, the case is still pending.

Closing

Parents are a crucial component in the effort to ensure that all public schools receive adequate funding and can help by learning how public schools are funded and becoming involved in their local school boards and parent teacher groups.

Sample Letter: Requesting Copy of Budget

[***Date***]

[***Name of School District***]

Business Office

[***Address for School District***]

[***City, State Zip Code***]

To Whom It May Concern:

I would like to obtain a copy of [***school district or school name***] line item budget for [***year of budget***]. I understand that a reasonable fee will be charged for the copies.

Thank you for your assistance on this matter.

Respectfully,

[***Signature***]

[***Your First & Last Name***]

[***Your Address***]

[***Your Phone Number***]

[***Your Email Address and/or Fax Number***]

Sample Letter: Concerns on School Funding

[**Date**]
[**Name of Town**]
[**City Council Member Name**]
[**Address for Town Hall**]
[**City, State Zip Code**]

Dear Mr/Mrs. _____,

My [**son/daughter**] attends [**insert name of school**], in the town of [**insert name of town**]. I am dedicated to ensuring that my child receives the best educational opportunities available. Recently, I have become aware of the fact that my child's school may be inadequately funded.

As a member of the City Council, with some say in how funds are appropriated to schools, I would appreciate the opportunity to speak with you about public school funding in the town of [**insert name of town**].

I can be reached at [**insert phone number or email**].

Sincerely,

[**Signature**]
[**Your First & Last Name**]
[**Your Address**]
[**Your Phone Number**]
[**Your Email Address and/or Fax Number**]

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List of DRG's

District Reference Group A

- * Darien
- * Easton
- * New Canaan
- * Redding
- * Ridgefield
- * Weston
- * Westport
- * Wilton

District Reference Group B

- * Avon
- * Brookfield
- * Cheshire
- * Fairfield
- * Farmington
- * Glastonbury
- * Granby
- * Greenwich
- * Guilford
- * Madison
- * Middlebury
- * Monroe
- * New Fairfield
- * Newtown
- * Orange
- * Simsbury
- * South Windsor
- * Southbury
- * Trumbull
- * West Hartford
- * Woodbridge

District Reference Group C

- * Andover
- * Barkhamsted
- * Bethany
- * Bethlehem
- * Bolton
- * Bridgewater
- * Burlington
- * Canton
- * Columbia
- * Cornwall
- * Durham
- * Ellington
- * Essex
- * Haddam
- * Harwinton
- * Hebron
- * Killingworth
- * Lyme
- * Mansfield
- * Marlborough
- * Middlefield
- * New Hartford
- * Old Lyme
- * Oxford
- * Pomfret
- * Roxbury
- * Salem
- * Sherman
- * Somers
- * Suffield
- * Tolland
- * Washington
- * Woodbury

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District Reference Group C

- * Andover
- * Barkhamsted
- * Bethany
- * Bethlehem
- * Bolton
- * Bridgewater
- * Burlington
- * Canton
- * Columbia
- * Cornwall
- * Durham
- * Ellington
- * Essex
- * Haddam
- * Harwinton
- * Hebron
- * Killingworth
- * Lyme
- * Mansfield
- * Marlborough
- * Middlefield
- * New Hartford
- * Old Lyme
- * Oxford
- * Pomfret
- * Roxbury
- * Salem
- * Sherman
- * Somers
- * Suffield
- * Tolland
- * Washington
- * Woodbury

District Reference Group D

- * Berlin
- * Bethel
- * Branford
- * Clinton
- * Colchester
- * Cromwell
- * East Granby
- * East Hampton
- * East Lyme
- * Ledyard
- * Milford
- * New Milford
- * Newington
- * North Haven
- * Old Saybrook
- * Rocky Hill
- * Shelton
- * Southington
- * Stonington
- * Wallingford
- * Waterford
- * Watertown
- * Wethersfield
- * Windsor

District Reference Group E

- * Ashford
- * Beacon Falls
- * Bozrah
- * Brooklyn
- * Canaan
- * Chaplin
- * Chester
- * Colebrook
- * Coventry
- * Deep River
- * East Haddam
- * Eastford
- * Franklin
- * Goshen
- * Hampton
- * Hartland
- * Kent
- * Lebanon
- * Lisbon
- * Litchfield
- * Morris
- * Norfolk
- * North Branford
- * North Stonington
- * Portland
- * Preston
- * Prospect
- * Salisbury
- * Scotland
- * Sharon
- * Thomaston
- * Union
- * Warren
- * Westbrook
- * Willington
- * Woodstock

District Reference Group F

- * Canterbury
- * East Windsor
- * Enfield
- * Griswold
- * Montville
- * North Canaan
- * Plainville
- * Plymouth
- * Seymour
- * Sprague
- * Stafford
- * Sterling
- * Thompson
- * Voluntown
- * Windsor Locks
- * Wolcott

District Reference Group G

- * Bloomfield
- * Bristol
- * East Haven
- * Groton
- * Hamden
- * Killingly
- * Manchester
- * Middletown
- * Naugatuck
- * Plainfield
- * Putnam
- * Stratford
- * Torrington
- * Vernon
- * Winchester

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District Reference Group H

- * Ansonia
- * Danbury
- * Derby
- * East Hartford
- * Meriden
- * Norwalk
- * Norwich
- * Stamford
- * West Haven

District Reference Group I

- * Bridgeport
- * Hartford
- * New Britain
- * New Haven
- * New London
- * Waterbury
- * Windham

Resources

2-1-1

A free 24 hour phone help line from the United Way of Connecticut for people to get information, or to seek help in a crisis. Simply dial 2-1-1 or 1-800-203-1234 any time of day or night.

Connecticut Parent Power

Statewide Parent Action Network that advocates in education and health care

Phone: 203-645-6702

Website: www.ctparentpower.org

Email: ts@ctparentpower.org

Connecticut Parent Teacher Association Council

Phone: 203-281-6617

Website: www.ctpta.org

Email: connecticut.pta@snet.net

Connecticut Parent Leadership Training Institute (PTLI)

Seeks to enable parents to become leading advocates for children through intensive twenty week trainings in Bridgeport, New Britain, Danbury, New Haven, Greenwich, Norwalk, Meriden, Stamford, Middletown, Waterbury, Milford, and Windsor.

Phone: (860) 240-0085

Website: <http://www.PLTI-CT.org/>

People Empowering People Program

Builds on strength of people with limited financial resources.

Participants work on various group projects to benefit the community.

Phone: (860) 345-4511

Website: www.canr.uconn.edu/ces/pep

AFCAMP Parent Leadership Training

A series of integrated workshops in Hartford focused on developing a better understanding of the juvenile justice, special education, and Department of Children and Families systems

Phone: (860) 297-4358

Email: afcampa@sbcglobal.net

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