



Testimony of Andrew A. Feinstein
Legislative Chair
Special Education Equity for Kids in Connecticut (SEEK)
To Committee on Appropriations
February 17, 2026

Senator Osten, Chairwoman Walker, Senator Somers, Representative Nuccio,

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to present the views of Special Education Equity for Kids in Connecticut (SEEK), a statewide organization of parents, providers, advocates and attorneys fighting for excellent education for students with disabilities. Public education in Connecticut is seriously underfunded. Special education in Connecticut is grotesquely underfunded. We plead with this Legislature to do something about this. Rather than discussing how much more money is needed, I choose to discuss how that money is best applied.

One fact to keep in mind is that Connecticut ranks third in the nation in the percentage of K-12 funding that comes from local sources (57%, as opposed to a national average of 43%) and ranks 41 st in K-12 funding that comes from the state (35%, as opposed to a national average of 45%). The state of Connecticut is failing local school districts and public school students by its parsimonious funding levels.

Raising the foundation amount in the ECS formula would partly rectify this. If foundation amount is the cost of educating a student with no special needs, we should subtract the special education expenditures from the total expenditures of a district and divide that number by the number of students without IEPs. The resultant figure is, to pick some districts at random, \$20,700 for New Haven, \$21,600 for Montville, \$19,900 for Groton, and \$19,200 for Tolland. We understand that no one is seriously talking about raising the foundation amount to the \$20,000 level, but we need to be clear on what adequate state funding would look like. Until the passage of the big special education legislation (Public Act 25-67) last session, Connecticut was one of very few states that failed to appropriate any money directly to support special education in local school districts. There are now, in general terms, three pots of money that support special education. One is the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) grant, which supplies nearly \$2.5 billion to local districts under a complex formula, weighted toward districts with highest needs. This accounts for approximately 18% of the \$13.6 billion that is spent on K-12 Education.

A second source of funding is the Excess Cost grant, which is \$221 million, or pays about 76% of the claims eligible under the statute, under a sliding scale formula. The Excess Cost grant is really an insurance policy that compensates school districts for extremely expensive programs for the most complicated students with disabilities. About 91% of the Excess Cost grant goes to out-of-district placements. In most districts, the Excess Cost grant kicks in for programs that cost more than \$100,000, while the average cost of an out-of-district placement is as high as \$160,000 in many districts.

A third source of funding comes from the Special Education Expansion and Development (SEED) grant and the High Quality Special Education Incentive Grant passed in Public Act 25-67. SEED is budgeted at \$30 million, while strict application of the formula would require an appropriation of \$191 million. This is the only funding that goes directly to support special education in district. Special Education costs average around 27% for most school districts (New Haven is 22%, Montville is 27% Groton is 28% and Tolland is 26%), meaning special education costs local school districts approximately \$3.6 billion per year. So, these two grants, which are quite limited in their permissible uses, account for far less than 1% of the cost of special education.

Special Education Equity for Kids (SEEK) sees education of student with disabilities in their home districts as the highest priority. Therefore, we would like to see a substantial increase in SEED grant money, with the prohibition on any of the money being used for private providers deleted from the statute. Many districts hire by contract related service personnel (occupational therapists, behavior therapists, physical therapist, speech and language pathologists, board certified behavior analysts) because they are too small to justify a full-time position or because they are simply unable to hire for such a position. The current limitation on SEED funding renders the grants less useable by districts. We note that one of the primary reasons for the establishment of the Regional Educational Service Centers (RESC) was to provide the sort of resources that individual districts are hard pressed to afford. The limitation on SEED funding disallows the use of RESC resources. Inexplicably, the Governor also proposes cutting funding for RESCs.

We have no objection to fully funding the Excess Cost grant, just as long as we understand that it does nothing to improve the quality of special education in district. Many municipalities need full funding of excess costs to balance their municipal budgets. Where the state has made a commitment, municipalities have the right to expect it to be kept. As to ECS funding, we are in support of increasing the foundation amount, that has not been increased since 2013. Doing so would increase the total ECS funding level. In that 27% of that funding presumably goes to fund special education, increasing the foundation amount could increase the quality of special education.



The most egregious problem with special education is the critical staff shortage of teachers, related service personnel, and paraeducators. Basic economics says that where there is a dearth of a certain occupational category, you should pay more to attract more individuals to the field. That is precisely what we need to do in Connecticut. We need to create a state-funded system of supplemental pay or bonuses for shortage occupations.

We are also concerned with the Governor's failure to provide any new money to support charter schools. Charter schools in Connecticut's cities provide good education opportunities for many students with disabilities.

SEEK wants to work with you over the course of the session to provide the resources necessary to effectively educate students with disabilities.

