



For Immediate Release

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SEEK Calls Lamont's Special Education Funding Plan Too Little, Too Late.

Governor Lamont yesterday announced that he was adding \$40 million to the special education excess cost grant for the 2026 fiscal year. SEEK calls this proposal too little, too late.

SEEK welcomes any additional funding for special education, which is woefully underfunded. This underfunding is manifest through drastic shortages of special educators, speech and language pathologists, school psychologists and paraeducators. The shortages are so great that, in many cases, local school districts cannot provide the services that are mandated in a student's Individual Education Plan (IEP).

Yet, excess cost reimbursements do nothing to improve the quality of education for the 95% of students with disabilities who are educated in district. Rather, excess cost reimbursements are a catastrophic insurance policy to backfill the costs of very expensive out-of-district placements.

The \$40 million falls far short of the current shortfall. For fiscal year 2024, the appropriated amount was \$181 million, while the total amount of excess costs claimed was \$261 million. For fiscal year 2025, the appropriate amount is also \$181 million, while claims made are approaching \$300 million. The Lamont proposal would add \$40 million for fiscal year 2026, where claims are sure to climb another 3% to 5%. So, the added money is far too little. And it is far too late, because it fails to deal with the current shortfall which is wreaking havoc with school budgets.

SEEK is also disturbed that the development of the proposal and the press conference failed to include any students with disabilities or their parents. Indeed, the fact that the Governor was flanked by municipal officials makes clear that this proposal is more to bailout municipalities than to enhance education for students with disabilities.

Both the Task Force to Study Special Education Services and Funding and the 119K Commission recommended that the Education Cost Sharing Formula be adjusted to add a 50% weight for the number of special education students in the district. This proposal alone would add \$170 million to funding and would have a real impact on the quality of education in districts.

The Governor also proposes a fund of \$14 million for a competitive grant program to enhance the capacity of school districts to program for students with intense needs in district and thereby reduce reliance on out-of-district placements. SEEK supports this proposal, which came from the Task Force. The money is too low, but it is a good place to start. SEEK supports this proposal because students with disabilities should, if possible, be educated in their home districts surrounded by typical peers.

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