

Connecting the Dots on Disconnected Youth:

Towns with Highest Percentages of Disconnected Youth Receive Lowest Per Pupil Pension Subsidies from the State

JANUARY 2025

CONTACT: Anthony Randazzo | Executive Director, Equable Institute | anthony@equable.org

Two studies in the last quarter of 2024 raised serious questions about whether the financing of Connecticut's education system is meeting students' needs. The 119K Commission released a report in October 2024 finding that 119,000 Connecticut youth between the ages of 14 and 26 — or one in five — have already disconnected from education and the workforce or are at-risk of not graduating high school.¹ Equable Institute released a separate report finding the way that Connecticut finances the teacher retirement system reinforces resource inequities between districts.²

This brief looks at the relationship between the data sets in the two reports, finding a clear link between the rates of disconnected youth in districts and the inequitable distribution of the state's Per Pupil Pension Subsidy.

FINDINGS

When looking at the towns with the highest rates of youth disconnection or high school students at-risk of disconnection, **the average Per Pupil Pension Subsidy is lower than for towns with relatively lower disconnection rates.**

Similarly, **school districts with the highest Per Pupil Pension Subsidies had lower rates of youth disconnection, compared to the school districts with lower subsidies.** These findings reinforce a relationship between the state's investment in teacher retirement and the connectedness of public school students.

ANALYSIS

- The average percentage of "high school students at-risk of disconnection" was >30-40% for the towns with the 10 lowest Per Pupil Pension Subsidies. By contrast, the same at-risk high schoolers average for the towns with the 10 highest Per Pupil Pension Subsidies was >11-20%.
- We see the same pattern in the average range of "youth disconnection" (after high school), with an average reported disconnection rate of >30-40% versus >10-20%, for the towns with the 10 lowest and 10 highest Per Pupil Pension Subsidies, respectively.

The same variance is visible when expanding the analysis to 15 smallest and largest Per Pupil Pension Subsidies, as shown in the tables on the next page.

When looking at towns and school districts ranked by rates of disconnection, we found the average Per Pupil Pension Subsidy was generally higher in places where disconnection rates are lower:

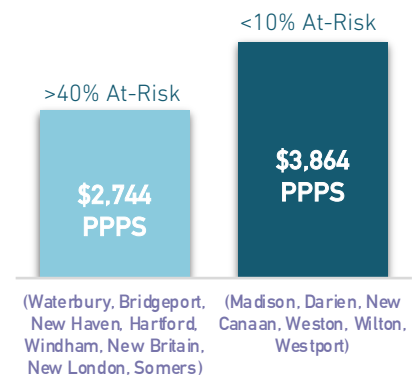
- The eight towns with the highest level of high school students at-risk of disconnection (e.g., >40%), have a \$2,744 average Per Pupil Pension Subsidy.
- By contrast, among the six towns with the lowest level of at-risk high schoolers (e.g., <10%), the average Per Pupil Pension Subsidy is \$3,864.
- Similarly, the 119K Commission reported 16 towns with post-high school youth disconnection rates of ">30% to 40%" or ">40%." The Per Pupil Pension Subsidy for these towns was \$2,767 on average, with a median of \$2,733.
- By contrast the 119K Commission reported 66 towns with the lowest level of post-high school youth disconnection (e.g., >10-20%). The average Per Pupil Pension Subsidy for those towns was \$3,312, and the median was \$3,239.

METHODOLOGY

The Per Pupil Pension Subsidy is calculated by dividing each district's total pension debt by its number of students enrolled—in order to identify how fairly the state allocates education resources when it covers local pension obligations.³

We reviewed the rates of youth disconnection that the 119K Commission released for each town in Connecticut, and then analyzed how it relates to the Per Pupil Pension Subsidy that the state provides for school districts.⁴

Average Per Pupil Pension Subsidy for Districts with the Highest and Lowest Rates of At-Risk Disconnection



SOLUTIONS THAT CONNECT THE DOTS

The report from the 119K Commission recommends large-scale investments to support Connecticut's young people, including large increases to the Education Cost Sharing formula. Their proposal is for \$150 million up front, plus \$900+ million annually.

Meanwhile, the Equable report calls for some districts to contribute toward the normal costs of salaries that fall above a statewide minimum—a policy that would keep contribution levels to the Teacher Retirement System, reduce some of the inequity in how the current state pension subsidy is distributed, and simultaneously generate state savings that could then be invested into the public education system.

Depending on the formula developed to establish municipal contributions to the Teacher Retirement System, the state's contributions to subsidize teacher pensions could be reduced by hundreds of millions of dollars. The state could then re-invest that money in Connecticut education, such as by putting more into the Education Cost Sharing formula and/or providing dollars to directly meet the needs identified by the 119K Commission.

15 SMALLEST AND 15 LARGEST PER PUPIL PENSION SUBSIDIES BY TOWN AND THEIR ASSOCIATED RATES OF DISCONNECTION

	Town	Per Pupil Pension Subsidy	% of High School Students At-Risk of Disconnection	% of Young People in First Year After High School Experiencing Disconnection	Student Enrollment
Smallest Per Pupil Pension Subsidies	Waterbury	2,208	>40%	>30-40%	18,701
	Bridgeport	2,325	>40%	>40%	19,337
	Killingly	2,378	>30-40%	>30-40%	2,450
	Meriden	2,412	>30-40%	>30-40%	8,630
	Ansonia	2,524	>30-40%	>21-30%	2,332
	Danbury	2,535	>30-40%	>30-40%	12,109
	Naugatuck	2,589	>30-40%	>21-30%	4,337
	Putnam	2,627	>30-40%	>30-40%	1,185
	Griswold	2,639	>20-30%	>21-30%	1,725
	New Haven	2,648	>40%	>30-40%	19,150
	Plainfield	2,673	>30-40%	>30-40%	1,944
	West Haven	2,708	>30-40%	>21-30%	5,976
	Southington	2,768	>11-20%	>10-20%	6,284
	Seymour	2,773	>20-30%	>10-20%	2,133
	Hartford	2,793	>40%	>40%	16,774
Largest Per Pupil Pension Subsidies	Wallingford	3,710	>11-20%	>10-20%	5,335
	Lyme*	3,736	>11-20%	>10-20%	1,288
	Old Lyme*	3,736	>11-20%	>10-20%	1,288
	Mansfield	3,762	>11-20%	>10-20%	1,027
	New Canaan	3,854	<=10%	>10-20%	4,168
	Clinton	3,892	>20-30%	>10-20%	1,497
	Weston	3,898	<=10%	>10-20%	2,197
	Windsor Locks	3,925	>30-40%	>21-30%	1,549
	Wilton	3,953	<=10%	>10-20%	3,788
	Westport	4,009	<=10%	>10-20%	5,387
	East Windsor	4,038	>30-40%	>21-30%	1,030
	Durham*	4,197	>11-20%	>10-20%	1,365
	Middlefield*	4,197	>11-20%	>21-30%	1,365
	Old Saybrook	4,281	>11-20%	>10-20%	1,070
	Greenwich	4,375	>11-20%	>10-20%	8,560

*Indicates town school district is part of a Regional School District. Per Pupil Pension Subsidy data shown is for the Regional School District as a whole. Note: Data shown is only for towns with school districts over 1,000 students. Per Pupil Pension Subsidy data is for the school year ending 2023, the most recent data available. The 119K Commission data is for the year 2021-22. For a dataset showing the Per Pupil Pension Subsidy and rates of disconnection for [all towns visit here](#).

¹ "Young People First: A Bold Plan to Address Connecticut's Statewide Crisis" and "Connecticut's Unspoken Crisis: Getting young people back on track"; For the purposes of the analysis in this brief, we are adopting the definition of "disconnected" as used in 119K Commission and Dalio Education's materials.

² "Who Benefits? How Connecticut's Financing of Teacher Pensions Reinforces Inequity in the Classroom."

³ "Who Benefits? How Connecticut's Financing of Teacher Pensions Reinforces Inequity in the Classroom."

⁴ To align with how the 119K Commission published their data, we limited our analysis to towns and school districts with over 1,000 enrolled students. We did not include charter schools in this analysis. We did include towns that participate in a Regional School District by assigning the values of that RSD to each of the towns that participate.