



MODELS OF PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION IN CONNECTICUT

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DUTY TO PROVIDE HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION

State law requires towns and their respective boards of education to provide secondary education (i.e., grades nine through 12) in their public schools.

Boards of education may secure high school educational opportunities for their students in a different school district, as long as state law is followed (CGS §§ [10-15](#) & [10-220](#)).

ISSUE

Describe public high school models a Connecticut town could adopt in lieu of operating its own high school, including each alternative model's characteristics, creation process, and funding mechanisms.

SUMMARY

Towns may fulfill their statutory duty to provide public education to high school students using a variety of models that comply with state law. In addition to operating their own public high school, state law allows towns to adopt the following models:

1. regional public high schools (i.e., high schools operated by two or more towns to serve the participating towns' residents);
2. cooperative arrangements (i.e., agreements between boards of education that establish interdistrict schools or interdistrict attendance); and
3. private academies (i.e., non-religious, private high schools operated by boards of trustees and approved by the State Board of Education (SBE) to act as a town's public high school).

REGIONAL PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS

Characteristics

Regional public high schools are operated as part of regional school districts that consist of two or more member towns. Some regional school districts operate all of the elementary and high schools for the member towns, but others operate only a high school.



A regional board of education manages the district's affairs. It must have at least five members, with at least one member from each participating town. It has the same powers and duties that a local board of education has under state law (CGS §§ [10-46](#) & [10-47](#)).

Creation

Before creating a new regional school district, interested towns must first form a temporary regional school study committee to investigate the feasibility of establishing the district. Each participating town's legislative body appoints five members to the study committee. At least two appointees from each town must be members of the town board of education. The state's education commissioner also appoints a consultant to the committee. The study is limited to two years, but the law allows the towns' legislative bodies to extend it for up to another two (CGS §§ [10-39](#) & [10-40](#)).

At least semiannually, the committee must make progress reports to SBE and the participating towns. When the study is complete, the committee must submit a final written report of its findings to SBE and each town clerk in the participating towns. If the committee finds the regional school district is feasible and desired, then its report must contain the following:

1. findings about the advisability of establishing the district;
2. towns to be included and grade levels for educational programs to be provided;
3. detailed educational and budget plans for at least five years, including enrollment projections, staff needs and deployment, and a description of planned programs and support services;
4. facilities recommended;
5. estimates of land and facility costs;
6. recommendations about each participating town's capital contribution and the size and composition of the regional board of education; and
7. other matters the committee finds pertinent (CGS § [10-43](#)).

SBE must review the study committee's final written report and recommendations. If the report recommends that it is advisable to establish a regional school district, then SBE must either accept or reject the recommendation. If SBE accepts the

report, then it must certify to the town clerk in each participating town that the recommendations have been approved. The town clerks must make copies of the report publicly available. The study committee then holds a public meeting in each participating town to present its final report (CGS § [10-43](#)).

Participating towns must then hold referenda, all on the same day, to vote on whether to establish a regional school district. A regional district is established if the majority of the votes in each participating town is "yes." If a majority vote in one or more towns is "no," then the study committee must decide whether to immediately resubmit the question for a second referendum (CGS § [10-45](#)).

Funding

At least two weeks before the first Monday or Tuesday in May, the board must hold a public hearing to propose a budget for the upcoming fiscal year. Anyone may recommend spending changes during the hearing.

After the public hearing, the board finalizes its budget preparations, makes copies of the budget available to anyone who requests one, and delivers copies to the town clerks of member towns at least five days before the budget is presented at the May meeting (see below).

On the first Monday or Tuesday in May, a regional school district must hold an annual district meeting at which it must present, and may vote on, the budget. Alternatively, the law provides that the budget vote may be taken at a referendum. On the day after the district meeting, voters can go to the polls to approve or reject the budget. Registered voters and eligible property owners are entitled to vote.

If the budget is rejected, the board has four weeks to call another district meeting to consider the same or an amended budget. The same procedures for voting by referendum apply. District meetings must be held regularly until voters approve a budget.

Each member town must pay a share of the cost of capital outlay, including school building project costs, and current expenditures necessary for the regional school district's operation. The board determines the (1) amount to be paid by each member town using a ratio of expenses to resident pupils established in statute and (2) payment due dates (CGS §§ [10-47](#) & [10-51](#)).

COOPERATIVE ARRANGEMENTS

Characteristics

State law allows boards of education to establish cooperative arrangements (i.e., written agreements) with each other to provide school accommodation services, programs, or activities. Some schools have used this authority to establish interdistrict schools, including the following types of schools:

1. charter schools: any two or more boards of education may cooperatively apply to the education commissioner to establish a charter school (CGS § [10-66bb](#));
2. interdistrict magnet schools: cooperative arrangements where multiple boards agree to operate an interdistrict magnet school together and receive the associated operating grant (CGS § [10-264l](#)); and
3. regional vocational-agricultural (vo-ag) centers: boards of education may enter into agreements with one another to establish a vo-ag center in conjunction with its regular public school system (CGS § [10-64](#)).

Creation

A cooperative arrangement between boards of education must be in a written agreement. The arrangement may establish a committee to supervise its program with the committee membership determined in the written agreement.

Participating boards of education may give the committee extensive powers, including the power to apply for and expend federal grants; to receive and disburse funds appropriated by participating boards of education; to employ personnel; to enter into contracts; and to otherwise provide the specified programs, services, and activities (CGS § [10-158a](#)).

Funding

The written agreement governing the cooperative arrangement between boards of education may contain funding provisions.

One example of a cooperative arrangement that contains funding provisions is the “tuition-out” high school model used by the Columbia Board of Education.

Columbia must make such an arrangement because it does not maintain a high school within its local school district; therefore, its high school age students may attend a designated high school to which Columbia’s board of education will pay tuition (CGS § [10-33](#)).

This board has established an interdistrict high school assignment policy through an agreement with several other school districts. According to Columbia School District [policy 5117\(a\)](#), a student living in Columbia who has completed eighth grade may attend Bolton High School or E.O. Smith High School under the terms of an agreement between Columbia and the respective schools' districts. (Students may also apply to attend Windham Technical High School, and, as with any technical school, the sending district does not have to pay tuition.)

PRIVATE ACADEMIES

Characteristics

Under state law, a private, nonreligious incorporated or endowed academy may serve as a town's public high school with state approval. Under this arrangement, students from the host town do not pay tuition to attend the school, but the town pays tuition in lieu of having its own public high school. Generally, these academies must follow the laws and regulations that other public high schools must.

The academies are each under the control of a board of trustees, rather than an elected local board of education. The board of trustees includes representatives from the host town's local board of education (CGS § [10-34](#)).

Table 1 lists the three academies currently operating, the towns where they are located, and the other towns they serve.

Table 1: Academies and the Towns They Serve

| <i>Academy</i> | <i>Host Town</i> | <i>Other Towns Served</i> |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|---|
| Gilbert School | Winchester | Hartland |
| Norwich Free Academy | Norwich | Brooklyn, Bozrah, Canterbury, Franklin, Lisbon, Preston, Sprague, and Voluntown |
| Woodstock Academy | Woodstock | Eastford, Pomfret, Brooklyn, and Canterbury |

State law requires these academies to provide the same special education services as those required of public high schools (CGS §§ [10-76o](#)). It also requires the academies, similar to public high schools, to annually certify that their food meets federal nutrition standards if they participate in federal school nutrition programs

(CGS § [10-215f](#)) and sell food and beverages that meet state nutritional standards (CGS §§ [10-221p](#) & [10-221q](#)).

Creation

A local board of education must receive permission from SBE to send its resident high school students to an academy in lieu of operating its own public high school. State law allows SBE to designate such an academy to serve as a town's public high school using SBE-created standards (CGS § [10-34](#)).

Funding

Towns that send their students to private academies pay full tuition to the academy; these students do not pay tuition (CGS § [10-34](#)).

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