

# SCHOOL + STATE FINANCE PROJECT



## RACIAL DISPARITIES IN CONNECTICUT EDUCATION FUNDING

An examination of the funding gaps and racial segregation that exist across Connecticut's public school districts

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## Key Findings

The following report and analysis contain a number of key findings about the racial disparities that exist in Connecticut education funding. This section summarizes these findings and provides a quick glance at the report's biggest takeaways.

### **Significant funding gaps exist between Connecticut districts that predominantly serve BIPOC<sup>A</sup> students and districts that largely serve White student populations. (pp. 5-7)**

- Districts with a BIPOC student population that is greater than 75 percent of the district's total enrollment spend roughly \$2,300 less per student than districts that serve student populations consisting of over 75 percent White students. (pp. 6-7)
- When this per-student difference is aggregated across the entire Connecticut public school student population, it translates to a \$312 million funding gap between districts with high populations of BIPOC students and districts with the highest percentages of White students. (p. 14)
- A \$327 million funding gap also exists between districts where the BIPOC student population is between 25 percent and 75 percent of the district's total enrollment and districts consisting of student populations that are over 75 percent White. (p. 14)
- Combined, this amounts to a total funding gap of \$639 million between all districts with BIPOC student populations of at least 25 percent and districts with White student populations greater than 75 percent. To close this gap would take an increase in total education spending of approximately 6.6 percent. (p. 14)

### **Connecticut's public school districts are highly segregated with most students attending a district where more than 75 percent of the students are White, or a district where more than 75 percent of the students are BIPOC. (p. 5)**

- While the racial demographic makeup of the state's student population is roughly 50 percent White and 50 percent BIPOC, most students attend a school district where the enrollment difference between White and BIPOC students is at least 50 percentage points. (p. 5)
- Approximately 60 percent of all Black students attend a district where the White student population is less than 25 percent of the district's total enrollment. (p. 10)
- A majority of the state's BIPOC students are concentrated in less than 10 districts, and over 40 percent of Connecticut's BIPOC students who attend a local public school district attend one where the total student population is over 75 percent BIPOC. (p. 11)

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<sup>A</sup> BIPOC is an acronym that stands for "Black, Indigenous, People of Color." In this report, BIPOC is used to represent students who, according to Connecticut State Department of Education data, identify as: American Indian or Alaska Native; Asian; Black or African American; Hispanic/Latino of any race; Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander; or two or more races.

**Districts with higher percentages of BIPOC students generally serve students with greater learning needs but spend less per student. (p. 12)**

- Oppositely, Connecticut public school districts with higher percentages of White students serve students with less learning needs but spend more per student. (p. 12)
- Student poverty rates are also inversely proportional to per-student spending, regardless of the low-income metric used. (pp. 12-13)
- Despite tending to have the highest poverty rates, per-student spending is lowest in districts with enrollments made up of more than 75 percent BIPOC students. (p. 12)

## Introduction

Connecticut's public school districts serve a wide range of student needs and student populations. They also have significant differences in per-student spending.<sup>1</sup> The State of Connecticut has one of the largest opportunity gaps<sup>B</sup> in the nation,<sup>2</sup> which is exacerbated by unequal and inequitable fiscal resources that allow wealthier and Whiter school districts to spend more per student.

These disparities are further revealed by the facts that a majority of Connecticut's BIPOC students are concentrated in less than 10 districts,<sup>3</sup> and that the average per-student spending for Connecticut districts with high populations of BIPOC students is roughly \$2,300 less than the per-student spending for districts with the lowest percentages of BIPOC students.<sup>4,5</sup> When this per-student difference is aggregated across the entire Connecticut public school student population, it translates to a \$312 million funding gap between districts with high populations of BIPOC students and districts with the highest percentages of White students.

This report explores these disparities by examining the student racial demographics of Connecticut's public school districts, detailing the current state of integration among public school districts in Connecticut, and observing the relationship between district student populations and per-student spending.

## Connecticut's Segregated School Districts

Connecticut's public school districts are segregated. Although the racial demographic makeup of the state's public school student population is roughly 50 percent White and 50 percent BIPOC, most students attend school districts where the enrollment difference between White and BIPOC students is at least 50 percentage points. This means the majority of Connecticut students attend school districts with student populations that are either more than 75 percent BIPOC students or more than 75 percent White students.<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, there is a significant funding gap between districts that predominately serve students who are BIPOC and districts that largely serve White student populations. Districts with higher percentages of White students have significantly higher spending levels than other districts, while districts with higher percentages of BIPOC students have significantly lower spending per student.<sup>7,8</sup>

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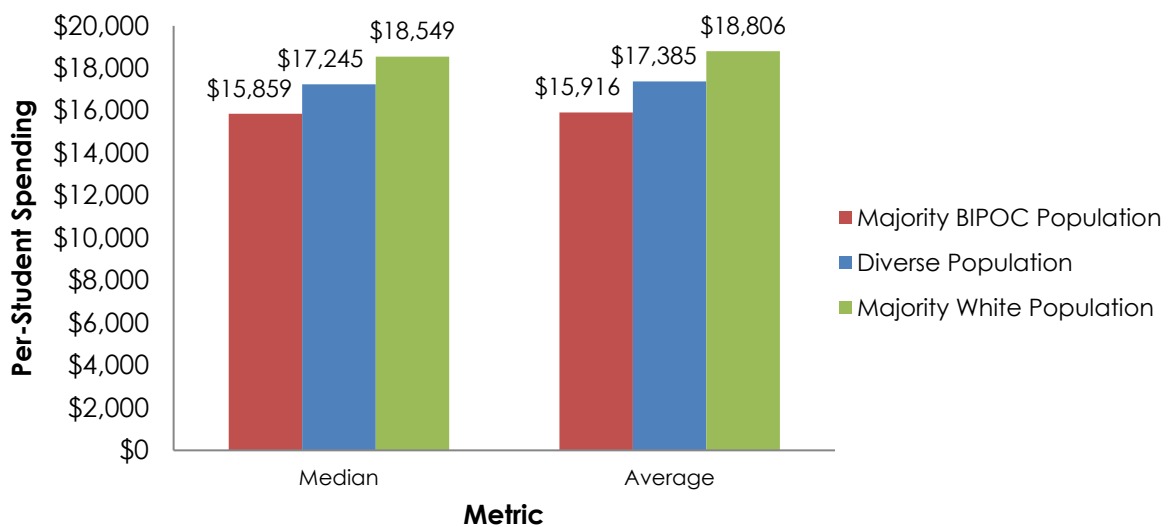
<sup>B</sup> "Opportunity gap" is often used interchangeably with "achievement gap." Connecticut General Statutes defines achievement gap as "the existence of a significant disparity in the academic performance of students among and between (A) racial groups, (B) ethnic groups, (C) socioeconomic groups, (D) genders, and (6) English language learners (ELL) and students whose primary language is English." Conn. Gen. Statutes ch. 164, § 10-16mm.

To examine these disparities, we have grouped Connecticut's public school districts into three different demographic classifications:

- **Majority BIPOC Population:** Districts with a BIPOC student population that is greater than 75 percent of the district's total enrollment;
- **Majority White Population:** Districts with a White student population that is greater than 75 percent of the district's total enrollment; and
- **Diverse Population:** Districts with a BIPOC student population between 25 percent and 75 percent of the district's total enrollment.<sup>C</sup>

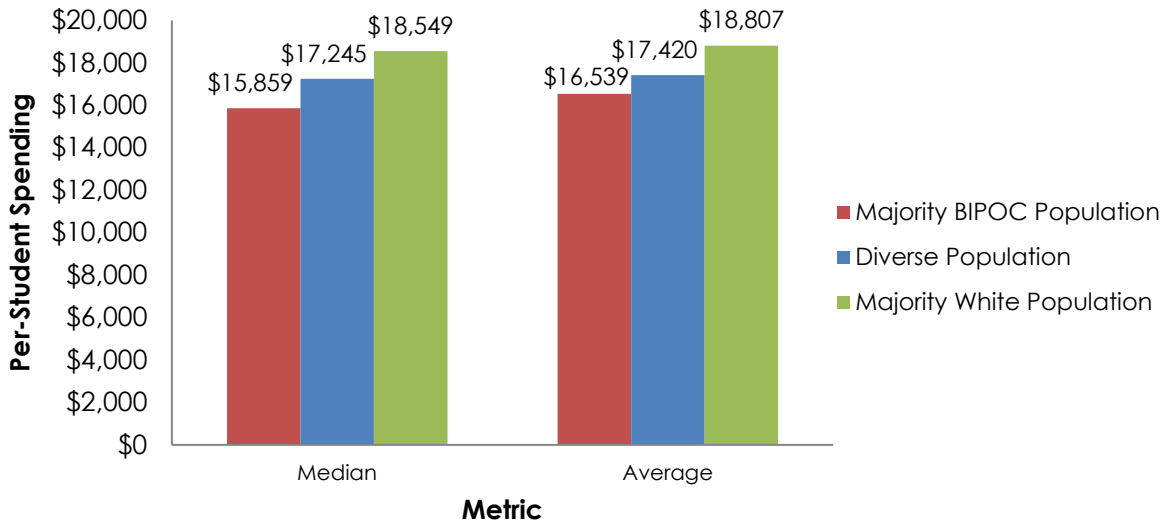
As shown in Figures 1 and 2, districts with a Majority White Population spend significantly more per student than both Majority BIPOC Population and Diverse Population districts, with students in Majority BIPOC Population districts receiving even lower per-student spending.<sup>9,10</sup> This pattern is consistent whether examining only local and regional public school districts or all public school districts in Connecticut, including schools of choice.

**Figure 1: Per-student Spending by District Demographic Classification, Local and Regional Public School Districts (2018-19 School Year)<sup>11,12</sup>**



<sup>C</sup> Because the most recent data for per-student spending is from the 2018-19 school year, school districts have been classified using 2018-19 enrollment data. Likewise, all calculations that follow are for the 2018-19 school year.

**Figure 2: Per-student Spending by District Demographic Classification, All Public School Districts (2018-19 School Year)<sup>13,14</sup>**

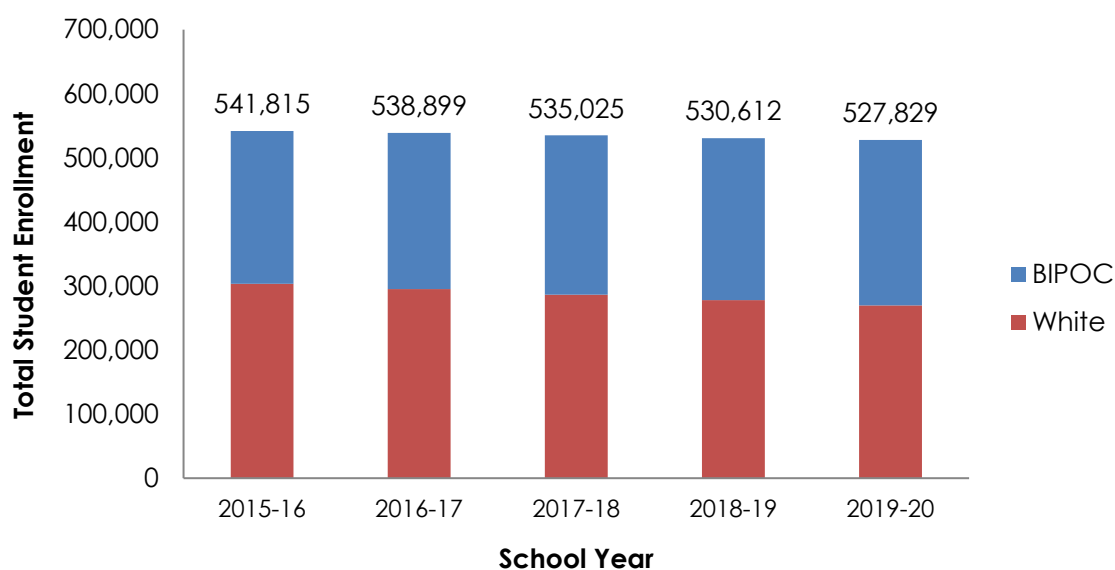




## Student Population in Connecticut

This section examines the student population of Connecticut's public schools, demographic trends, and demographics of individual school districts. As Figure 3 below demonstrates, Connecticut's total public school enrollment has been trending downward over the past several years.

**Figure 3: Total Connecticut Public School Student Enrollment, 2016-2020<sup>15</sup>**



This decline is primarily attributable to a large decrease in the number of White students. While White students make up just over half of all enrolled students in Connecticut, the number of White students enrolled in the state's public schools has decreased roughly 11 percent over the past five years.<sup>16</sup>

Comprising approximately 40 percent of the state's total student enrollment, Hispanic/Latino students of any race and Black or African American students are, respectively, the second and third largest student racial demographic groups in Connecticut public schools. The number of Black or African American students has declined by nearly four percent over the past five years, while Hispanic/Latino student enrollment has increased by 13.5 percent over the same time period.<sup>17</sup>

Table 1 below details these demographic changes by comparing total student enrollment by race for the 2019-20 school year (the most recent year of data available) to enrollment data from the 2015-16 school year.



**Table 1: Connecticut Enrollment Data Comparison, 2015-16 to 2019-20<sup>18</sup>**

Race/Ethnicity	Enrollment, 2015-2016	Enrollment, 2019-2020	Percent Change
BIPOC	238,449	258,074	8.2%
American Indian or Alaska Native	1,492	1,322	-11.4%
Asian	26,857	27,365	1.9%
Black or African American	69,658	67,067	-3.7%
Hispanic/Latino of any race	125,110	141,981	13.5%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	529	533	0.8%
Two or More Races	14,803	19,806	33.8%
White	303,366	269,755	-11.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>541,815</b>	<b>527,829</b>	<b>-2.6%</b>

Although the statewide public school student population is approaching approximately equal White and BIPOC enrollment, racial segregation is still prevalent across school districts. Table 2 below details the number of local and regional public school districts that fall under each classification (Majority BIPOC Population, Majority White Population, or Diverse Population) based on the racial demographics of the district's student population. Also included in the table is the percentage of total student enrollment for local and regional public school districts that the districts in each classification represent. Table 3 contains the same information but includes all<sup>D</sup> of Connecticut's public school districts — not just local and regional public school districts.

**Table 2: District Classification Based on Student Racial Demographics, Local and Regional Public School Districts (2018-19 School Year)**

Classification	Number of Districts	Percent of Student Population for Local and Regional Public School Districts
<b>Majority BIPOC Population</b> (>75% BIPOC Students)	9	22%
<b>Diverse Population</b> (25% - 75% BIPOC Students)	48	44%
<b>Majority White Population</b> (>75% White Students)	107	34%

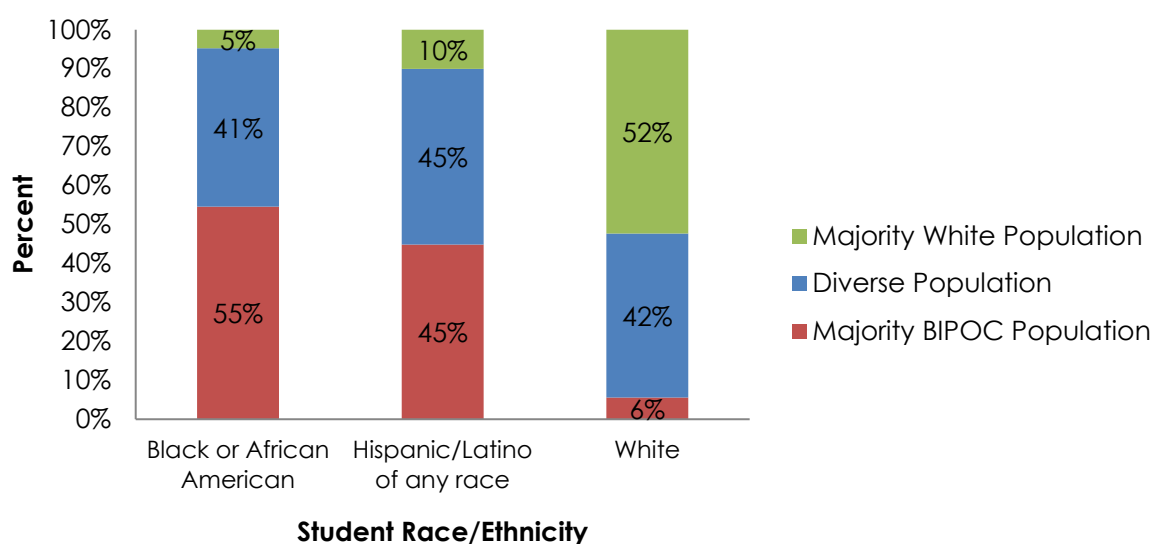
<sup>D</sup> In addition to local and regional public school districts, "all districts" includes state and local charter schools and interdistrict magnet schools operated by Regional Educational Service Centers (RESCs).

**Table 3: District Classification Based on Student Racial Demographics, All Public School Districts (2018-19 School Year)**

Classification	Number of Districts	Percent of Student Population for All Public School Districts
<b>Majority BIPOC Population</b> (>75% BIPOC Students)	30	25%
<b>Diverse Population</b> (25% - 75% BIPOC Students)	55	43%
<b>Majority White Population</b> (>75% White Students)	108	33%

A minority of Connecticut's total student population attends a school in a Diverse Population district where the percentage of BIPOC students falls between 25 percent and 75 percent of the district's total student population. There is a large number of Majority White Population districts, while BIPOC students tend to be clustered in only a handful of districts. Although the relative size of the Majority BIPOC Population group is small compared to the other two classifications, it contains a disproportionate amount of Black and Hispanic/Latino students. Approximately 60 percent of all Black or African American students attend a district where the White student population is less than 25 percent of the district's total enrollment.<sup>19</sup>

**Figure 4: Percentage of Total State Student Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity Represented in Each District Demographic Classification, Local and Regional Public School Districts (2018-19 School Year)<sup>20</sup>**



Initially, these findings might appear to make sense. After all, Majority BIPOC Population districts are, by definition, districts in which there are a disproportionately large number of BIPOC students, and therefore, these districts also contain a disproportionately large percentage of total BIPOC students. However, the ratio between Majority White Population and Majority BIPOC Population districts and Diverse Population districts is drastically skewed. Even though White students and BIPOC students are present statewide at about a 1:1 ratio, roughly 57 percent of Connecticut public school students attend districts in which the White student population is either below 25 percent or above 75 percent. Currently, there are only nine Majority BIPOC Population local public school districts, but over 40 percent of the BIPOC students who attend a local public school district attend a school in one of these districts.<sup>21</sup>

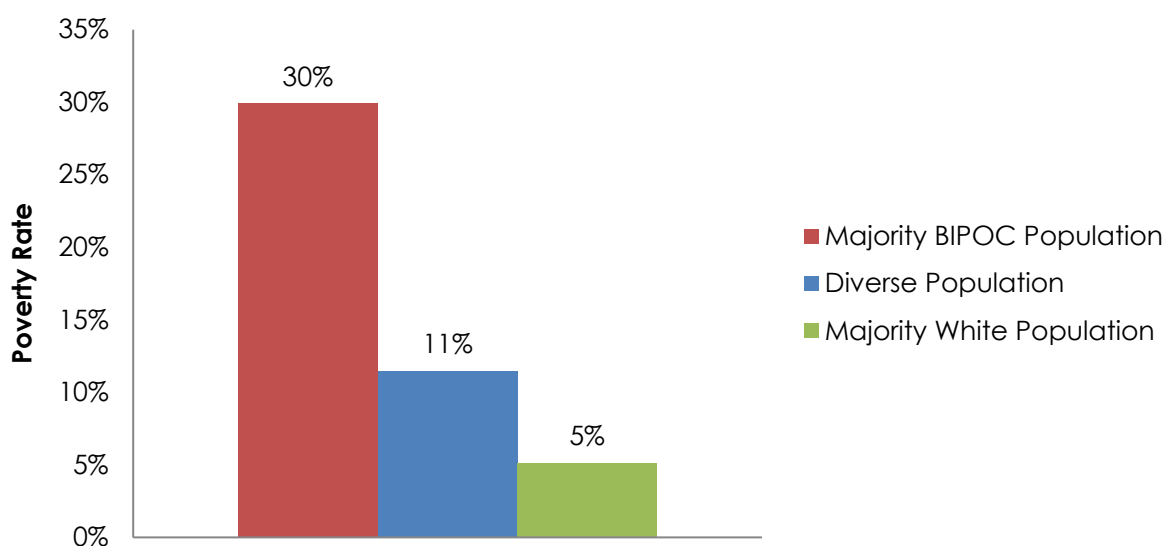
This supports the idea that district student enrollment does not follow a normal distribution in Connecticut. Districts rarely match the demographic population of the state. Instead, most students fall into two broad categories: those who attend Majority White Population districts or those who attend Majority BIPOC Population districts. Comparatively, few students attend schools in Diverse Population districts where the district student population is more reflective of statewide student racial demographics.

## Spending and Student Need

Generally, Connecticut public school districts with higher percentages of White students serve students with less learning needs and spend more per student. Conversely, districts with higher percentages of BIPOC students generally serve students with greater learning needs and spend less per student than Majority White Population or Diverse Population districts.<sup>22,23</sup> This trend is even more pronounced when examining the relative need of the students in each of these district classifications. This is despite the fact that research has shown students with certain learning needs, such as students from low-income families<sup>24</sup> or who are English Learners,<sup>25</sup> require greater funding than their non-need peers to achieve at similar levels.

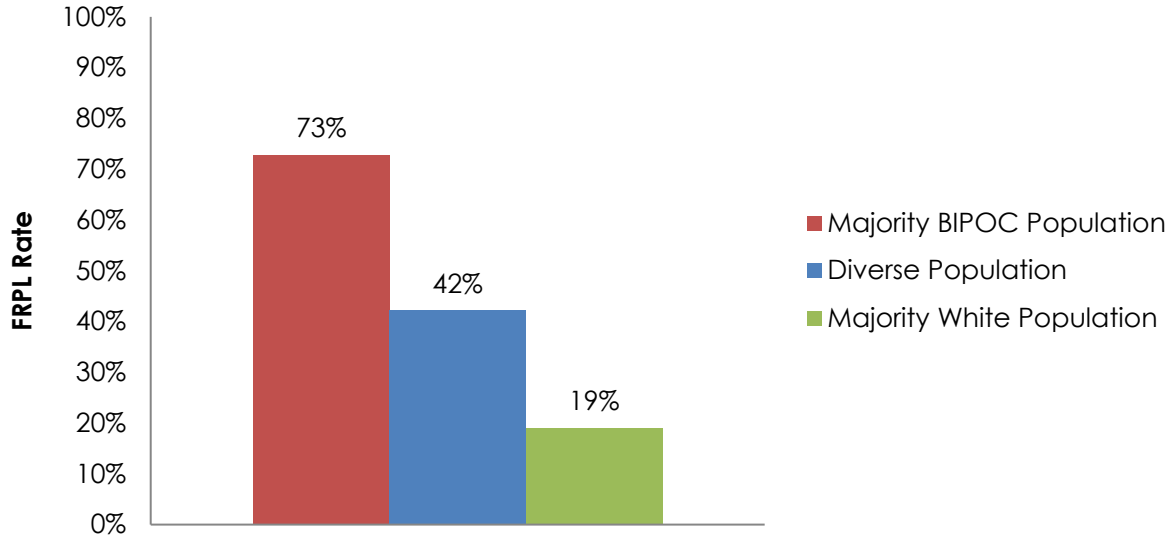
When examining the three district demographic classifications, student poverty rates<sup>E</sup> are inversely proportional to per-student spending. Per-student spending is lowest in Majority BIPOC Population districts, where students tend to have the highest poverty rates.<sup>26,27</sup> Regardless of the low-income metric used, this pattern is consistent. The rates of students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch is significantly higher in Majority BIPOC Population districts than in Majority White districts.<sup>28</sup>

**Figure 5: Poverty Rate by District Demographic Classification, Local and Regional Public School Districts (2018)<sup>29</sup>**



<sup>E</sup> Poverty rate figures for school districts are lower than district rates for students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL). This is because FRPL-eligibility figures include not only students who live at or below the federal poverty line but also those whose household incomes are up to 185 percent of the federal poverty line.

**Figure 6: Free or Reduced-Price Lunch Eligibility Rate by District Demographic Classification, Local and Regional Public School Districts (2018-19 School Year)<sup>30</sup>**

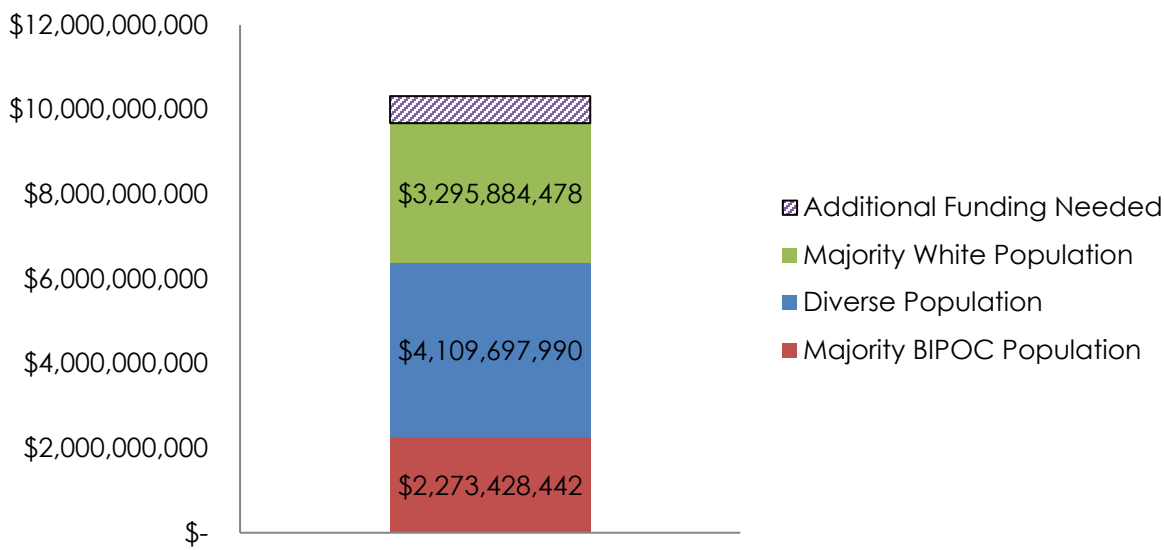


## Total Funding Gap

As shown previously, Majority BIPOC Population districts spend about \$2,300 less per student than Majority White Population districts.<sup>31,32</sup> When this per-student difference is aggregated across the entire Connecticut public school student population, it translates to a \$312 million funding gap between Majority BIPOC Population districts and Majority White Population districts. In other words, providing the same amount of funding per student to students in Majority BIPOC Population districts as students who attend schools in Majority White Population districts would cost approximately \$312 million.

Students attending Diverse Population districts also experience a per-student funding gap. Providing students in Diverse Population districts with the same level of funding as students who attend Majority White Population districts would cost an additional \$327 million. This means there is a total funding gap of \$639 million if all students in Majority BIPOC Population and Diverse Population districts were to receive the same level of funding as students in Majority White Population districts. This would account for an increase in spending of approximately 6.6 percent, as visualized on the chart below.

**Figure 7: Total Spending by District Demographic Classification, All Public School Districts (2018-19 School Year)**



## Appendix

**Table 4: Individual District Classification by Racial Demographics**

Majority BIPOC Population Districts (>75% BIPOC Students)	Diverse Population Districts (25%-75% BIPOC Students)	Majority White Population Districts (>75% White Students)
Bloomfield	Ansonia	Andover
Bridgeport	Avon	Ashford
East Hartford	Bethel	Barkhamsted
Hartford	Branford	Berlin
New Britain	Bristol	Bethany
New Haven	Cromwell	Bolton
New London	Danbury	Bozrah
Waterbury	Derby	Brookfield
Windham	East Haven	Brooklyn
Area Cooperative Educational Services (ACES)	East Windsor	Canterbury
Capitol Region Education Council (CREC)	Enfield	Canton
Achievement First Bridgeport Academy	Farmington	Chaplin
Achievement First Hartford Academy	Glastonbury	Cheshire
Amistad Academy	Greenwich	Chester
Booker T. Washington Academy	Groton	Clinton
Brass City Charter School	Hamden	Colchester
The Bridge Academy	Ledyard	Colebrook
Capital Preparatory Harbor School	Manchester	Columbia
Common Ground High School	Mansfield	Cornwall
Elm City College Preparatory School	Meriden	Coventry
Great Oaks Charter School	Middletown	Darien
Highville Charter School	Milford	Deep River
Interdistrict School for Arts and Communication	Montville	East Granby
Jumoke Academy	Naugatuck	East Haddam
New Beginnings Family Academy	Newington	East Hampton
Park City Prep Charter School	Norwalk	East Lyme
Side By Side Charter School	Norwich	Eastford
Stamford Academy	Orange	Easton
Stamford Charter School for Excellence	Plainville	Ellington
	Regional School District 19	Essex
	Rocky Hill	Fairfield
	Seymour	Franklin
	Shelton	Granby
	Simsbury	Griswold
	South Windsor	Guilford
	Sprague	Hampton
	Stamford	Hartland
	Stratford	Hebron
	Torrington	Kent
	Trumbull	Killingly
	Vernon	Lebanon
	Wallingford	Lisbon



Majority BIPOC Population Districts (>75% BIPOC Students)	Diverse Population Districts (25%-75% BIPOC Students)	Majority White Population Districts (>75% White Students)
Trailblazers	West Hartford West Haven Wethersfield Windsor Windsor Locks Woodbridge  Cooperative Educational Services (C.E.S.) Eastern Connecticut Regional Educational Service Center (EASTCONN) EdAdvance LEARN Elm City Montessori School Integrated Day Charter School Odyssey Community School	Litchfield Madison Marlborough Monroe New Canaan New Fairfield New Hartford New Milford Newtown Norfolk North Branford North Canaan North Haven North Stonington Old Saybrook Oxford Plainfield Plymouth Pomfret Portland Preston Putnam Redding Regional School District 01 Regional School District 04 Regional School District 05 Regional School District 06 Regional School District 07 Regional School District 08 Regional School District 09 Regional School District 10 Regional School District 11 Regional School District 12 Regional School District 13 Regional School District 14 Regional School District 15 Regional School District 16 Regional School District 17 Regional School District 18 Ridgefield Salem Salisbury Scotland Sharon Sherman

Majority BIPOC Population Districts (>75% BIPOC Students)	Diverse Population Districts (25%-75% BIPOC Students)	Majority White Population Districts (>75% White Students)
		Somers Southington Stafford Sterling Stonington Suffield Thomaston Thompson Tolland Voluntown Waterford Watertown Westbrook Weston Westport Willington Wilton Winchester Wolcott Woodstock Explorations

**Table Notes**

1. Due to suppressed student data, Canaan and Union are excluded from the table.
2. Districts in red are charter schools and districts in green are Regional Educational Service Centers (RESCs). All other districts are local and regional public school districts.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Connecticut State Department of Education. (n.d.). Connecticut Public School Expenditures Report 2018-2019. Retrieved from <https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Fiscal-Services/Connecticut-Public-School-Expenditures-Report-2018-2019>.

<sup>2</sup> Connecticut Legislative Achievement Gap Task Force. (2014). *For the Children of Connecticut: A Master Plan to Eliminate the Achievement Gap in Connecticut*. Hartford, CT: Author. Retrieved from <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Interagency-Council/April-2014-Taskforce-Final-Report-002.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Connecticut State Department of Education. (n.d.). EdSight: Public School Enrollment. Available from <http://edsight.ct.gov/SASPortal/main.do>.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Connecticut State Department of Education. (n.d.). Connecticut Public School Expenditures Report 2018-2019. Retrieved from <https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Fiscal-Services/Connecticut-Public-School-Expenditures-Report-2018-2019>.

<sup>6</sup> Connecticut State Department of Education. (n.d.). EdSight: Public School Enrollment. Available from <http://edsight.ct.gov/SASPortal/main.do>.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Connecticut State Department of Education. (n.d.). Connecticut Public School Expenditures Report 2018-2019. Retrieved from <https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Fiscal-Services/Connecticut-Public-School-Expenditures-Report-2018-2019>.

<sup>9</sup> Connecticut State Department of Education. (n.d.). EdSight: Public School Enrollment. Available from <http://edsight.ct.gov/SASPortal/main.do>.

<sup>10</sup> Connecticut State Department of Education. (n.d.). Connecticut Public School Expenditures Report 2018-2019. Retrieved from <https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Fiscal-Services/Connecticut-Public-School-Expenditures-Report-2018-2019>.

<sup>11</sup> Connecticut State Department of Education. (n.d.). EdSight: Public School Enrollment. Available from <http://edsight.ct.gov/SASPortal/main.do>.

<sup>12</sup> Connecticut State Department of Education. (n.d.). Connecticut Public School Expenditures Report 2018-2019. Retrieved from <https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Fiscal-Services/Connecticut-Public-School-Expenditures-Report-2018-2019>.

<sup>13</sup> Connecticut State Department of Education. (n.d.). EdSight: Public School Enrollment. Available from <http://edsight.ct.gov/SASPortal/main.do>.

<sup>14</sup> Connecticut State Department of Education. (n.d.). Connecticut Public School Expenditures Report 2018-2019. Retrieved from <https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Fiscal-Services/Connecticut-Public-School-Expenditures-Report-2018-2019>.

<sup>15</sup> Connecticut State Department of Education. (n.d.). EdSight: Public School Enrollment. Available from <http://edsight.ct.gov/SASPortal/main.do>.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Connecticut State Department of Education. (n.d.). Connecticut Public School Expenditures Report 2018-2019. Retrieved from <https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Fiscal-Services/Connecticut-Public-School-Expenditures-Report-2018-2019>.

<sup>24</sup> Duncombe, W.D., & Yinger, J. (2005). How Much More Does a Disadvantaged Student Cost? *Economics of Education Review*, 24(5), 513-532.

<sup>25</sup> Gándara, P., & Rumberger, R.W. (2008). Defining an Adequate Education for English Learners. *Education Finance and Policy*, 3(1), 130-148.

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<sup>26</sup> Connecticut State Department of Education. (n.d.). Connecticut Public School Expenditures Report 2018-2019. Retrieved from <https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Fiscal-Services/Connecticut-Public-School-Expenditures-Report-2018-2019>.

<sup>27</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2019). *Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates Program (SAIPE): 2018 Poverty Estimates for School Districts*. Available from <https://www.census.gov/data/datasets/2018/demo/saipe/2018-school-districts.html>.

<sup>28</sup> Connecticut State Department of Education. (n.d.). EdSight: Public School Enrollment. Available from <http://edsight.ct.gov/SASPortal/main.do>.

<sup>29</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. (2019). *Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates Program (SAIPE): 2018 Poverty Estimates for School Districts*. Available from <https://www.census.gov/data/datasets/2018/demo/saipe/2018-school-districts.html>.

<sup>30</sup> Connecticut State Department of Education. (n.d.). EdSight: Public School Enrollment. Available from <http://edsight.ct.gov/SASPortal/main.do>.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Connecticut State Department of Education. (n.d.). Connecticut Public School Expenditures Report 2018-2019. Retrieved from <https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Fiscal-Services/Connecticut-Public-School-Expenditures-Report-2018-2019>.