

Connecticut

Background

School Readiness Program (SRP)

The Connecticut School Readiness Program (SRP) is open to all three- and four-year-olds who live in the state's nineteen lowest-performing school districts (Priority School Districts) and fifty lowest-wealth towns (Competitive Grant Municipalities).¹ At least 60 percent of students enrolled in the program must have a family income at or below 75 percent of the state median income.² Families must contribute a co-payment based on an income-based sliding scale. The Connecticut Office of Early Childhood administers SRP through two separate grant programs. Priority School Districts, defined in state law, automatically receive SRP funding on a formula basis. Competitive Grant Municipalities are eligible to apply for SRP funding. Both Priority School Districts and Competitive Grant Municipalities may serve preschoolers in either public school or community-based settings—or a mix of both.

Charter schools in Connecticut

Connecticut permits start-up and conversion charter schools. Local charters and state charters can only be authorized by, respectively, local school boards and the state school board.³ In practice, the state school board authorizes all but one charter school in the state. The New Haven Board of Education authorizes Connecticut's one local charter school.

Process for Accessing Pre-K Funds

If a charter applicant wishes to serve pre-K, it must include pre-K in its charter application. A charter school approved to offer pre-K can count pre-K students toward its enrollment for state funding purposes. This option, which is not available for district-run schools, allows charters that serve pre-K students to receive substantially more funding per preschool student than they would receive through SRP. Connecticut has determined charters cannot receive SRP funding.

Barriers

Although there are two state funding streams for pre-K in Connecticut, the discussion of barriers focuses on state per-pupil funding for charters because it is the only way through which charters can access funds.



TOTAL SCORE

40/50


Connecticut's climate for charter schools to offer pre-K is **hospitable***

- + There are no state statutory or regulatory barriers to charter schools accessing state funding for pre-K.
- + Compared to K–12 funding levels, pre-K program funding is sufficient to attract charters.
- + Because Connecticut charter schools receive pre-K funds through a different mechanism than the state pre-K program, the size of the program does not affect their ability to access pre-K funding.
- The funding, application, or approval process creates a barrier to charter access.
- + Automatic enrollment from charter pre-K to kindergarten is not prohibited in legislation or practice.


**Although Connecticut offers a state-funded pre-K program, Connecticut's score is based on a separate process that charters go through to receive state per-pupil funding for pre-K.*




Are there any statutory or regulatory barriers to charter schools accessing state funding for pre-K?

 **No.** Connecticut's charter school legislation does not explicitly permit or prohibit charter schools from offering pre-K. In practice, however, at least six charter schools in Connecticut offer pre-K. These schools receive per-pupil funds from the state, as charter schools do for serving K–12 students. Connecticut's SRP legislation does not list charter schools as eligible to receive SRP funds.⁴ The state interprets this silence to mean that charter schools cannot offer SRP. (This situation is advantageous for charter schools, which receive considerably more per-pupil funding through this arrangement than they would through SRP.)


Is the funding level of the state pre-K program a barrier to charter access?

 **No.** The amount of funding that charters receive is sufficient to attract charters to offer pre-K. Charters receive the same funding amount for pre-K and K–12 students.


Is the size of the state pre-K program a barrier to charter access?

 **No.** Because Connecticut charters do not receive SRP funds, the size of the SRP program does not affect charters' ability to access pre-K funding. Connecticut law, however, imposes multiple caps on charter school creation, although it does not further limit the number or percentage of approved charters that may access pre-K funds.

Is the application, approval, and/or funding process a barrier to charter access?

 **Yes.** The funding process is a barrier to charter access. Although charters are currently able to access pre-K funding from the state, this is somewhat tenuous because it is the result of tacit agreements with the state rather than formal policies explicit in legislation.

Is automatic enrollment from pre-K to kindergarten prohibited in legislation or practice?

 **No.** Charter schools that include pre-K in their charter can automatically enroll pre-K students into kindergarten.

Recommendations

Connecticut charter schools are currently able to access pre-K funding, but there is no clear statutory or policy basis for this. Connecticut's charter law suffers myriad weaknesses. Any future legislation to address these weaknesses should also:

- Establish clear policies or statute codifying the current practice of allowing charter schools that include pre-K in their charter to receive state per-pupil funding for pre-K students.



	School Readiness Program	Charter schools in Connecticut
Year created	Launched in 1997	Charter law enacted in 1996
Children in state	84,667 three- and four-year-olds in Connecticut ⁷	694,483 school-age children in Connecticut ⁸
Children served	9,487 children served 6 percent of 3-year-olds 13 percent of 4-year-olds ⁹	7,131 students served 1.0 percent of school-age population Eighteen charter schools ¹⁰
Charters offering pre-K	Six charter schools in Connecticut offer pre-K. ^{11,12}	Twelve charter schools in Connecticut offer an elementary program. ¹³
Funding	Districts receive \$8,346 to offer full-day SRP. Charter schools receive \$11,000 per pupil to serve pre-K students.	Charter schools receive \$11,000 per pupil to serve K–12 students. ¹⁴

Endnotes

1 Connecticut Office of Early Childhood, “School Readiness Grant Program,” May 16, 2014, http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/rfp/rfp053_psd_community_fy15_16.pdf. Priority school districts are outlined in this legislation. Competitive communities are towns with at least one priority school and any town ranked in the bottom fifty towns in the state in town wealth.

2 Connecticut State Department of Education, “School Readiness,” <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/PDF/DEPS/Readiness/sroverview.pdf>.

3 National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS), “Measuring Up: Connecticut,” <http://www.publiccharters.org/get-the-facts/law-database/states/CT/>.

4 Connecticut General Assembly, Amendment to Senate Bill 380, “An Act Concerning Early Childhood Education Credentialing for School Readiness Programs for 2015,” February 2010, <http://www.cga.ct.gov/2010/AMD/S/2010SB-00380-R00SA-AMD.htm>.

5 W. Steven Barnett et al., “The State of Preschool 2013: State Preschool Yearbook” (New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research, 2013), <http://nieer.org/sites/nieer/files/yearbook2013.pdf>.

6 NAPCS, “Measuring Up: Connecticut.”

7 State population data calculated using ACS 2012 five-year estimates; U.S. Census Bureau, “American Community Survey,” www.census.gov/acs.

8 Ibid., all children in households, three to seventeen years old.

9 W. Steven Barnett et al., “The State of Preschool 2013.”

10 NAPCS, “Measuring Up: Connecticut.”

11 Northeast Charter Schools Network, “Connecticut Charter Schools,” http://www.necharters.org/ct_charter_schools.

12 Examples include: Brass City Charter School (<http://www.brasscitycharter.org/about-us>); Jumoke Academy (<http://jumokeacademy.org>); and Highville Charter School (<http://highvillecharter.com>).

13 Northeast Charter Schools Network, “Connecticut Charter Schools.”

14 Connecticut State Department of Education, “Biennial Report on the Operation of Charter Schools in Connecticut, 2014,” http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/equity/charter/report_on_the_operation_of_charter_schools.pdf.