K12 ACADEMICS — STATE EDUCATION SERIES



Connecticut

Education Guide

A complete profile — schools, testing, graduation, accountability, school choice, teacher certification & financial aid, each in depth.

K12 ACADEMICS

Find Your Community

2026 EDITION

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

Everything about school in Connecticut.

This guide profiles **Connecticut**'s education system in seven parts, each a two-page deep dive with the key facts, plain-English explanations, and a link to the full, regularly-updated guide online. From K12 Academics, the world's largest education resource, online since 2004.

WHAT'S INSIDE

Education Overview · State Testing · Graduation Requirements · Accountability & Report Cards · School Choice · Teacher Certification · Financial Aid

SEARCH 200+ DIRECTORIES

K-12 Schools · Colleges & Universities · Vendors · Summer Programs · International Programs · Performers

Education Overview

EDUCATION IN CONNECTICUT

Connecticut educates roughly 500,000 public K–12 students across about 200 local and regional school districts (organized largely by town), overseen by the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) and the State Board of Education. Connecticut consistently ranks among the higher-spending, higher-performing states — and is also...

WHO MUST ATTEND SCHOOL

- **Start age** — 5 (by January 1); deferral to 6 or 7 allowed
- **End of compulsory age** — 18 (or high school completion)
- **Districts** — ~200 local and regional districts (town-based)
- **Satisfying it** — Public, private, or home instruction

PRE-K IN CONNECTICUT

Connecticut does not offer a fully universal pre-K program, but it invests substantially in early education through the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood (OEC) . Publicly funded options include the School Readiness program and Smart Start (supporting preschool in public schools), Care 4 Kids (child-care assistance), and Head Start —...

AT A GLANCE

Compulsory	**Ages 5–18**
Districts	**~200**
Testing	**Smarter Bal. · SAT**
Diploma	**25 credits**
Choice	**Magnet / Open Choice**

DISTRICTS & CHARTERS

Connecticut's roughly 200 districts are organized largely by town , with some regional school districts serving multiple towns. The largest include the cities of Hartford , New Haven , Bridgeport , Stamford , and Waterbury . Compared with many states, Connecticut has a relatively small charter-school sector (state-authorized charters)...

PRIVATE & INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS IN CONNECTICUT

- **Independent schools** — Nonprofit, board-governed schools — including nationally known boarding schools (Choate Rosemary Hall, Hotchkiss, Taft, Kent, Miss Porter's, Loomis...
- **Catholic & parochial schools** — Archdiocese of Hartford and Dioceses of Bridgeport and Norwich schools (such as Notre Dame, Xavier, and Sacred Heart)
- **Other religious schools** — A range of Christian, Jewish, and other faith-based options
- **Specialty schools** — Montessori, Waldorf, and schools for specific learning needs

READ CONNECTICUT'S FULL EDUCATION OVERVIEW GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com →

CONNECTICUT — PART 2 OF 7

State Testing

WHAT YOUR STATE TESTS

Connecticut uses the Smarter Balanced assessment for ELA and math in grades 3–8, the NGSS science test, and the SAT School Day for all 11th graders. All are run by the Connecticut State Department of Education. There is no high-school exit exam.

WHICH TESTS, WHICH GRADES

- **Smarter Balanced — ELA & Math** — Grades 3–8 (computer-adaptive with a performance task)
- **Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) test** — Science in grades 5, 8, and 11
- **SAT School Day (grade 11)** — A free, in-school SAT that also serves as the high-school accountability test
- **CTAA** — Alternate assessment for eligible students

FORMAT & SUBJECTS

Smarter Balanced is computer-adaptive ; the grade-11 SAT follows the national digital SAT format, giving students a real college-usable score at no cost.

IS PASSING REQUIRED TO GRADUATE?

No exit-exam gate. Connecticut doesn't require passing a state test to graduate; districts set course and credit requirements. The grade-11 SAT provides a college-usable score.

TESTING WINDOWS

Testing runs in a spring window (by subject, roughly March–June) set by each district.

AT A GLANCE	
Grades 3–8	**Smarter Balanced**
Science	**NGSS Science gr 5, 8, 11**
High school	**SAT School Day (gr 11)**
Grad requirement?	**No exit-exam gate**
Format	**Computer-adaptive**
Standards	**CT Core Standards**

HOW IT'S SCORED

Smarter Balanced reports four levels (Level 3+ meets standard). The grade-11 SAT is scored 400–1600.

HOW TO PREPARE

- **SAT prep for grade 11** — Our SAT guide and free Khan Academy Official SAT Practice apply directly
- **Smarter Balanced practice** — CSDE provides free practice and training tests

PARTICIPATION & OPTING OUT

Students in tested grades participate; ask your district about any participation questions.

ACCOMMODATIONS & MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS

Accommodations follow a student's IEP or 504 plan ; eligible students take the state's alternate assessment. Multilingual learners take an English proficiency test (WIDA ACCESS or the state equivalent) and may receive designated supports.

READ CONNECTICUT'S FULL STATE TESTING GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com →

CONNECTICUT — PART 3 OF 7

Graduation Requirements

AT A GLANCE

Connecticut requires 25 credits with no exit exam . It emphasizes a mastery-based diploma approach and a specific course distribution across the disciplines.

CREDIT & COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Connecticut's 25 credits include 4 English, 4 math, 3 science, 3 social studies (including civics and U.S. history), 1 world language, 1 fine arts, 1 health/safety, 1 PE, 1 in a "mastery-based diploma assessment" area, and electives (with financial literacy).

TESTING TO GRADUATE

No exit exam. Connecticut students take the SAT (given statewide) and state assessments, but a passing score is not required to graduate. Districts use a mastery-based diploma assessment approach to show readiness.

DIPLOMA TYPES & HONORS

Connecticut issues a standard diploma, with the Seal of Biliteracy available. Districts may add honors and endorsements.

ALTERNATIVE PATHWAYS

The mastery-based diploma assessment credit lets students demonstrate learning through projects and performance, not just seat time.

AT A GLANCE

Credits	25
Exit exam?	No
Includes	Mastery-based diploma assessment
Also	Fine arts & financial literacy
Confirm with	Your district

OTHER REQUIREMENTS

Connecticut requires fine arts , civics , and financial literacy coursework. Confirm details with your district.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- **How many credits does Connecticut require?** — The state sets a minimum, but your district may require more — confirm locally.
- **Does Connecticut require a test to graduate?** — No — Connecticut has no exit exam; a passing test score is not required to graduate.
- **Are there different diploma types?** — Yes — plus honors designations and seals; see the diplomas section.
- **What if my student is behind on credits?** — Talk to the counselor about credit recovery and alternative pathways.
- **Where do I confirm the exact requirements?** — Your school counselor, district, and the state department of education.

READ CONNECTICUT'S FULL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com →

CONNECTICUT — PART 4 OF 7

Accountability & Report Cards

AT A GLANCE

Connecticut rates schools with the Next Generation Accountability System — an index score (a percentage of possible points across a dozen indicators) — published on EdSight , rather than a letter grade or stars.

HOW THIS STATE RATES SCHOOLS

The index earns points across 12 indicators : achievement, growth, achievement gaps, English-learner progress, chronic absenteeism, preparation for college/career (like coursework and exams), graduation, postsecondary entrance, physical fitness, and arts access. The result is a single accountability index (a percentage) . Read the...

WHAT GETS MEASURED

- **Academic achievement** — How students score on state tests (proficiency in reading/ELA and math)
- **Academic growth / progress** — How much students improve year to year — not just where they land
- **Graduation rate** — For high schools (the 4-year cohort rate)
- **English-learner progress** — How English learners are progressing toward proficiency
- **School quality / student success** — An extra indicator — often attendance/chronic absenteeism, college/career readiness, or similar

FINDING & READING THE REPORT CARD

Look up any school on EdSight (edsight.ct.gov) . Review the indicator breakdown (especially growth and absenteeism) and the trend alongside the index.

AT A GLANCE

Format	Next Generation Accountability I...
Scale	Points across 12 indicators (a %...
Tool	EdSight
Look up at	edsight.ct.gov

HOW FAMILIES SHOULD USE RATINGS

- **Read it in context** — A school's score reflects its students' circumstances too, not only its quality
- **Look at growth, not just scores** — Growth shows how much a school moves students — often more telling than raw proficiency
- **Check the trend** — Is the school improving over time?
- **Look past the summary** — Dig into the underlying data (subgroups, attendance, readiness)
- **Then visit** — Data raises questions; a visit answers them (see our guide on evaluating a school)

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- **How does Connecticut rate schools?** — Connecticut uses the Next Generation Accountability index (a percentage across 12 indicators).
- **What do the ratings measure?** — Test scores, growth, graduation rate, English-learner progress, and a school-quality indicator.
- **Where do I look up my school?** — On the state's official report-card portal (see below).
- **Should I choose a school by its rating alone?** — No — use it as a starting point, weigh growth and context, and visit.
- **What are CSI and TSI?** — Federal labels for schools flagged for Comprehensive or Targeted Support and Improvement.

READ CONNECTICUT'S FULL ACCOUNTABILITY & REPORT CARDS GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com →

School Choice

AT A GLANCE

Connecticut does not have a private-school-choice program. It has notable public choice, especially its regional magnet schools and the Open Choice program (which lets students attend public school in another district), plus charters.

THIS STATE'S CHOICE PROGRAMS

There is no ESA, voucher, or tax-credit scholarship for private school in Connecticut. Its strength is public choice — magnet schools (a large system, especially around Hartford), Open Choice , and charter schools. Families seeking a private school pay tuition (with financial aid often available).

PUBLIC SCHOOL CHOICE, TOO

- **Open enrollment / transfers** — Attend a public school outside your zone, where allowed (see our finding-your-school guide)
- **Charter schools** — Tuition-free public schools of choice (where available)
- **Magnet schools** — Tuition-free public schools with a specialized focus
- **Homeschooling** — Legal in all 50 states (rules vary)

LEGAL & LEGISLATIVE STATUS

Private-choice proposals have not been enacted in Connecticut. Confirm the current status if you've heard of a new proposal.

AT A GLANCE

Private choice?	**No statewide program**
Public choice	**Magnets, Open Choice, charters**
Magnets	**A major regional magnet system**
Homeschool	**Legal**
Confirm with	**Your district**

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- **Does Connecticut have a private-school-choice program?** — No — Connecticut has no private program, but strong public choice (magnets, Open Choice, charters).
- **What's the difference between an ESA and a voucher?** — A voucher pays a private school directly; an ESA is a flexible parent-managed account for many approved expenses.
- **What is a tax-credit scholarship?** — Donors get a tax credit for giving to organizations that fund private-school scholarships.
- **Is there public school choice too?** — Yes — open enrollment, charters, and magnets (plus homeschooling).
- **Where do I confirm the details?** — On the official state program site (see below).

READ CONNECTICUT'S FULL SCHOOL CHOICE GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com →

Teacher Certification

HOW LICENSURE WORKS HERE

Connecticut certifies teachers through the Connecticut State Department of Education . You complete an approved program, pass the required tests, and earn an Initial Educator Certificate , advancing to Provisional and Professional . Connecticut uses Praxis plus a reading test .

WHICH TESTS THIS STATE USES

- **Praxis Subject Assessments** — Content test(s) for your certification area
- **Foundations of Reading** — Required for elementary, reading, and special-education candidates
- **Note** — Basic-skills requirements may be met via qualifying scores/coursework — confirm current options

WHAT YOU NEED TO GET LICENSED

- **A bachelor's degree** — From an accredited college or university
- **A state-approved teacher-preparation program** — Completed at a college or through an approved alternative route
- **Student teaching / clinical practice** — Supervised classroom experience
- **Pass the required exams** — See the exams section above
- **A background check** — Fingerprint-based criminal background check
- **Apply to the state** — Submit your application and documents to the licensing agency

AT A GLANCE

Agency	Connecticut State Dept. of Educa...
Content	Praxis Subject Assessments
Reading	Foundations of Reading
Certificate	Initial — then Provisional/Profe...

OTHER PATHS INTO TEACHING

Most states offer alternative routes for career-changers and those with a degree in another field. In Connecticut, these typically let you start teaching while completing licensure requirements — through district or university alternative-certification programs, residencies, or emergency/provisional permits. Requirements (and the exams)...

RECIPROCITY & OUT-OF-STATE LICENSES

- **Interstate agreements** — Most states participate in the NASDTEC Interstate Agreement, which eases (but doesn't guarantee) recognition of an out-of-state license
- **You may still owe exams** — States often require you to meet their own testing (or coursework) requirements, sometimes within a grace period
- **Check both states** — Confirm the specific steps with Connecticuts agency and your current state

READ CONNECTICUT'S FULL TEACHER CERTIFICATION GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com →

Financial Aid

THE STATE AID PICTURE

Connecticut's state aid is administered by the Office of Higher Education (OHE) , with a combined need-and-merit scholarship and a free-community-college program.

NEED-BASED STATE GRANTS

- **Roberta B. Willis Scholarship** — Connecticut's main state scholarship, with both need-based and need-merit components for residents at eligible in-state colleges.

PROMISE & FREE-COLLEGE PROGRAMS

PACT (Pledge to Advance Connecticut) makes community college tuition- and fee-free (last-dollar) for eligible Connecticut residents at the state's community colleges.

COLLEGE SAVINGS (529 PLAN)

Connecticut's CHET (Connecticut Higher Education Trust) 529 plan offers a state income tax deduction.

APPLYING & THE STATE AGENCY

- **File the FAFSA early** — It's the trigger for state grants and many scholarships
- **Register with Connecticut Office of Higher Education** — Create the state agency's student account to track and claim awards
- **Confirm your details** — Verify residency, GPA, and enrollment as required
- **Meet any extra requirements** — Some programs need a separate form, GPA, or service commitment
- **Reapply every year** — State aid is awarded annually

AT A GLANCE	
Need + merit	Roberta B. Willis Scholarship
Free community college	PACT
529 plan	CHET
Agency	CT Office of Higher Ed

DEADLINES & TIMING

State deadlines are typically much earlier than the federal FAFSA deadline , and some aid is first-come, first-served until funds run out. File the FAFSA as soon as it opens (in the fall) and confirm the state's specific priority date.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- **How do I get Connecticut state aid?** — File the FAFSA (and any state form) by the deadline; Connecticut Office of Higher Education administers the programs.
- **Is it need-based or merit?** — Both — Connecticut offers need-based grants and merit scholarships.
- **Are the deadlines earlier than federal?** — Usually yes — file early, as some aid is first-come.
- **Can I use it out of state?** — Most Connecticut aid is for in-state schools; check each program.
- **Does this list private scholarships?** — No — this guide covers official state programs only.

READ CONNECTICUT'S FULL FINANCIAL AID GUIDE
tools.k12academics.com →

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