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COOPERATIVE ARRANGEMENTS

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You wanted a description of the cooperative arrangements districts may enter into, outside of forming regional school districts.

SUMMARY

Connecticut law contemplates both formal and informal relationships between local and regional school districts. The statutes allow towns to form regional school districts to share the administration of their schools under a common board of education. The procedure to do so involves several steps, including the establishment of a temporary regional study committee, funding the study, a written report of the committee's findings and recommendation, State Board of Education review and approval, and simultaneous referenda in each participating town.

The statutes also allow boards to form cooperative arrangements for the provision of programs and services. While not as complicated as the regional school district formation process, cooperative arrangements must be agreed to in writing and have specific requirements for dissolution. Committees formed to supervise such arrangements have broad power, including the authority to receive and disburse funds, hire personnel, and hold title to property. Boards often enter into less formal relationships, including interdistrict programs aimed at reducing racial, ethnic, and economic isolation and the joint employment of superintendents.

FORMAL COOPERATIVE ARRANGEMENTS

Formation and Oversight

Connecticut law allows local and regional boards of education to establish cooperative arrangements with one another to provide school accommodation services, programs, or activities. Boards must agree in writing to form such an arrangement. Cooperative arrangements can establish a committee to supervise their programs with the committee membership determined by the agreement.

The committees, in accordance with the terms of the agreement, have the power to (1)

apply for, receive directly, and expend on behalf of the school districts (if so designated) any grants to the school districts that relate to programs the committee supervises, as long as the grants are provided before implementation of any such program or are to reimburse the committee for transportation provided to a school operated by a cooperative arrangement; (2) receive and disburse funds donated to the committee from private sources or appropriated for the committee's use by the cooperating school districts or the state or federal government; (3) hold title to real or personal property in trust, or as otherwise agreed to by the parties, for the appointing boards; (4) employ personnel; (5) enter into contracts, and (6) otherwise provide the specified programs, services, and activities. Teachers employed by a committee are subject to the same laws as those by employed by the board of education of any town or regional school district (CGS § 10-158a(a)).

School Building Projects

The percentage of school building project grant money a cooperative arrangement may be eligible to receive is determined by its wealth ranking. The ranking is determined by (1) multiplying the total population of each town in the arrangement by the town's ranking when ranked in descending order according to adjusted equalized net grand list per capita, (2) adding the products of that calculation, and (3) dividing the total by the total population of all towns in the cooperative arrangement. The ranking of each cooperative arrangement must be rounded to the nearest whole number and each cooperative arrangement must receive the same reimbursement percentage as would a town with the same rank plus 10 percentage points (CGS § 10-285a(d)).

If a cooperative arrangement receives a school building project grant, the cooperative arrangement must use the building for which the grant was provided for at least 20 years after completion of the project. If the cooperative arrangement ceases to use the building for the purpose for which the grant was provided, the education commissioner must determine whether (1) title to the building and any legal interest in appurtenant land reverts to the state or (2) the cooperative arrangement gives the state a reimbursement of 10% of the project's eligible costs (CGS § 10-158a(c)).

Withdrawal/Dissolution

In order to withdraw from the cooperative arrangement a board must provide written notice of its intent to do so to the other board(s) at least one year prior to the date of the proposed withdrawal. If there are at least two remaining boards, they can continue their agreement. If the agreement is continued, the committee can continue to hold title to any real or personal property given to or purchased by the committee in trust for all the boards of education which entered the agreement, unless otherwise provided in the agreement, by law, or by the grantor or donor of the property. If the committee is dissolved, any property held in trust must be distributed in accordance with the agreement, if the distribution is not contrary to law (CGS § 10-158a(b)).

INTERDISTRICT PROGRAMS

The law also requires school districts to provide educational opportunities for its

students to interact with students and teachers from other racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds. To those ends, the law allows boards to offer a number of programs aimed at desegregation and increasing school choice options, including: (1) interdistrict magnet school programs; (2) charter schools; (3) interdistrict after-school, Saturday and summer programs and sister-school projects; (4) intra- and interdistrict public school choice programs; (5) interdistrict school building projects; (6) interdistrict program collaboratives for students and staff; (7) distance learning through the use of technology; and (8) any other experience that increases awareness of the diversity of individuals and cultures (CGS § 10-226h).

Most of these programs, by their very nature, must be undertaken cooperatively by boards of education. Some of the more formal and involved arrangements include charter schools, interdistrict magnet schools, and regional vocational-agricultural centers. Cooperative arrangements are specifically authorized to operate interdistrict magnet schools and receive the interdistrict magnet school program operating grant (CGS § 10-264l). Any two or more boards of education may cooperatively apply to the education commissioner to establish a charter school (CGS § 10-66bb). Also, boards of education may enter into agreements with one another to establish a regional vocational-agricultural center in conjunction with its regular public school system (CGS § 10-64). Detailed information about all of these programs can be found in the State Department of Education (SDE) publication Public School Choice in Connecticut.

SDE maintains a competitive grant for the establishment and operation of interdistrict cooperative programs. Programs may include (1) interdistrict resident summer programs and programs for distance learning and other technologies, (2) existing public schools or those planned before July 1, 1997 that are located in a priority school district, have a specialized curriculum, and are designed to promote public school choice (lighthouse schools), and (3) certain programs conducted by interdistrict magnet programs. Eligible applicants include cooperative arrangements on behalf of local or regional school districts; regional education service centers (RESCs) solely or pursuant to a cooperative arrangement; approved non-sectarian non-profit organizations; and, in the case of a lighthouse school, boards of education or RESCs (CGS § 10-74d).

SHARED SUPERINTENDENTS

The law also allows boards of education to share a superintendent. Pursuant to CGS § 10-157a, the boards of education of any two or more towns, a regional school district board and the board of education of at least one member town, or a committee formed and authorized by agreement of such boards on behalf of such boards may jointly employ a superintendent.

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