

POLICY BRIEF · CONNECTICUT

On Marguerite Roza's Deceitful Presentation in Connecticut

Why the Edunomics graphs shown to Governor Lamont's Blue-Ribbon Commission have no place in Connecticut's school funding debate

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2013

Edunomics' chosen starting year for Connecticut: after Connecticut had already fallen below the cost of adequate outcomes, and when national scores peaked

97% → 71%

Connecticut spending relative to the cost of Massachusetts-average outcomes, 2013–2024

+0.24 vs. +0.73

Connecticut districts: raw spending vs. outcomes, and spending relative to cost vs. outcomes, 2024

The bottom line

On August 20, 2026, Marguerite Roza of Georgetown's Edunomics Lab presented to Governor Lamont's Blue-Ribbon Commission on K-12 Education Funding and Accountability. Her deck was organized around four "worries," ending in "Weak ROI," and it leaned on the family of graphics her lab publishes for every state. On screen was a scatter of district spending against test scores. Behind the "Weak ROI" claim sits the lab's Connecticut trend line of spending rising since 2013 while scores fall. Wherever these graphs land, they send the same message: more money has bought nothing, and districts should be audited, constrained and downsized.

These graphs do not belong in a serious policy conversation. They are built so they cannot show anything else. They are far more likely to misinform the Commission, the General Assembly and the public than to inform them, and anyone who puts them in front of Connecticut policymakers should be challenged directly.

- **The trend graph starts in 2013**, when national NAEP scores had peaked and when Connecticut had already slipped below what Massachusetts-average outcomes would cost. That choice is intentionally deceitful. The graph then reports nominal dollars, never asks what outcomes cost, and stretches two unrelated scales onto one axis.
- **The scatterplot shown to the Commission dumps every district onto one chart by raw spending**, with no adjustment for the students served. Roza's own caption concedes that high-poverty districts underspend their peers, and then the same cloud is offered as evidence that some districts simply use money better.
- **Done correctly, Connecticut's data say the opposite**. From 2013 to 2024, Connecticut's spending fell from 97% to 71% of the estimated cost of Massachusetts-average outcomes. Across Connecticut districts in 2024, raw spending correlates with outcomes at +0.24; spending relative to cost correlates at +0.73.

None of this is new. I have documented the same moves in Roza's work since 2009 (Baker, 2026a). The audience has changed. The tricks have not.

What Roza showed Connecticut

Exhibit A: the trend graph. Edunomics' Connecticut page plots cumulative growth in per-pupil spending against cumulative change in NAEP points, starting in 2013 (Edunomics Lab, 2025). Its caption: spending grew 48% to about \$24,700 per pupil, while 4th-grade reading fell "through the decade." It is the Connecticut edition of the graph Edunomics publishes for every state, and the backdrop for the "Weak ROI" claim Roza brought to the Commission.

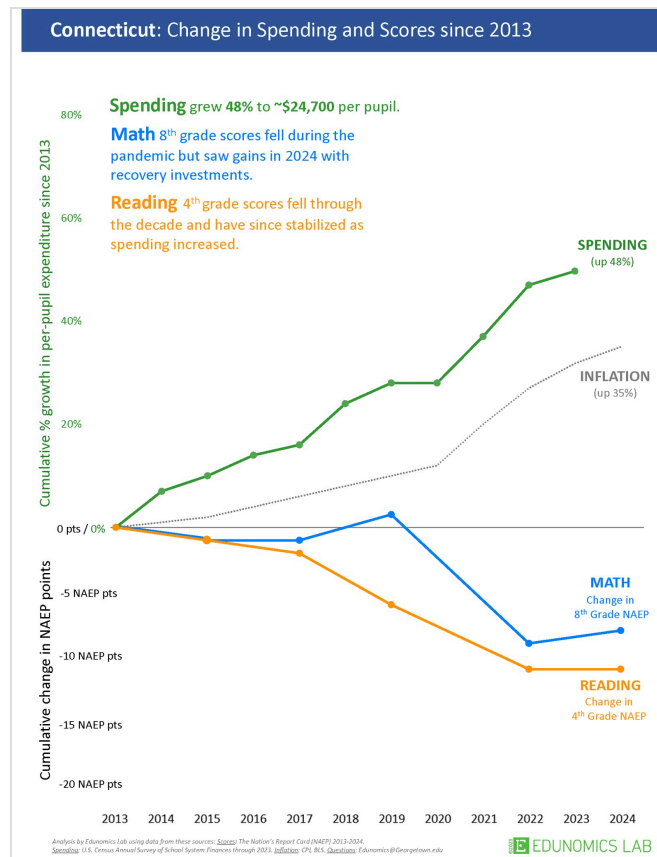


EXHIBIT A Edunomics Lab, "Connecticut: Change in Spending and Scores since 2013." Reproduced for purposes of critique.

Exhibit B: the spending-versus-performance scatterplot. Slide 28 of the Commission deck plots each Connecticut district's FY2024–25 expenditure per pupil against its 2024–25 Performance Index, with crosshairs at the state averages and districts colored by the share of economically disadvantaged students (Roza, 2026; Edunomics Lab, 2026). Edunomics' companion worksheet asks users to find districts that "spend more but get lower outcomes than similar peers" (Edunomics Lab, 2022). According to press accounts of the meeting, Roza used the chart to argue that districts with similar wealth perform very differently, so some must be using their dollars more effectively (Peck-Suzuki, 2026).

1. Uneven access to funding. Unable to tap local funding.

High poverty districts underspend their peers. How can the state leverage its limited dollars to ensure more equitable access to state and local funding?

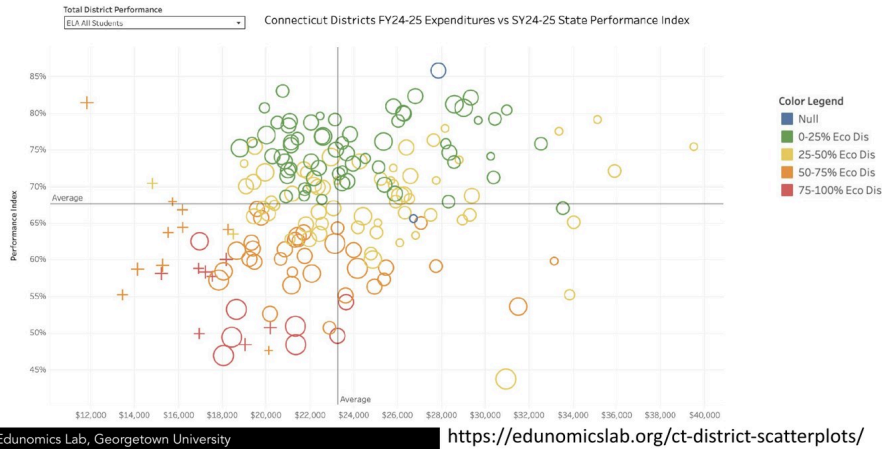


EXHIBIT B Roza (2026), slide 28, presented to the Governor's Blue-Ribbon Commission, August 20, 2026. Reproduced for purposes of critique.

Look at the colors. Edunomics' own legend marks the highest-poverty districts in red and orange, and they sit almost entirely below the state average on performance, most of them to the *left* of average spending. The slide's own headline says it: "High poverty districts underspend their peers." The graph displays the very pattern that cost explains, then invites the Commission to read the cloud as a story about management.

Exhibit C: staffing versus enrollment. Slide 37 uses the same device on a different baseline: cumulative percent change in staff and in enrollment since 2014–15, under the heading "Poor financial planning, overcommitting, resistance to thoughtful downsizing," with the conclusion that "CT districts likely have too many schools and too many staff."

2. Districts in fiscal distress:

Poor financial planning, overcommitting, resistance to thoughtful downsizing or addressing budget challenges.

CT districts have already lost 3% of enrollment and are forecasted to shrink by 9% by 2031.

The next few years will require downsizing by another 40K students or more.

Given the shrinking student population, CT districts likely have too many schools and too many staff.

Unpopular downsizing decisions will be difficult for some district leaders. When those decisions are delayed, districts end up in financial distress.

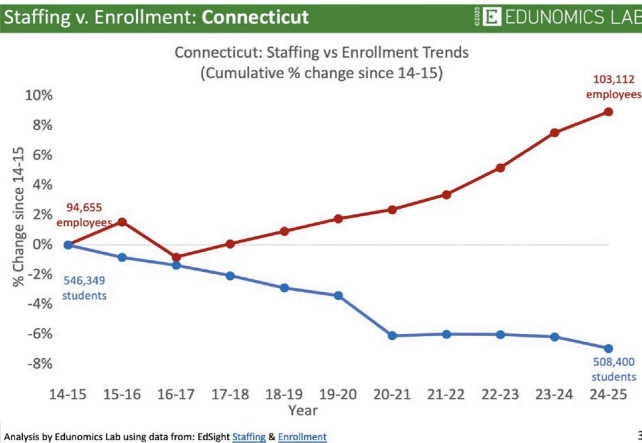


EXHIBIT C Roza (2026), slide 37. Reproduced for purposes of critique.

Problem 1: the trend graph is rigged by its starting year

Every design choice in Exhibit A pushes in one direction.

1. **The starting year.** The graph starts in 2013, the one year that all but guarantees spending up and scores down. Why that choice is deliberate is explained below.
2. **Nominal dollars.** The headline 48% is nominal. The graph's own inflation line rises 35%, leaving real growth of about 10% over a decade, under 1% a year. And the spending series ends in 2023, at the height of temporary federal pandemic relief.
3. **The wrong deflator, and no cost.** The CPI measures consumer prices, not the price of teachers in Connecticut's labor markets. Nothing in the graph accounts for who the students are or what their outcomes cost.
4. **Mismatched years and scales.** Spending stops in 2023 while scores run through 2024, and percentage growth and NAEP points share one vertical axis at an arbitrary exchange rate. Rescale either axis and the "divergence" grows or shrinks at will.
5. **No comparison, and a caption that undercuts itself.** NAEP fell nationwide after 2019, overwhelmingly in the pandemic years. Plotting one state's spending next to a national decline says nothing about whether Connecticut's dollars mattered. Edumomics' own caption even concedes that 8th-grade math "saw gains in 2024 with recovery investments" and that reading "stabilized as spending increased." Those are not the words of a return on investment that is "weak."

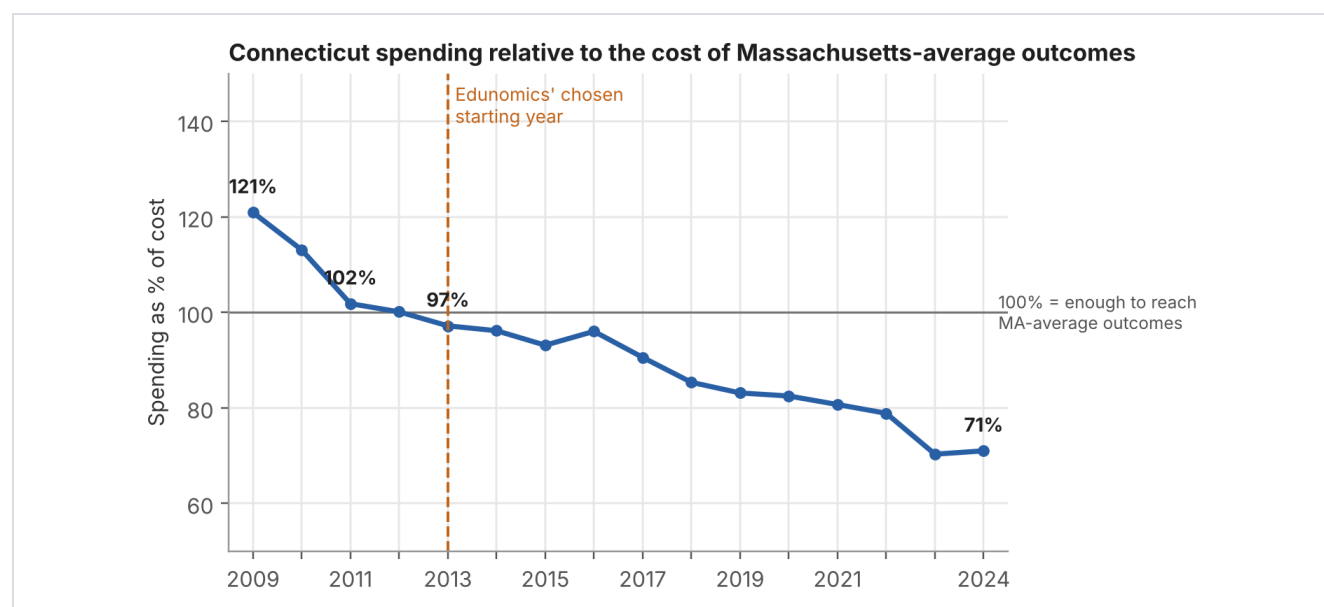
Why the choice of 2013 is intentionally deceitful

Calling a graph deceitful is a strong charge. Here is why it fits, and why 2013 is not an innocent default.

1. **2013 is where the scores topped out.** It is well understood among researchers who work with NAEP that 2013 is the point at which scores nationally leveled off and began to turn down. Start the clock there and almost any state will show flat or falling scores afterward, whatever it spent.
2. **2013 is where the post-recession damage was already done.** By 2013, the recession-era hit to school funding had largely run its course nationally, so spending sits near the bottom of its trough. In Connecticut, spending relative to the cost of Massachusetts-average outcomes had already fallen from 121% in 2009 to 97% in 2013.
3. **Put the two together and the conclusion is built in.** A starting year at the top of the scores and the bottom of spending manufactures the apparent divergence. Edumomics' tool produces this graph for every state, and it produces the same picture in nearly all of them. That is the tell: the conclusion comes from the starting year, not from anything about Connecticut's schools.
4. **Earlier years were available and left out.** State NAEP results in reading and math go back to 2003 for every state, every two years. Starting in 2009 would have shown what happened first in Connecticut: spending fell from 121% to 102% of the estimated cost of Massachusetts-average outcomes in just two years. A starting year that hides that slide is a choice.
5. **They have been told, repeatedly and in public.** These problems have been laid out for Edumomics on social media, in blog posts and in a 2026 video critique (Baker, 2026a; Baker, 2026c). The 2013 start has stayed. A misleading choice made once can be a mistake. Keeping it after being told exactly why it misleads is not.

Measured against cost, the trend runs the other way. Connecticut's spending fell from 97% of the estimated cost of Massachusetts-average outcomes in 2013 to 71% in 2024, and from 160% to 117% of

the cost of national-average outcomes. The share of Connecticut students enrolled in districts spending less than the cost of Massachusetts-average outcomes roughly doubled, from 32% to 63%.



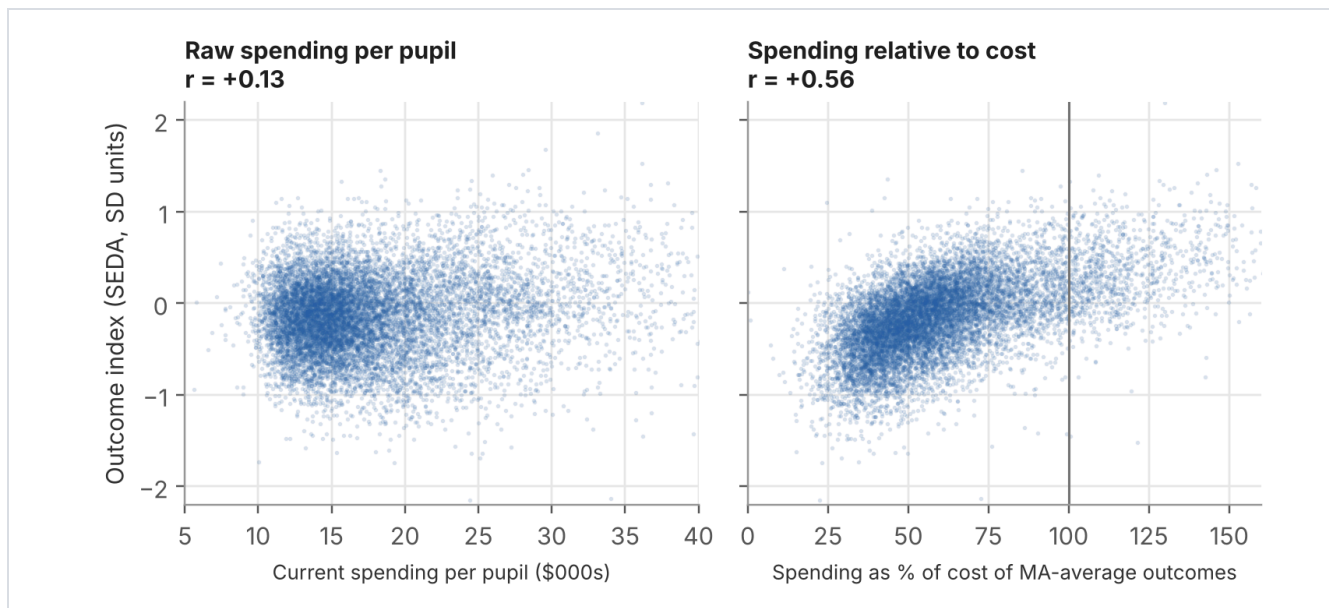
COUNTER-EXHIBIT 1 National Education Cost Model (NECM) merged with SEDA outcomes, 166 Connecticut districts, 2009–2024. Statewide total current spending divided by statewide total estimated cost of Massachusetts-average outcomes (enrollment-weighted).

Problem 2: the scatterplot ignores what outcomes cost

Spending is what a district spends. Cost is the minimum it would take to reach a given outcome with the students it serves, in the labor market it hires from, at the scale it operates. Efficiency is the gap between the two. A graph with no cost estimate cannot say anything about efficiency, and this one doesn't try (Baker, 2026b).

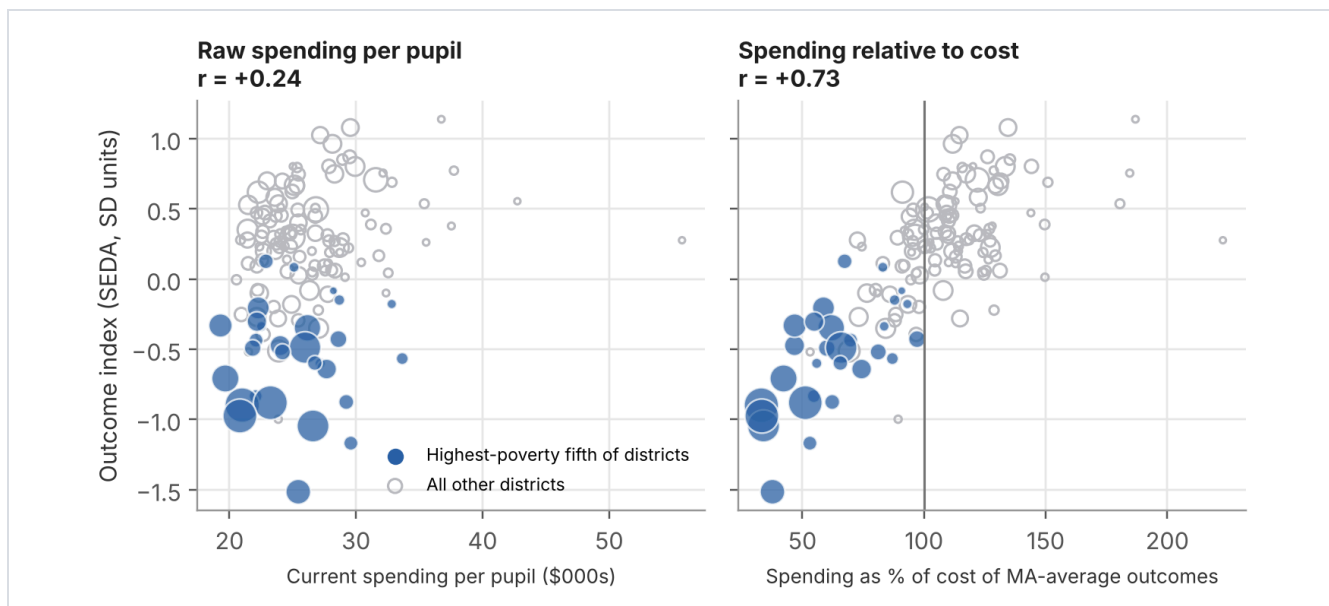
The raw cloud is not neutral, either. Connecticut's highest-poverty districts do not even spend more per pupil than its lowest-poverty districts. Those districts land in the low-spending, low-performance corner, and the ones that spend a little more than average land in the "spends more, scores lower" corner the Edunomics worksheet tells users to scrutinize. At the meeting, Lisa Hammersley of the School and State Finance Project pushed back on reading the graph at face value, noting that student needs such as multilingual learners explain outcome gaps between districts that look alike on poverty and spending: "it's just more of a nuanced conversation than just looking at these spots on the graph" (Peck-Suzuki, 2026). She is right, and the cost model is how that nuance is measured.

Nationally, the same districts and the same test scores tell very different stories depending on whether cost is measured: across about 11,200 districts in 2024, raw spending and outcomes correlate at +0.13; spending relative to cost correlates at +0.56.



COUNTER-EXHIBIT 2 NECM merged with SEDA outcomes, 11,195 districts, 2024. Axes trimmed to \$5,000–\$40,000 and 0–160% for legibility; correlations use all districts.

Connecticut's own district data show the same reversal. Raw spending in 2024 correlates with outcomes at +0.24. Spending relative to the cost of Massachusetts-average outcomes correlates at +0.73.



COUNTER-EXHIBIT 3 NECM merged with SEDA outcomes, 142 Connecticut districts with outcome data, 2024. Blue: highest-poverty fifth of districts (Census child poverty). Bubble size = enrollment.

The numbers explain why. The highest-poverty fifth of Connecticut districts spends a median of about \$24,200 per pupil in 2024, *less* than the lowest-poverty fifth's \$25,400. But reaching Massachusetts-average outcomes would cost those high-poverty districts a median of about \$39,400, so they spend about 62% of cost. The lowest-poverty fifth spends about \$25,400 against a cost of about \$22,000, or 114%.

About a quarter of Connecticut districts (37 of 142) combine above-median spending with below-median outcomes, the corner Edunomics tells users to scrutinize. About three in five of them (22) spend less

than their outcomes would cost, among them Hartford, New Britain, New London, Norwalk, Norwich, Windham and Stamford. Their median child poverty rate is 9.9%, against 6.2% for all districts, and their median free or reduced-price lunch share is 43%, against 32%.

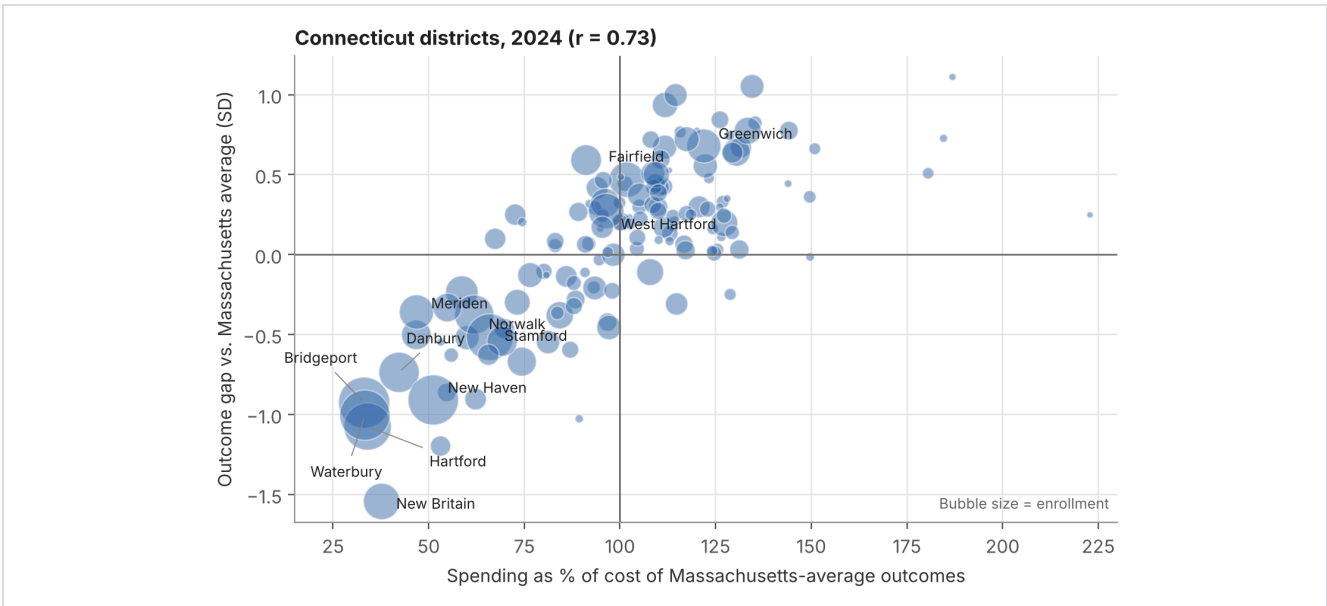
Problem 3: the staffing graph is the same trick on a different baseline

Exhibit C picks 2014–15 as its zero point, plots cumulative percent change in two different things on one axis, and lets the gap do the arguing. The steepest enrollment drop is 2020–21, the first pandemic year. The deck does not ask what the added staff were hired to do. Its own later slides answer that question, and the answer is not "overcommitting."

- **Teachers are flat.** Roza's slide 43 shows Connecticut added just 176 teachers between 2018–19 and 2024–25. The growth is in paraprofessionals (+908) and in school-based specialists, nurses and coaches (+4,611), offset by a 2,801-position (32%) drop in district administration and central office, a pattern that looks at least as much like staff being recoded from central offices to schools as like new hiring.
- **The growth tracks needs the deck itself describes.** Slide 44 reports rising special education identification and staffing; the "Fiscal Distress" section concedes that federal ESSER funds paid for positions over the past five years. Staff hired with temporary federal money to serve rising needs is not evidence of mismanagement.
- **The deck does not agree with itself.** Slide 37 reports 103,112 employees in 2024–25. Slide 43, citing the same Edunomics staffing tool for the same year, reports 101,152. Slide 37 says districts "have already lost 3% of enrollment," while its own chart shows a 7% decline from its chosen baseline. The 3% figure comes from slide 43's 2018–19 baseline. Two baselines, two totals, one conclusion.

What Connecticut's evidence shows instead

Across Connecticut districts, spending relative to the cost of Massachusetts-average outcomes and outcomes move together (correlation 0.73). The districts furthest below cost are furthest below the Massachusetts average, and they are the state's highest-poverty districts: Bridgeport, Waterbury and Hartford each spend about a third of what Massachusetts-average outcomes would cost, New Haven about half.



COUNTER-EXHIBIT 4 NECM merged with SEDA outcomes, 142 Connecticut districts, 2024. Outcome gap measured against the enrollment-weighted Massachusetts district average. Bubble size = enrollment.

- **Money buys more in Connecticut, not less.** Within states, the payoff to spending relative to cost is about 1.2 in Connecticut, New Jersey and Massachusetts, against 0.44 in Florida and 0.70 in Texas (Baker, 2026b). Connecticut is one of the places where the return to adequate funding is highest.
- **The shortfall is concentrated where needs are greatest, and growing.** Taken together, the highest-poverty fifth of districts spent 49% of the cost of Massachusetts-average outcomes in 2024, down from 67% in 2013 and 93% in 2009. The lowest-poverty fifth spent 113%.
- **The Commission's own principles point the same way.** The Commission's first guiding principle is that the system be "Adequate: Provides the level of resources necessary to serve all students." A presentation that never measures what adequacy costs cannot tell the Commission whether that principle is met. Connecticut's evidence says it is not, and by a widening margin.

Poverty fifth (districts)	Median child poverty	Median spending	Median cost (MA outcomes)	Spending ÷ cost, 2009	2013	2024
Lowest poverty	3.6%	\$25,398	\$21,972	166%	151%	113%
Second	4.5%	\$25,542	\$21,968	157%	143%	118%
Middle	6.1%	\$26,787	\$24,683	149%	138%	108%
Fourth	9.0%	\$25,436	\$26,695	142%	124%	90%
Highest poverty	16.8%	\$24,189	\$39,353	93%	67%	49%

Table 1. Connecticut districts by fifths of Census child poverty. Medians for 2024; spending ÷ cost is the enrollment-weighted aggregate for each fifth in each year. NECM, 166 districts.

Same tricks, new audience

These graphics are new editions of very old devices that I have documented in Roza's work for seventeen years (Baker, 2026a; Baker, 2026c):

- **The "long-term trend."** Start the clock in 2013, the one year that all but guarantees spending up and scores down. Skip the cost adjustment, stretch the axes, and announce that money doesn't matter. The baseline is not an accident. It is intentionally deceitful.
- **The "clouds of doubt."** Throw every district onto one chart by raw spending, with no adjustment for students, labor markets or scale, and call the resulting cloud a finding. Measure against cost and the cloud resolves into a clear positive relationship, in Connecticut and nationally.
- **The convenient baseline, again.** Pick 2014–15 for staffing, 2018–19 for the enrollment headline, and let whichever baseline makes the gap look bigger do the talking.
- **Not a first offense.** In 2011 Roza circulated a "productivity curve" with no data behind it at all. The Edunomics graphs repeat the pattern: confident claims about what money buys, with no measure of what outcomes cost.

These graphs do not inform the Commission's work. They misinform it. They should not be cited in the Commission's January report, in testimony, in budget hearings, in litigation or in training for school board members.

Anyone who puts them in front of Connecticut policymakers should be asked, publicly, why they chose 2013 and why they left out cost.

What to ask of any spending-and-outcomes graph

1. **Why this starting year?** Would an earlier or later baseline change the story?
2. **Is spending measured against what outcomes cost?** Student needs, regional labor costs and scale, not just the CPI.
3. **Real or nominal, and which dollars?** Does the figure include temporary federal relief or costs that never reach classrooms?
4. **Compared with what?** National trends, other states, or the outcomes the money was supposed to buy?
5. **Who lands in the "inefficient" corner?** If it is the highest-poverty districts, the graph is measuring need, not waste.

Sources and notes

My work

1. Baker, B. D. (2026a, September 29). Seventeen years of Roza-tinted glasses. *School Finance 101*. <https://schoolfinance101.com/2026/09/29/seventeen-years-of-roza-tinted-glasses/>
2. Baker, B. D. (2026b, September 30). Efficiently mediocre: Why measuring school efficiency requires measuring cost. *School Finance 101*. <https://schoolfinance101.com/2026/09/30/efficiently-mediocre-why-measuring-school-efficiency-requires-measuring-cost/>
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Roza and Edunomics Lab

5. Roza, M. (2026, August 20). What options do states have to ensure smart spending in school districts. Presentation to the Governor's Blue-Ribbon Commission on K-12 Education Funding and Accountability (full Commission meeting deck, slides 26–50). <https://portal.ct.gov/governor/-/media/office-of-the-governor/working-groups/blue-ribbon-commission-on-k-12-education/documents/20260820-presentation.pdf>
6. Edunomics Lab. (2025). Connecticut ROI over time. Georgetown University. <https://edunomicslab.org/connecticut-roi-over-time/>
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The meeting

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10. Peck-Suzuki, T. (2026, August 24). Friction emerges as K-12 school funding commission weighs solutions. *CT Mirror*. <https://ctmirror.org/2026/08/24/k-12-schools-blue-ribbon-commission-funding-solutions/>

Data

11. School Finance Indicators Database: National Education Cost Model (NECM) district panel merged with SEDA outcomes, 2009–2024 (cost_panel_altmodels_NEWSEDA). Spending is current spending per pupil; cost is the model's estimated cost of Massachusetts-average outcomes (and, where noted, national-average outcomes) for each district and year. <https://www.schoolfinancedata.org>

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