



Testimony of Jeffrey Leake, Cheshire Education Association before the Education
Committee

Bill No. 1114 An Act Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations
Regarding Education

February 28, 2007

Good afternoon, Chairpersons Gaffey and Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee committee. My name is Jeffrey Leake, and I am here today representing almost 400 teacher members of the Education Association of Cheshire in asking you to support the Governor's proposals for increasing Education Cost Sharing resources. Our teachers work hard every day to insure that students in Cheshire receive a high-quality education – one that prepares them for the world community they will soon be entering as productive citizens and we urge you to support those efforts with this proposal for increased state funding.

The Cheshire community supports our efforts with energetic parent involvement and a range of community support, including, of course, financial resources. Over the past 15 years, however, that financial support has been tested, as the local share of Regular Program Expenditures has had to increase from 69% to 85% as the state's share has decreased from 31% to 15%. I am here this afternoon to discuss what this shift has meant for the Cheshire community in general, and the teachers and students specifically.

For the community, it has meant difficult budget processes as we have struggled to find the balance between the need for increased resources and the desire of Cheshire taxpayers, especially senior citizens, to moderate those needed increases. It has included reductions in funding for maintenance for the physical plant in our community. It has created 'generational conflict' as parents have attempted to support their children and their schools and others have attacked that support. The most dramatic instance of the conflict within the community occurred in the spring of 2004. As a result of the Town Council's zero increase in the school system's budget a rather large percentage of our members were given non-renewal notices.

For Cheshire teachers and our Board of Education, it has meant a struggle every three years to come to agreement on a contract that represents at modest attempt to maintain even a moderate standard of living in the face of increases in the cost of living. In addition, the burden is enormous on both parties as we deal with escalating health care costs. It has meant dealing with increasing challenges to revise curriculum and heighten student expectations without the accompanying support of curriculum specialists to implement

those revisions and help achieve those increased expectations. It has meant counseling our newer staff as they attempted to deal with non-renewal notices, generated by the budget struggles mentioned above, who question their ability to commit to being part of our community with the uncertainty of continued employment.

Most importantly, this shift of support from the state to the local has meant true losses of opportunity for Cheshire's children: class sizes have increased; library and guidance services have been reduced; and technology enhancements have been delayed. In order to implement the increasingly 'personalized and data-driven' instruction that our district attempts to deliver we need class sizes that will allow for that kind of personal attention and time for individual and small-group instruction. We know that in this information-driven society we need more, not less, attention to the effective use of that information, with classroom teachers and library-media specialists working together. We know that with increased societal and educational pressures we need more, not less, support from guidance professionals and programs. And we know that in this technology-driven world we cannot afford to fall behind.

Let me conclude by once again asking for your support for increasing the state's share of funding for our public schools. It is a solution that is long overdue, and we applaud the bi-partisan efforts to address this funding solution. I ask you to reflect on the words of Benjamin Franklin: "If a man empties his purse into his head, no man can take it away from him. An investment in knowledge always pays the best interest." I am not asking you to empty the state's purse, but I am asking you to make that investment. Our communities, our teachers and our students deserve no less.