

**Testimony Regarding Senate Bill 1114**  
**An Act Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations**  
**Regarding Education**

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Submitted by  
Frank H. Sippy Ph.D.  
Superintendent of Schools  
Regional School District 15

Tomorrow's world will not reward today's students for minimal proficiency in basic skills. Rather, tomorrow's world will reward independent and creative thinking, analytical comprehension, decision-making skills, high level achievement in a broad array of academic subjects, and the development of social and interpersonal relationship skills.

-Gerald Tirozzi, Ph.D., NASSP NewsLeader, February, 2007

Connecticut school districts' fundamental mission has changed. As outsourcing American skilled labor continues, Connecticut schools must retool its public education program to prepare our students for the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce. The future success of Connecticut's economy, as well as, a thriving commercial base rests on how well our children are prepared to be productive citizens.

Dr. Tirozzi is correct. We must set our sights on an academic program that not only supports skills acquisition but also equally values independent and creative thinking, decision-making skills, and the development of interpersonal relationship skills. America's intellect is its most prized asset now and in the years to come. Connecticut citizens vigorously support public education. Unfortunately that support is waning under the weight of increased property taxes. My colleagues and I recognize the tipping point, when our most ardent supporters can no longer afford to support academics because it is too expensive. There are many such cases in my home district and indeed throughout our state of more folks feeling the pinch every year. We have a legitimate crisis in our state. To affect the type of academic paradigm shift necessary will require more educational funding. To ask local districts to shoulder a disproportionate share of that burden is unacceptable for all 169 towns in Connecticut.

Over a period of twenty years, this funding crisis has gradually escalated to a level that can no longer be ignored. In 2005, Governor Rell took the courageous step of creating a Commission on Education Finance to make a comprehensive study of Connecticut's Public Education Finance Plan and school finance issues. The Commission's goal was to make recommendations for improvement to the Governor before the end of 2006.

How we got to this crisis:

- 1977 - Connecticut Supreme Court Case Horton vs. Meskill ruled Connecticut's school funding formula needed to be fixed. At the time, local districts' support was at 70 percent, State support was at 25 percent, and Federal Government support was at 5 percent.
  - In response, the Connecticut Legislature created the Guaranteed Tax Base Grant. The goal was to equalize funding of public education between the state and local governments.
- 1989 - Legislature revised school funding formula and renamed it the Educational Cost Sharing Grant (ECS)
  - Merged the Guaranteed Tax Base Grant, Special Education funding, and the Education Enhancement Act into one formula
  - Formula was manipulated by caps and stop-loss so the formula was never allowed to operate as intended
  - No adjustment mechanism associated with the foundation expenditure level. Since the 1999-00 school year, the foundation level remains at \$5,891 per pupil (foundation expenditure level is defined as the per pupil expenditure level for the town/school district at the 80<sup>th</sup> percentile.

From 1989 through 2004, the artificial impediment to the funding formula took a toll on Connecticut's children and taxpayers.

- 1989 - State of Connecticut assumed 45.5 percent of the cost of public education, while cities and towns assumed 54.5 percent of the cost
- 2004 - State of Connecticut assumed 35.5 percent of the cost of public education, while cities and towns assumed 60.5 percent of the cost
- 1989 - State of Connecticut assumed 40.5 percent of Special Education Cost, while cities and towns assumed 59.5 percent of the cost
- 2004 - State of Connecticut assumed 30.5 percent of Special Education Cost, while cities and towns assumed 69.5 percent of the cost
- 1989-04 - Special Education cost rose from \$500 million to \$1.2 billion

SB 1114 An Act Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations Regarding Education incorporates the vast majority of the Commission's recommendations.

- Increased funding to public education by \$1.5 billion in five years
- Removes grant caps in year one of the phase-in
- Increase the Foundation from \$5,891 to \$9,687 over five years
- Increase the State Guaranteed Wealth Level from 1.55 to 1.75
- Increase the Minimum Aid Ratio from 6 to 10 percent
- Increase accountability for student performance
- Decreased reimbursement for school construction from 80 to 20 percent to 65 percent – 15 percent capping funds at \$300 million

The Commission on Education Finance members recognized that the discrepancy in school funding affects all of Connecticut's children. We also recognized that such a significant investment in education required increased accountability. We resolved to craft our recommendation under the philosophical pennant that, whatever we recommended, all of Connecticut's children must realize some benefit.

This bill is a bold effort to stem the school funding crisis in Connecticut, to meet the needs of Connecticut's young people, and to provide property tax relief to our citizens. I enthusiastically support SB 1114 because it holds the key to addressing the public education crisis existing in Connecticut. Governor Rell displays visionary leadership by addressing this problem of school funding.