

MAYOR
DANNEL P. MALLOY



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Public Hearing Testimony Speaker:
Mayor Dannel Malloy

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Mayor Dannel P. Malloy
Education Committee Testimony
March 12, 2007

Thank you to Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann and the members of the Education Committee for the opportunity to testify today about some of the most urgent issues facing the State and the General Assembly. How we rise to the educational challenges we face, and how we pay for it, are among the hardest questions to answer today. In Stamford, school performance, ECS funding, and the challenges of running a great urban school system funded almost entirely by property taxes are among the largest concerns my constituents have.

Unlike other Connecticut cities, Stamford's population has increased substantially over the last decade, due in large part to an influx of immigration. Currently, our population is about 122,000. In 2000, the U.S. Census indicated that 35% of Stamford's citizens speak a language other than English at home, as compared to 15% statewide. 55 languages other than English are spoken at home by our public school population. Based on a significant increase in the number of immigrant families from South America, Eastern Europe and Asia, we believe Stamford's non-English speaking population has increased substantially over the past seven years.

44% of Stamford's public school population are eligible for free or reduced priced meals. Minority students comprise 54% of the public school population. Stamford has one of the highest median household income levels in the country (\$116,300), yet in some areas almost 1 in 4 households live in poverty (2000 U.S. Census).

As you can see, Stamford faces many of the challenges faced by other large cities, yet we receive less than \$6 million in ECS funds to support a \$200 million school budget. Of course I recognize that Stamford's strong economy makes it possible for Stamford to carry more of our school costs on local property taxes than some other communities. But I also believe that the ECS formula should recognize the educational challenges that each community faces.

The Governor proposed an increase in ECS spending overall, including to Stamford. Unfortunately, her increase came at the expense of other funding to Stamford. The increase in education funding that the State needs to implement must not come at the expense of other necessary grants and programs.

I urge the General Assembly to move boldly to address the longstanding defects of our education funding system. We will do a disservice to the young people of Connecticut if we fail to begin moving toward a fair and sustainable system of paying for schools that recognizes our challenges, holds our systems accountable, and unburdens property taxes.

I am also concerned that we continue to support our groundbreaking School Readiness Program. Most importantly, the State should take regional differences into account when calculating reimbursement rates and eligibility criteria for the State's School Readiness Program. Because of significantly higher costs of living in lower Fairfield County, our program has difficulty making ends meet, much less attracting and retaining qualified teachers. And because we must use the State Median Income as a baseline for calculating parent fees, middle income families cannot afford to participate in the School Readiness Program.

We also should address the fact that no college or university in Connecticut offers a four year degree in Early Childhood Education.

I strongly support Senate Bill 1411, An Act Concerning Youth Services Bureaus. The City of Stamford has taken direct measures to provide employment opportunities for youth to fill the gap left by the federal government. We believe that these initiatives have helped defer an uptick in youth violence that was happening in Stamford a year ago. I applaud the efforts the legislature has made to make employment programs available to youth across the State. Thank you for your time today.