

Appropriations Hearing, Education Appropriation Subcommittee  
Feb. 11, 2009

Ann Sweeney  
Commissioner, Waterbury Board of Education  
Chair, Legislative Committee

I address you today in support of funding for Education to CT cities and towns. Critical to all districts is the ECS funding. Fearing deep cuts in this critical funding, Waterbury is thankful for Gov. Rell's proposed budget that maintains funding at the 2008-2009 level. If you offer more, we'd be even more thankful. But please maintain, at minimum the funding for ECS in the Governors proposal.

Our district, and all districts throughout the state, have become masters of data. And our data tells us that we must dispense and expend our resources in areas where gains can be made and counted. We need to support all our students, including those who already make AYP. But if we want our district as a whole to make AYP, we have to focus our largest resources on those students we can move from not proficient to proficient. Because the reality is, if the only gains we make are students making AYP with better scores, the District still does not meet AYP. Such is the challenge for CT and its ECS funding. ECS must continue to support districts meeting AYP, but also must strategically target districts where gains will push them to achieve AYP. This is not "unfair" or "disproportionate" funding. This is smart, focused funding. It gets CT to AYP. Note CT. strategic School Profiles for DRG 1. Pay attention to the "Indicators of Education Need" as defined by the State of CT. All the DRG 1 cities have populations in these categories that exceed the state average. We are the districts with the greatest educational needs. Our funding needs to reflect that if we are to succeed and CT is to succeed.

We applaud the 2 year reprieve on the in school suspension bill, a costly mandate to towns and cities that is not appropriate for these tough fiscal times. Please take this time to really examine the worth of this legislation. Consider a more targeted approach that exempts districts that have made progress in reducing suspension rates, and offer support and resources to districts that need to improve rates of suspension. Continue to examine and eliminate mandates that saddle districts with extra costs or sap resources from successful initiatives.

Thoughtful relief from binding arbitration, though not popular in some arenas, can result in gains for all. Certainly districts can benefit financially. But all sides must be respectful and open to compromise. It is imperative that we don't simply suspend it today, and return to the status quo tomorrow. Now is the time to make real and permanent changes.

Waterbury thanks you for the work you will face ahead; we know it will not be easy. We know that what we do for our students today shapes what we are tomorrow. What we have today is less. We must utilize it well to do better.