



**TESTIMONY  
BART RUSSELL  
CONNECTICUT COUNCIL OF SMALL TOWNS (COST)  
BEFORE THE  
EDUCATION COMMITTEE  
MARCH 16, 2009  
LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING**

**RE: HB-6656, AN ACT CONCERNING SPECIAL EDUCATION**

The Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST) *strongly supports* efforts to increase the financial assistance to towns for special education by fully funding special education and reducing the reimbursement threshold.

**HB-6656, An Act Concerning Special Education**, which is aimed at increasing financial assistance to towns for special education by creating tiered reimbursement thresholds.

Although we support efforts to address the inequities resulting from the current reimbursement threshold, given that cuts to special education have already been proposed as part of a deficit mitigation package we believe it is more important to fight for a continued funding commitment to special education this year rather than trying to change the reimbursement thresholds.

Although towns will receive some funding for special education on the economic stimulus package, this is a short-term fix. We don't want to be in the position of fighting to bring funding of special education up the level we currently have after the federal funds run out.

The cost of special education is one of the most pressing financial challenges facing Connecticut's towns and cities. The cost of special education continues to grow at an exponential rate and places an untenable fiscal burden on many towns. Moreover, from year to year, a school district's costs for special education can vary dramatically and are difficult to plan and budget for. The Special Education Excess Cost Grant was designed to reduce a town's exposure to significant and unexpected special education costs. Unlike other state grants which are tied to a district's wealth, all of Connecticut's towns and cities – and their students – benefit from an increase in funding for this grant.

Accordingly, COST advocates for full funding of special education and consideration of a reduction in the state threshold for special education cost grants to a maximum of two and one-half times the average educational cost of the school district. Under current law, a district is eligible for a grant for the costs associated with children whose cost of special education, related services and room and board exceed 4.5 times the previous year's Net Current Expenditures per Pupil (NCEP) although the state capped the appropriation level at 83%.

In Connecticut, approximately 77, 000 children, or 14 percent of the public school population, receive special education. Under federal law, school districts are required to identify children with disabilities that affect their ability to learn. Federal and state law identifies those disabilities, and requires school districts to offer special education programs designed to meet the individual needs of the students identified as having these disabilities.

The special education programs, and related services, are offered, at no cost to parents or guardians, in classrooms, at home, in institutions and other appropriate settings. Ultimately, regardless of the availability of different sources of funding, the responsibility for paying for the cost of special education programs and services rests with municipalities. Unfortunately, the unpredictable costs associated with special education pose difficult challenges for those involved in developing municipal budgets. Municipal budgets are increasingly being rejected by taxpayers, forcing towns to cut other important services, programs and even teachers.

Although we recognize that a reduction in the reimbursement threshold is probably not viable given the state's fiscal deficit, we urge lawmakers to continue their commitment to funding special education costs at or above this year's level.