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TESTIMONY OF THE

BRIDGEPORT CHILD ADVOCACY COALITION

TO THE

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

MARCH 9, 2009

Testimony of Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition
For Education Committee

The Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition (BCAC) appreciates the opportunity to submit testimony to the Education Committee of the 2009 General Assembly about the Governor's proposal for ECS funding and to urge that the committee include bills on reforming the ECS formula to provide appropriate weighting for ELL (English Language Learner) students in an upcoming public hearing.

I think we all breathed a sigh of relief when the federal stimulus package passed, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. The direct spending, infrastructure funding, and the State Stabilization Fund will be a big boost to Connecticut. It is the funding from the State Stabilization Fund that Governor Rell has included in her budget for ECS funding.

Oppose Level Funding for ECS

Governor Rell is proposing level funding for all school districts for 2009-10. Her proposed ECS funding comes after two years of granting the **same** increase to all school districts across the state, regardless of their per student spending.

Level funding to all districts perpetuates and deepens the gross inequities in education funding for students across Connecticut. Funding inequities that have some districts spending as much as \$17,000 per student and others spending half that amount. These funding inequities have resulted in Connecticut being labeled as the state of "Two Connecticut" when it comes to education funding.

Not only does level funding for every single district perpetuate the wide inequities in education spending across our state, it also disproportionately impacts and harms the poorer school districts. This is at a time when the poorer school districts are working mightily to improve student outcomes and test scores – without the funding support to do so.

A better choice for this committee to endorse would be to provide an **increase to the Priority School Districts**, the state's largest and poorest districts. These are the districts that will use additional resources to hire more teachers to lower class size, or provide more remedial tutoring for students falling behind, or expand summer school to more students, or hire more teaching coaches to improve teaching and learning, or provide more preschool.

Level funding is in reality a budget **cut of 3-5%**. Costs continue to rise for health care, fuel, supplies, energy, school repairs in older schools, and other costs. Now is the worst time to be giving the Priority School Districts a budget cut.

As recognized by the Governor's Education Finance Commission, Bridgeport is the most under-funded school district in the state. In Bridgeport, our schools have suffered more than \$36 million in cuts over the past five years. This now means that the Bridgeport schools have the fewest teachers and fewest administrators of all the urban districts. Supplies and educational materials are in short supply. Support services such as remedial tutoring have been cut

substantially. Custodians and maintenance personnel have been cut. Secretaries, support staff, and paraprofessionals have been severely reduced. Our teachers teach under incredibly challenging circumstances with resources so scarce.

It should not be a matter of geography whether a student lives in a district that spends \$17,000 per student, or one that spend little more than half of that. Where a student lives should not be the determining factor in the quality of the education they receive.

A couple years ago, our state started to address these huge education spending inequities by reforming the ECS formula. Last year that came to a screeching halt. Now, more than ever, the state needs to continue to address these gross spending inequities across the state.

Priority School District Funding Cut: The Governor's proposed budget cuts Priority School District funding by 6%. This is the very funding that can help the state's poorest school districts provide the remedial and support services that their students desperately need. Priority School District Funding should be increased rather than decreased just to help districts keep the critically needed programs provided with this funding.

School Readiness Funding Cut: In Bridgeport, a School Readiness funding cut means that fewer kindergarteners will enter Bridgeport schools with preschool learning that is necessary to help them succeed academically.

State Transportation Grants: Fully fund the cost of school busing. Because the state grants less than the full cost of school busing, the Bridgeport school district have removed most school busing for high school students. However, they are required under state law to provide school busing for charter high school students. This sets up an intolerable and inequitable situation that could be fixed by fully funding the cost of school busing.

ELL Student Weighting in the ECS Formula: The Governor's Education Finance Commission recognized the challenges urban school districts face in educating ELL students. State Education Commissioner Mark McQuillan has recognized that the state is failing its ELL students.

There are three key student demographics in urban school districts: poor students, students who are poor and English Language Learners, and poor students receiving special education services. They present distinct and separate challenges to urban school districts. This is manifestly demonstrated in the attached bar charts that show how poor students (who are not poor and ELL and not poor and special ed), poor ELL students and poor student receiving special education services score on the state's CMT tests compared to all other students across Connecticut.

The data as displayed in the bar charts are astounding and provide ample evidence for why ELL student weighting in the ECS formula should be increased to as high as double the weighting for poor students. BCAC has repeatedly raised this issue. Rep. Auden Grogins of Bridgeport has introduced a bill to address this critical issue. More of the urban school districts are raising this issue. There are multiple bills before the committee that address this issue. We strongly urge the Education Committee to develop one bill and include it in a public hearing very soon.

Separate Property Tax Relief from Education Funding: Lastly, it has not worked to combine needed property tax relief to our cities and towns with ECS funding. This new funding formula pits municipalities against their own schools. We strongly urge separation of education funding from property tax relief. All state education funding should be mandated to be passed through to fund the schools -- and there should be strong formulas with careful state verification for education funding requirements by municipalities out of their own tax revenues.

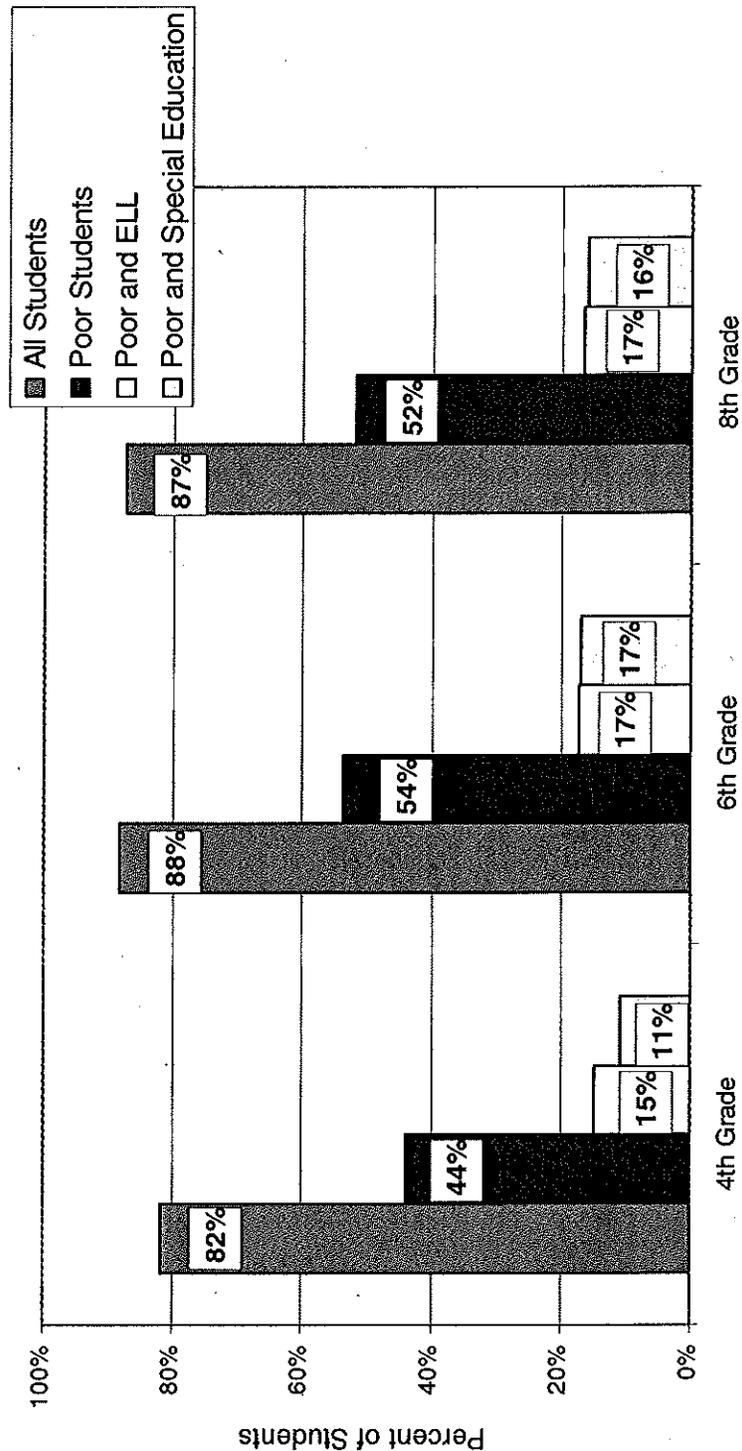
President Obama has focused on supporting low-income children and families as an important principle in the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act of 2009. Connecticut should follow his example in how it funds education for Connecticut's wealthiest and poorest school districts.

Thank you this opportunity to submit our testimony.

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The Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition is a coalition of more than 80 member organizations dedicated to improving the well-being of Bridgeport's children through research, advocacy, community education and mobilization.

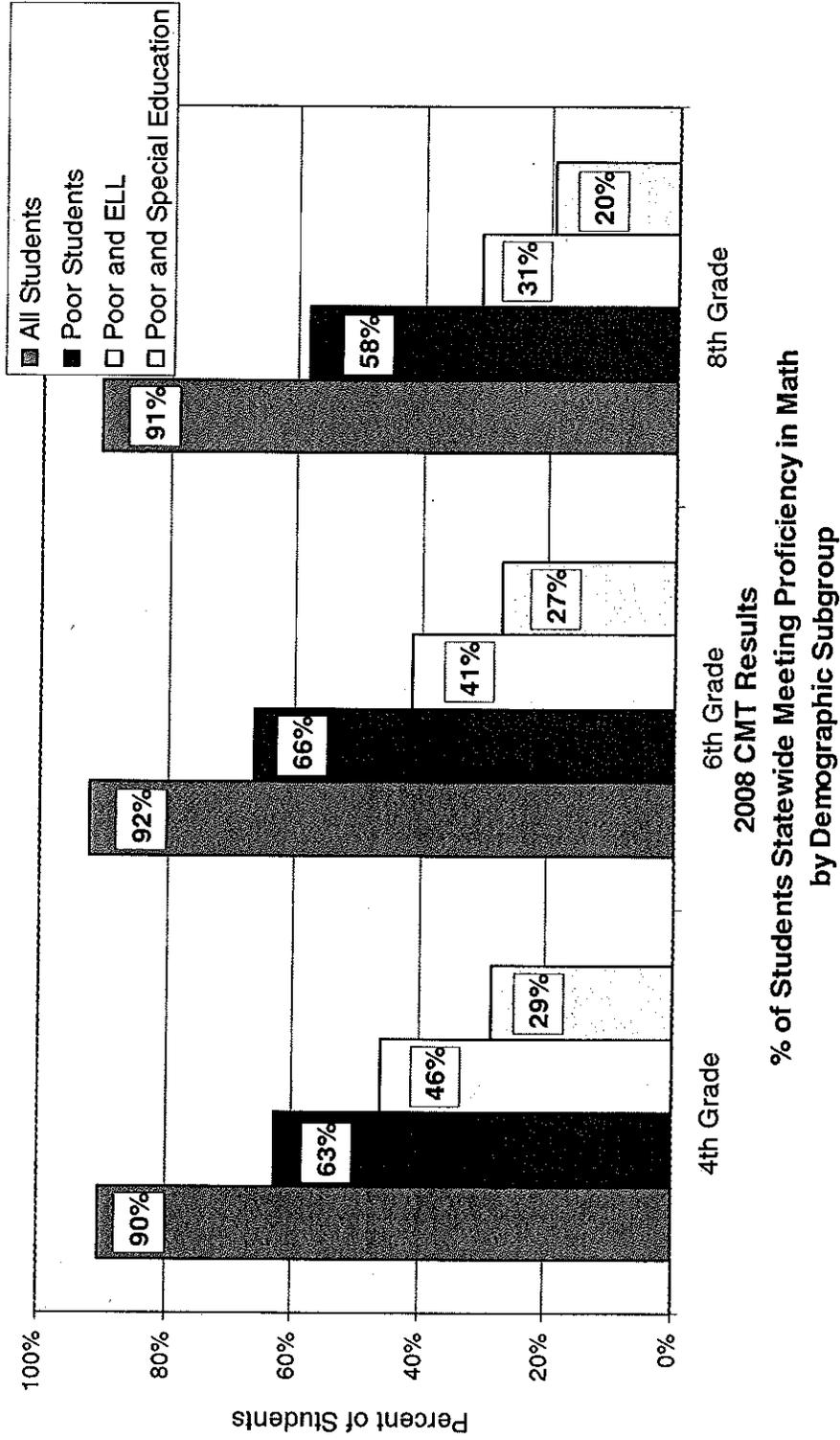
Poor Students Who are English Language Learners or in Special Education are MUCH LESS Likely to Meet Proficiency on the CMT Test in Reading



2008 CMT Results
% of Students Statewide Proficient in Reading
by Demographic Subgroup

*All Students excludes Poor Students, English Language Learners and Special Education Students. ** ELL = English Language Learners
Source: CMT Data Interaction, cmtreports.com

Poor Students Who are English Language Learners or in Special Education are MUCH LESS Likely to Meet Proficiency on the CMT Test in Math



*All Students excludes Poor Students, English Language Learners and Special Education Students. ** ELL = English Language Learners
 Source: CMT Data Interaction, cmtreports.com