



**Testimony of
John Yrchik, Executive Director
Connecticut Education Association**

**Connecticut Education
Association**

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Before the

Appropriations Committee

February 16, 2010

Good evening Senator Harp, Rep. Geragosian, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is John Yrchik and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Education Association, representing more than 41,000 teachers in the state of Connecticut.

When we appeared before you last year, the CEA expressed its concern that effective educational programs, created painstakingly over many years, would be dismantled and that Connecticut students would experience irreparable loss in their educational programs. We shared our worry that Connecticut would fail to meet its constitutional obligation to provide all Connecticut students with a suitable educational opportunity.

The year that followed our testimony has done nothing to allay these concerns. They have grown immeasurably. The legislature flat funded Education Cost Sharing grants for this biennium. In doing so, it ensured that towns would be forced to both cut education programs and raise local taxes to pay for increases in education costs. Last year, we indicated that a modest increase of \$65 million in each year of the biennium would take considerable pressure of municipalities and allow them to better maintain programs. This did not happen.

In addition to failing to account for the normal increase in education costs, the state of Connecticut reduced state aid to education by 14% (\$270 million per year and \$540 million over the biennium). The percentage of state aid to public education is at an historic low.

The thing that keeps me and others in the education community up nights is what happens when the federal stimulus goes away. Does the state have a plan

or will public education topple into the abyss along with other core programs as the state confronts a projected \$3 billion budget deficit.

The extent of the devastation that will be produced by the end of federal stimulus funds is underscored by stories coming out of districts now. Naugatuck faces a \$4 million deficit next year. Wallingford is considering eliminating 55 teaching positions, boosting class sizes by 7-8 students in some cases. Cheshire is looking at the elimination of 13 teaching positions. Milford similarly is contemplating significant layoffs. Windsor has announced the elimination of more than 13 teaching positions. Simsbury proposes eliminating 4.5 teaching positions, a number that could climb to 24 if a 0% budget increase is adopted. The Ledyard budget cuts 10 teaching positions and Region 14's budget eliminates 15.5.

The reason for the elimination of positions is twofold. State aid has not kept up with education inflation, driven largely by health care and special education increases. Second, grand lists have failed to increase sufficiently to meet these increases in many cases. At the precise moment that municipalities need help from the state, the state is shifting an increasing share of the burden of this essential service on to them.

The downsizing of public education is occurring in the context of an ECS formula subsidized by federal monies. It is not difficult to imagine the heightened degree of seriousness if the formula were to be further cut. We cannot continue along our present path. Fiscal restraint at the state level cannot be accomplished at the price of cost shifting to municipalities with its concomitant erosion of public services. The state needs to do its part.

When the new ECS formula was created in FY 2008, the foundation in the formula was set by statute at \$9687. This was to be phased in. Connecticut had been making progress toward this end, but the economic crisis brought us back to the point we were when the new foundation was created. At present, by using the federal stimulus money the state is funding the formula at 74% of what is set in statute (\$6164). However, since 14% of what the state puts in comes from the federal government. If the state were to increase funding to reach the level set in statute by only using state dollars, funding would have to increase by 57% to reach the level of aid set by our legislature as appropriate.

We need to set a new schedule to phase in this foundation and begin to make progress toward it. The state's failure to do so will simply compound an already dire situation. Thank you.