



Connecticut Commission On Educational Achievement



The Connecticut Council for Education Reform, reflecting the findings of the Commission on Educational Achievement, supports SB 1195.

Please accept these two pages (attached) from the school finance section of the Connecticut Commission on Educational Achievement's report as part of our written testimony. As you will note, the Commission had similar recommendations for the reform of school finance in Connecticut.

Information on the Commission and the Council

The Commission was a bi-partisan group of 11 business and philanthropic leaders appointed by former Governor Rell to make recommendations for closing CT's widest in the nation achievement gap. Chaired by Steve Simmons, CEO of Patriot Media, the commission met with 200 educational experts, held hearings across the state, visited schools and went to visit other states known for reform before issuing our report in October.

Commission Members:

- Ramani Ayer, retired Chairman and CEO, The Hartford
- David Carson, retired Chairman and CEO, Peoples Bank, Bridgeport
- Roxanne Cody, President and Founder R.J. Julia Booksellers
- William Ginsberg, President and CEO, The Community Foundation for Greater New Haven
- Carla Klein, former teacher and member of the Bridgeport Public Education Fund
- Yvette Melendez, Board Member of The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, Former Chief of Staff Connecticut State University System
- Peyton Patterson, Chairman, President and CEO, New Alliance Bank, New Haven
- Steve Preston, President & CEO of Oakleaf Waste
- John Rathgeber, President and CEO, Connecticut Business & Industry Association
- Dudley N. Williams, Jr., Director of District Education Strategy, GE Asset Management Group

The Connecticut Council for Education Reform is a new non-profit organization that is comprised of many of the members of Connecticut Commission on Educational Achievement. The Council will advocate for the recommendations of the Commission with a goal of narrowing the achievement gap and raising academic achievement for all Connecticut students.

of incompetent teachers, not ineffective teachers, and the process is lengthy, involving multiple hearings and appeals.¹¹² The process needs to be streamlined further to permit the timely removal of ineffective teachers.

Actions Required

- Enact legislation to modify the Teacher Tenure Act so that it permits removal of ineffective teachers in a timely manner
- Legislation is necessary to revise the standards for dismissal to include student needs as a dominant component

Get highly effective teachers to the most challenged schools.

Ensure that the lowest-achieving schools can attract and retain highly effective teachers. Hold school districts accountable for implementing plans to recruit, develop and retain highly effective teachers and place them in low-achieving schools.

- 1 | Provide additional support and mentoring for teachers in these districts to improve instructional practice.
- 2 | The state should partner with philanthropic organizations to offer financial incentives to facilitate the process. Philanthropic organizations and businesses must be permitted to participate in strengthening the teaching force in these districts.
- 3 | Report data on the distribution of teachers by effectiveness to the public without the use of individual names.
- 4 | Require that teachers inform their school districts of their intent to retire or resign at the end of the school year by March or receive a financial penalty. This will not apply in instances of emergency or illness.

Why This Recommendation Is Necessary

Research shows that the most important factor in students' academic success is the quality of their teachers.¹¹³ The lowest-achieving schools require highly effective teachers, those with a proven track record of helping students cover more than one year's content in one year of schooling.¹¹⁴ Connecticut does not yet have systems in place for identifying highly effective teachers, but current data on district staffing vacancies suggests that incentives will be required to recruit and retain these teachers in the lowest achieving schools. In 2009-2010, the state's neediest districts entered the school year with a 16% vacancy rate compared with a 2% vacancy rate in districts with the lowest need.¹¹⁵

Under current local policies, teachers may retire with little advance notice to their schools and districts.¹¹⁶ Telling

districts of a decision to leave at the very end of a school year places that district at a disadvantage in hiring a talented replacement. A recent Connecticut report found that school districts benefit from recruiting and hiring for teacher vacancies earlier in the school year, as the quality of the applicant pool is greater.¹¹⁷ Since the greatest "outflow" of teachers is from lower-achieving school districts, their hiring burden is greater with the majority of hires occurring over the summer.¹¹⁸

Actions Required

- Increase the types of incentives proven to be effective in recruiting and retaining highly effective teachers
- Legislation is necessary to guarantee that philanthropic assistance can be used for this purpose in any district
- Legislation requiring the earlier notice of plans to leave is necessary

Invest intelligently.

Provide an effective and transparent way of funding public education.

Redeploy education cost sharing grants.

Develop a new weighted student funding formula to distribute Education Cost Sharing (ECS) grants within the existing pool of budgeted funds.

- 1 | Phase in new funding formula over 3-5 years.
- 2 | This funding formula will apply to all public schools including charters and magnets.
- 3 | Overtime, allow "money to follow the child."

Why This Recommendation Is Necessary

In this time of fiscal constraint, it is critical that we allocate the funds we have to best meet student needs. Connecticut's schools are funded without ensuring that students with the same needs consistently receive the same level of funding, regardless of the public school they attend. The majority of Connecticut's state education funds are distributed through the approximately \$1.9 billion Education Cost Sharing (ECS) grants.¹¹⁹ Originally, the amount of ECS funding received by districts was intended to take into account students' needs and the wealth of the city or town.¹²⁰ Due to years of alterations, caps and other adjustments, the ECS formula now has little correlation with the actual costs to educate a child.¹²¹ As a result, many schools and districts both affluent and poor feel they are not receiving their fair share of funding.

Adding to this confusion, public schools of choice, such as magnet schools, charter schools and technical schools, are funded by separate categorical or line item funding streams in the state budget. As an example, charter schools receive grants of \$9,300¹²² per student from the state through separate annual state appropriations while, in many cases, the state continues to allocate ECS funds to the school districts where these children reside. Although charter schools receive substantially less than the state average per pupil expenditure of \$13,109,¹²³ the sending district is still fiscally responsible for student services such as transportation and special education.

Using existing overall funds presently available for ECS, the formula needs to be redesigned to ensure schools and districts receive their proportionate share for the needs of their students.¹²⁴ A weighted student funding formula puts students, not systems, at the center of all funding decisions. This new funding system provides students with a consistent dollar amount that reflects their needs and can follow them to any public school rather than being trapped in schools that may not be serving them well.¹²⁵ It eliminates the double funding for charter and magnet schools, but would require charter schools to pay for costs such as transportation and special education, just as traditional public schools do.

A new weighted student funding formula should be developed after an SDE commissioned study determines the appropriate level of foundational funding necessary to educate all students. The new formula should also factor in research on the appropriate level of weights for different student needs (i.e., free and reduced lunch status, Special Needs, English Language Learner). It should be configured so that a portion of funding remains in the district for districtwide costs such as administrative and operational costs. The new formula should be phased in over 3-5 years to give schools and districts time to adjust to the changes in their budgets without too much disruption. Once a formula is decided upon, it should be reviewed periodically, but not subject to an annual process of tinkering. This funding mechanism will be an enormous shift for school and district leaders, but it is not impossible. Other states and districts across the country are moving to a weighted student funding formula.¹²⁶

Actions Required

- Develop a new weighted student funding formula to distribute ECS grants
- Legislation is necessary to make changes to the ECS formula

Reallocate categorized funds.

Examine existing categorical grants for effectiveness and reallocate them towards specific efforts aimed at improving achievement for low-income students.

There are more than 30 state categorical grants for education totaling \$600 million.¹²⁷ While some of these grants can only be used for specific purposes, some of the grants related to low-performing schools are quite flexible with their uses,¹²⁸ leaving the state without minimal information on how these funds are used and whether they are effective. The state must review the current deployment of categorical grants for current uses and effectiveness and the possibility of reallocation.

Action Required

- SDE must examine the use of current categorical funds for effectiveness

Let's understand how we are spending our money.

Revise the process of tracking education expenditures to improve transparency and public accountability.

- 1 | Adopt a standard, common chart of accounts statewide to allow per-pupil expenditures to be reported at the state, district and school levels.
- 2 | Reviews of district should regularly include a component to determine how funds are distributed to individual schools and programs and a system for analyzing effectiveness of programs funded.

Why This Recommendation Is Necessary

At any point in time, but particularly when dollars are scarce and budget cuts are looming, we need to know exactly how money is spent to compare spending practices across districts and evaluate the effectiveness of our investments: Public data describing how education funds are utilized is difficult to access and is not available at the school level.¹²⁹ Clear, consistent and comparable data on per-pupil expenditures at the school, district and state levels is critical to understanding whether state funds appropriately address student need and school results. Currently, school district expenditures are audited annually as part of municipality audits, but the audits do not include adequate information on individual schools.¹³⁰ In addition, the absence of such data at the district level can result in funding that is not properly distributed across schools within a district.¹³¹

Without clear, comparable financial data that can be easily accessed by the general public, it is not possible to