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To: Planning and Development Committee, Connecticut Legislature  
Date: March 21, 2011  
Re: Unfunded Mandates

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today on the issue of mandate relief. Mandates are putting severe financial pressure on our public schools and I seek relief from as many requirements as possible until the state's fiscal situation improves and ECS aid increases.

I have testified several times in the past on this topic and I am resubmitting a letter I wrote to the Education Committee on March 11, 2009, as requested by the Co-Chairs at that time. That letter details the many mandates that I and many other education groups have been seeking relief from due to escalating costs.

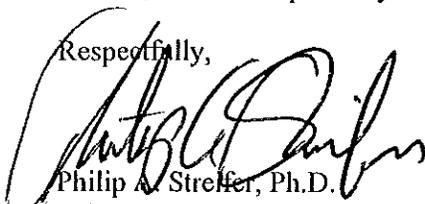
As I stated earlier, I do not know of any educator that is philosophically opposed to these requirements and we also recognize the right of the legislature and governor to enact such legislation. What concerns me even more today, given level state funding for ECS as the best case scenario over the next biennium, is the simple fact that as our costs for all school functions continue to rise these 'requirements' or 'mandates' will necessitate a reduction in regular education programming.

I recently modeled a five to ten percent reduction of my current operating budget that will become a reality for Bristol over the next two years given our rising costs, increasing mandates, and no new state or federal aid. I can tell you that as I look to find between \$5M to \$10M in budgetary reductions, there are no mandates or state/federal requirements on that list. In recent discussions with my colleagues, many are experiencing the same exigencies.

I seek relief in the short term (at the minimum) until state ECS aid can again fund these requirements. Now let's be realistic, suspending or eliminating any mandate is difficult because they are all good ideas. But so are the programs that we will eliminate because of these mandates due to the severe fiscal pressures we all face. We cannot do it all and something needs to give. For example, the newly enacted law PA 10-111 that details high school reform is important, but not at the expense of excellent and important programs already in place.

So in summary, I would hope that you would seriously consider the mandate relief detailed on my March 11, 2009 letter to the Education Committee, and I would add to that list any new mandate enacted since. Further, I would respectfully request that no new mandate be enacted until ECS aid increases.

Respectfully,



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March 11, 2009

Senator Gaffee and Representative Fleischmann  
Co-Chairs, Legislative Education Committee  
Education Committee  
Room 3100, Legislative Office Building  
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Senator Gaffee and Representative Fleischmann:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before your Committee on March 9, 2009. During my testimony you asked that I forward a list of unfunded mandates that could be suspended. The purpose of this letter is to outline those mandates.

In recent testimony to the Planning and Development and Appropriations Committees I detailed several recommendations where mandates could be suspended for two years until the economy rebounds. I also included recommendations by the CT Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS) and CT Association of Urban Superintendents (CAUS) in that testimony. Finally, I appeared at the request of the CT Conference of Municipalities and the Governor's Office. Copies of that testimony are on record.

Let me say at the outset that I am not opposed to legislative mandates nor is CAPSS or CAUS. My concern fundamentally stands on the fact that ECS aid, the main vehicle for the state to fund its public schools, never reached its intended 50/50 level where the state and local communities would equally share the costs for public education. All projections are that ECS aid will be level funded, at best, and possibly reduced. Since ECS is designed to rise along with our expenditures, even level funding results in a net loss of aid to the City. Further, Bristol expects excess cost aid to be capped in the new biennium budget and we will be faced with a loss of Priority District Status along with its funding because we have performed so well on mastery tests.

There are further pressures on our school districts, in particular due to the Sheff Stipulated Order – which is yet another unfunded mandate. I am not opposed to the goals of Sheff, however we simply can no longer afford to fund additional state mandates without adequate financial support. As I have written elsewhere and so testified before several committees of the Connecticut Legislature, the State was the defendant in the Sheff case, not local districts. Therefore, it is paramount that the state fully funds this mandate if it wishes to meet the court requirements.

The fundamental problem facing local schools and municipalities is that all of these mandates result in a dramatic transfer of the tax burden from the State to the City. Simply put, we are at the breaking point and something needs to give. Temporarily relaxing expensive mandates until the economy rebounds is an important part of the solution.

With that in mind, here are the mandates that my staff and I feel should be relaxed which would save the City of Bristol \$2M or more a year.

In-school suspension [after new legislation \$150,000]	Tutoring costs for expelled students [\$80,000 – more if an Open Choice student requires tutoring in Hartford – that is \$30,000 for a full year expulsion vs. \$2,500 given to us for that student; cost of Hearing Officer approximately \$20,000 per year]
Bullying [PBS Training, curriculum development - \$199,500]	BEST [\$70,000 for mentors and mentor coordinator, substitutes - \$17,000]
CEUs, other mandated professional development [3 staff days @261,000 = \$783,000, cost for presenters \$85,000, staff oversight \$5300: totals \$882,900]	Manpower to complete certain state reports [\$100,000 + \$150,000 Power School Database for PSIS uploads]
Magnet school tuition and Open Choice [\$700,000+]	

CAUS – the Connecticut Association of Urban Superintendents has reached a consensus about which mandates should be suspended and they sent these to the Commissioner of Education in a recent letter. These include:

In-School Suspension	End requirement to provide C.E.U.s to teachers
D.R.A. (an elementary reading test) – eliminate requirement to test students already on level; and end reporting mandate)	Sp.Ed. services for private schools (could Federal mandates be adjusted? End requirement to use R.T.I. model?)
DCF placements –review <i>nexus/no nexus</i> requirements	Sp. Ed – exit students out at age 21
Reduce paperwork on requirements such as “bullying logs”	Private school transportation requirement
Technical schools transportation requirement	

The Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents defines unfunded mandates that may be eliminated as “those laws and regulations not directly related to the core mission of increasing student learning or eliminating the achievement gap among groups which require expenditure of local dollars or staff time. They ask that no new mandates be enacted in this session, particularly those related to In-School suspension. Further they ask that no new requirements even related to our core mission, such as Secondary School reform or Mentor Assistance Program, be enacted without sufficient dollars to implement them.

CAPSS appreciates that every mandate was a well intentioned attempt to improve the lives of children; however, they believe it is time to create a task force of Superintendents of Schools and State Department of Education officials to review all mandates to determine if they are relevant to our core mission. I made this very recommendation to the State Board back on December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2008 and we are now already in March with no action.

At the March 9<sup>th</sup> hearing I was asked a number of questions about the in-school suspension law set to take effect soon. This unfunded mandate is but the tip of the iceberg in terms of what needs to be addressed. During that dialogue it was mentioned that with the added dollars over past years in ECS and Priority District funding, districts should not be concerned about funding this mandate (and others). However, the essential calculus here does not add up as local superintendents work to design budgets and programs to meet all of the requirements before them. When ECS meets its constitutionally required level of 50/50 funding you will find superintendents more receptive to this argument.

Again, I want to sincerely thank you for the open dialogue we had during the March 9<sup>th</sup> hearing of your Committee. I hope that the information provided in this letter is useful. Should you wish I would be pleased to discuss these issues further at your convenience.

Sincerely,

*Philip A. Streifer, Ph.D.*

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Superintendent of Schools

cc: Bristol Board of Education  
Bristol City Council  
Bristol Board of Finance  
Governor Rell  
James Finley, CT Conference of Municipalities  
CT Association of Public School Superintendents  
CT Association of Urban Superintendents