TESTIMONY BEFORE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

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The Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS) which represents all of the superintendents of schools in the state and the members of superintendents cabinets supports SB 24 which contains Gov. Malloy's recommendations for improving schooling in CT. CAPSS believes that the Governor's proposals, if enacted, would start the state on the journey from where we are now to where we need to be if we are to guarantee that every child in the state will learn what they need to learn to lead decent and productive lives. The organization, however, has four suggestions for improvement to SB 24 when it comes to the budgetary aspects of the Governor's proposals.

1. The Governor has recommended increases in the Education Cost Sharing Grant (ECS) for specific municipalities contingent upon the school systems that serve those municipalities submitting satisfactory proposals for using that additional money. The problem with this approach is that the ECS grants go to municipalities with no guarantee that the municipalities send this money through to the school systems. Those systems, therefore, may well not be given the funds to pay for the components of the plans that will be submitted for state approval. What the state wants to see accomplished with those funds, therefore, may well never take place.

   This problem can be remedied by taking the increase in ECS funds that the Governor has proposed and putting the money in a categorical grant program that gives the money directly to the districts. Districts, then, would be given the money when they submit acceptable plans to the state. The state, then, would have complete assurance that the educational improvements that it wants the grants to incentivize will actually take place.

2. The Governor has recommended an increase of $2,600 in the per pupil allotment for state chartered schools with $1,000 of this amount being paid by the school district in which the charter school students live. The problem with this approach is that it violates the principle of educational equity in that in almost every case, school districts save nowhere near $1,000 for every child that leaves the district and enrolls in a charter school. As a result, enactment of this proposal would make the per pupil money available to be spent on regular school students the victim of the per pupil money allocated for charter school students. For every child who enrolls in a charter school, the district in which that student lives will have less in terms of financial resources to be spent on the children who do not enroll in a charter schools.

Adding one more inequity to an already inequitable funding system simply compounds an already problematic situation.

This problem can be remedied by adopting an approach whereby the state assumes the entire cost of any increase in charter school funding. After all, it is the state that charters the schools. The state, therefore, should continue to pay the entire cost of the schools that it charters.

3. The Governor has recommended a decrease in ECS funding for municipalities that have school districts that have student enrollments below a specific figure. The purpose of this recommendation is to force consideration of merging school districts.

   The problem with this approach is that while the school districts involved are contemplating what they need to do with respect to consolidation, the students in those districts will have portions of their programs curtailed or eliminated. The children and their programs will be used, therefore, as hostages to force the districts that serve them to be consolidated. During the time in which the districts will consider consolidations, the children involved will get a less than adequate education. This is very difficult to justify.

   This problem can be remedied by restoring the small school district funds that have been recommended for elimination and instead, initiating a process with a deadline of six months from now for determining how the existence of small school districts should be addressed from the perspective of providing every student in the state the educational program that is best suited for them

4. The Governor has recommended no increase in funds for agriscience programs. These programs as much as any others in the state begin to represent the kind of schooling that CAPSS called for in its Education Transformation Project Report. Because of this, because the programs are a highly valuable option for some students and because literally thousands of students are prohibited from participating in these programs, state funding for the programs needs to be increased. No increase has been allocated for approximately seven years.

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony. I would be happy to discuss these matters with you further.