



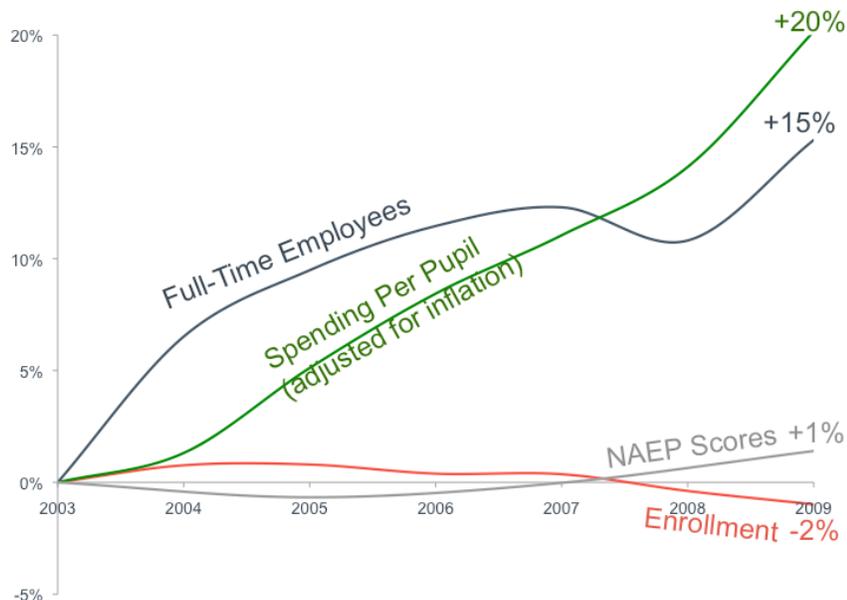
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Testimony on S.B. 24
February 22, 2012

Chairwoman Stillman, Chairman Fleischmann, and members of the Education Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Patrick Riccards, and I am the CEO of ConnCAN, a nonprofit statewide education reform advocacy organization. I am thrilled to be here today to testify in support of Senate Bill 24, an incredibly important step forward for Connecticut's students that I very much hope you will fully embrace and move swiftly through the legislative process, with some critical improvements. I want to discuss three strengths of the bill:

- Increased funding to districts based on the adoption of critical reforms
- Local contribution to public charter schools
- Commissioner's Network and school turnarounds

I also want to emphasize, however, that these impressive changes will not fix the inequities that are baked into the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) formula, and much more change will be needed if we are to bring about such a fix.

I am very encouraged by the **provisions in Senate Bill 24 that tie additional aid for school districts to changes to local education policies**. Many districts are feeling the pain of tightened budgets, and more money will certainly help alleviate some of that. Nevertheless, we know that more money by itself does not lead to improved student outcomes, which is why it is so important for these additional funds to be contingent on reforms that will increase student achievement. Over the past decade, Connecticut has increased school spending by 20 percent and the number of full time employees in schools by 15 percent, while student achievement has flatlined:



In S.B. 24, Governor Malloy has demonstrated a thoughtful approach to increasing the state contribution to school districts by connecting funds to student-centered reforms.

Likewise, the **proposal to require that districts send \$1,000 to charter schools per local student attending a charter school is an important step forward**. Students at our public schools of choice have been treated like second-class citizens for far too long, and this proposed reform signifies Governor Malloy's position that all public school students should have access to the excellent educational options they deserve. To be clear, \$1,000 per student attending a charter school does not go nearly far enough to actually create equity for students in schools of choice, and Connecticut will continue to lag behind nearly all other states in how we fund our charter schools. But, it does begin to recognize that these are all our students. Connecticut's adults must demonstrate that we are making a commitment to educating *all* of our students equitably and setting them all up for success – this is not about Bridgeport's students vs. Avon's students vs. Jumoke Academy's students. We all have an interest in and an obligation to fund their education equitably no matter where they come from or what public school they go to.

I also want to recognize the **importance of the proposal for a Commissioner's Network**. This is an opportunity to address the scandal of chronically failing schools with a clean slate. We must focus on meeting students' learning needs and forsake the excuses that have allowed us to live with this scandal for far too long: thousands of students in Connecticut currently attend schools that are failing to educate them, and have been failing for years. This proposal finally sets the stage for dramatic, results-oriented, student-centered interventions that could truly change the trajectory of students' lives.

We have seen the Commissioner's Network idea work before in places like Louisiana and New York – and it can work here. The ingredients outlined in this proposal are what we'll need for success, but let there be no mistake: turning around low-performing schools is incredibly hard work, and it will take a good-faith effort by all involved to get these schools where they need to be.

While these are all very promising developments, however, I must emphasize that **these changes do not address the fundamental issue: the ECS formula is broken, and more band-aid fixes do not add up to a solution**. If we want a school funding formula that actually meets the needs of all public school students, we will need to do even more than what is proposed here. We need a weighted student funding formula that accounts for all students and their learning needs, no matter what public school they attend – including schools of choice. Such a formula should be:

- **Fair to all students** by accounting for students where they sit and funding them according to their learning needs
- **Fair to all public schools** by including all schools, including schools of choice, in the formula
- **Fair to towns** by using up to date, accurate town wealth and income data to calculate state contributions

- **Fair to taxpayers** by eliminating wasteful double funding practices, bringing about transparency and accountability, and maximizing the use of precious school dollars to drive outcomes for students

I very much hope this issue will be addressed in the near future, either in this Committee or by the state's ECS Task Force. It is the right approach for meeting all students' learning needs in the schools they actually attend, and is a must-have for a school system that is set up for all students to succeed. If we are serious about getting a meaningful return on our education investments, and ensuring every child has access to a great school, we must make sure all of our policies are student-focused, and right now even these important proposed changes to ECS do not go nearly far enough.

Thank you for your time.