EDUCATION COMMITTEE
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2012

SUBJECT MATTER PH: Education Issues

S.B. No. 24 AN ACT CONCERNING EDUCATIONAL COMPETITIVENESS.

Comments submitted as testimony, for the February 22nd Public Hearing, in relation to finance issues and educational fairness.

"I am forwarding to you documents given to me by Ellington's Superintendent of Schools. What is outrageous here, is that, under no criteria or combination of criteria does Ellington rank dead last. Look at the towns which have been highlighted in red [Summarized in attached spreadsheet] and tell me what separates Ellington from the rest."

"All we seek is some sort of fairness. As a town which is deemed the "typical CT Town" we certainly are not being treated fairly."

Robert J Clements
Ellington, CT

From the Desk of the Superintendent

"We're Number One – Or Not" (Revised)

I recently sent an e-mail to the members of the Board of Education with the above title. Most members of the Board are familiar with my sense of humor and I am sure they immediately detected my sarcasm. Some may have even anticipated the content of my communication from the title. Although the title may have contained some humor, the content certainly did not.

Most citizens of Connecticut know that there are 169 towns and cities in the state. When analyzing school statistics by district/municipality that number becomes 166. I have never compared the lists to note the difference, but all data is analyzed and presented by the Connecticut State Department of Education. All school districts in Connecticut are required to submit a multitude of annual data reports. One such report contains all financial data from the previous school year.

One major statistic that is reported annually is Net Current Expenditures per Pupil (NCEP). School districts contain many similarities, yet they can also be quite different. Districts differ in grade configuration, size and composition of student population, and urban/suburban/rural settings among others. Annually, financial statistics are compared across a variety of categories. The full report for 2010-2011 has yet to be released; however, the significant comparison of how much money each district spends per pupil it educates was published by the Connecticut State Department of Education in November.

this posting. One can be viewed on the district website. The other came via e-mail. The posted commentary (I encourage you to read it) while indicating sadness regarding this state of affairs, recommends a healthy dialogue on what services and programs we should be offering to the children of Ellington. The e-mail offered kudos as this is a "feather in your cap".

Those who know me would probably state that I am fiscally conservative. My wife would agree with that statement with the exception being what is spent on our two children. I believe that for many of us, when it comes to our own children, we can never do enough. I believe that many, if not all, administrators in the district know how difficult it can be to get the superintendent to approve the expenditure of money. During budget deliberations one member of the Board of Education regularly refers to me as "The Grinch." Thus, getting the most effective and efficient services for our money is a source of pride for our district. However, failure to provide the programs and services that the students in Ellington need to be successful in the global economy is inexcusable. There is a need and we must address it.

Next year the federal Jobs in Education Fund will expire. This means a loss of approximately one-half million dollars in federal support for the Ellington Public Schools. These funds are needed to support the following positions: 1.28 FTE Special Education, 1.0 FTE School Psychologist, 1.0 FTE Guidance Counselor, 1.0 Elementary Classroom, 1.0 FTE Music, .5 FTE Remedial Reading, and .4 FTE Mathematics, as well as eight at-will classroom support positions. In my opinion, the loss of these positions would be devastating for the students in the district.

The upcoming budget cycle may be the most difficult one in many years. The loss of federal funding as described above, coupled with a significant increase in health insurance costs, will demand more revenue to meet existing need. When one considers that we are already last in per pupil spending in Connecticut, my fear is how far behind we will fall. We need to build for the future, yet I fear we will be forced to take a step back into the past. We need to create a plan that will meet the educational needs of all of our students in a rapidly changing, increasingly technological, global society. We have already won the race to the bottom (in terms of per pupil spending). Whether we remain there or how much further behind we fall is to be determined.

As stated earlier, the achievement of the students in the Ellington Public Schools far exceeds its rankings in terms of town wealth or per pupil spending. That is a tribute to our students, their families, our staff and the wider Ellington community. There is a challenge before us. That challenge is not to continue to achieve as we have in the past, but for our students to achieve at higher and higher levels. That is what the future will demand of them and of their country. We must do all we can to assist each and every student to be prepared to meet the ever changing challenges and opportunities that await them. We can settle for nothing less. Your response is welcome at the Superintendent's Blog on the website for the Ellington Public Schools, *www.ellingtonpublicschools.org* .