EASTCONN
Where Learning Comes to Life

February 21, 2013

Good Afternoon,

I am Paula Colen, Executive Director at EASTCONN, one of the six Regional Educational Service Centers located in northeastern Connecticut serving 36 member districts. I am here to discuss the Interdistrict Grant Program. Upon reviewing the Governor's budget for the next two years, I would like to share a concern that I hope the Committee will be able to assist us in rectifying. As you may know, the Interdistrict Grant program has been very successful in northeastern Connecticut in reducing racial and economic isolation among and between students in our public schools. The program has allowed us to serve more than 4,000 students, grades 2-12 per year for well over a decade. We were awarded 24 grants during the past grant cycle. These grants give many northeastern Connecticut districts' students most of whom are from primarily rural districts the opportunity not only to interact with peers from diverse backgrounds, but to participate in connected academic interventions aligned with subject area standards. These programs have been a very positive experience for all participants. More often than not these grants are the only opportunity many students from across the region have to interact with peers from diverse cultures and economic backgrounds from within our region and from outside our region.

The results have been very impressive over the years. To quote the Governor's budget document on page 376, "Interdistrict Grant Programs provide funding for Interdistrict programs that increase student achievement and reduce racial, ethnic and economic isolation while also promoting a greater understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity. It is a highly successful program with more than 47,789 students participating in the 2011-2012 school year." This year, some of our major areas of focus have been bullying, the arts, health, STEM, history and literacy.

Overall:

- 90% of our students have shown an increase in their understanding of bullying, acceptance, and respect of others and an appreciation of diverse peoples.
- In the area of content knowledge, 80% of students showed an increase specific to the academic content of the grants in which they were involved, and
- 87% of participating district staff received training around tolerance and understanding of personal differences.

376 Hartford Turnpike, Hampton, CT 06247
(860) 455-0707 Fax: (860) 455-8026
www.eastconn.org

We believe all this data to be significant in promoting higher academic success and developing an understanding and appreciation of diverse points of view; the result is the reduction of social and racial isolation in northeastern Connecticut.

The Governor's budget for 2014-2016 only funds Interdistrict grants that serve the Sheff region, which already has many opportunities for students to interact with peers from diverse backgrounds. The Interdistrict Grant Program is the only major State initiative that provides and makes available these kinds of opportunities for all students in northeastern Connecticut. If our students are to continue to, as the Governor's document states: "increase student achievement while reducing racial, ethnic and economic isolation", we need to restore the eliminated funding for this grant program. I hope that you will be able to assist us in this important effort.

The currently funded Interdistrict Grant programs serving our region and the vast majority of the public school districts (30 districts and 47 schools) in the EASTCONN region participate in one or more Interdistrict grants.

Any assistance you can provide in restoring the Interdistrict Grant funding would be greatly appreciated. If I can provide any additional information or answer any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you for your time and all that you do for the students and educators in Connecticut.

Paula M. Colen
Executive Director
EASTCONN

T: 860-455-1565
pcolen@eastconn.org