

TESTIMONY OF CT ASSOCIATION OF PUBLIC SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS ON HB 6357: AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE GOVERNOR CONCERNING EDUCATION

JOSEPH J. CIRASUOLO, ED.D.
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The CT Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS) which represents the superintendents of CT's school districts and the members of the superintendents' cabinets supports particular components of the budget that Gov. Malloy has proposed for FY 2014 and FY 2015 and has concerns about other components of the proposal.

CAPSS supports the following components.

- Continued funding for the Alliance Districts
- Expansion of the Commissioner's Network of Schools
- Support for the implementation of the new teacher and principal evaluation and support system
- Funding for efforts to transform the teaching profession on a voluntary basis by local districts in partnership with the bargaining agents for teachers in those districts.

In short, CAPSS is pleased that the Governor's proposal seeks to continue to momentum towards transforming education in CT that began in 2012.

CAPSS's concerns relate to the relatively low increase in ECS funding that will be received by most municipalities, to the general level of funding for municipalities and to confusion over any guarantee that municipalities that are proposed to receive an increase in their Education Cost Sharing Grant (ECS) will be compelled to use that increase for school systems

These concerns are presented in the context of what has happened over the past four years in school districts across the state. State funding for education has not increased over these four years. For the most part, local communities have not substituted local money for the increases that were not received from the state. As a result the following has happened.

- Over 60% of the districts have postponed capital programs.
- Over 60% of the districts have deferred building and grounds maintenance and repairs.
- Approximately 45% of the districts have postponed the acquisition of new instructional technology
- Over 40% of the districts have eliminated or reduced instructional offerings.
- Approximately 40% of the districts have increased class size.

In addition, some districts have eliminated or reduced athletic program offerings.

Deferred maintenance and repairs and deferred capital improvement programs are options that are chosen in order to preserve as much as possible the instructional programs. The price for this preservation, however, will be much more expensive maintenance, repair and capital programs in the future.

Postponement of technology acquisition, reductions in instructional programs and increases in class size result in a diminished educational program for CT's children at the very time when the program needs to be enhanced.

The Governor's budget proposal does not reverse this trend in the school systems that are served by 124 or 74% of the municipalities. The ECS Grant increase in these cases is less than \$500,000 over two years and this amount is not enough to cover rising costs in those cases. Depending on whether the increase in ECS funds per municipality must be used for education, the Governor's proposal may or may not reverse this trend in any municipality. If the increase must go to school systems, the trend will be reversed in only 45 municipalities where the ECS Grant increase is at least \$500,000 over two years. If this is not the case, the trend will not be reversed anywhere. This is so because the proposal does not increase the capacity of local municipalities to fund their school systems and the proposal would not guarantee the allocation of increased ECS grant funds to local school systems.

In all cases, the capacity of local municipalities to fund school systems is vital to consider because school systems receive their annual budgets from local municipalities and not from the state. Under the Governor's proposal, 88 municipalities would receive no increase in state financial aid over the next two years. Of the 81 municipalities that would receive an increase in state aid, 30 would receive less than \$50,000 over two years, 20 would receive less than \$20,000 and 14 would receive less than \$500,000. This leaves only 17 municipalities whose capacity to fund school systems might be enhanced.

So, what can be done to address these concerns? CAPSS recommends the following.

- **Increase the ECS grant for 124 municipalities so that in each case the school systems would receive sufficient state aid to at least stop the decline in facility care and educational services that has occurred over the past four years.**
- **Restore the school transportation grant and remove the cap on that grant.** School transportation is a state mandate and it should be funded by the State.
- **Remove the cap on the special education placement excess cost grant.** This is another State mandate and funding for it should be increased.
- **Establish a Minimum Budget Requirement that unambiguously protects an increase in the ECS Grant Program for use by the local school system.**

CAPSS makes these recommendations with full knowledge that the Governor and the State Legislature have a daunting challenge before them when it comes to adopting a State budget for FY 2014, a challenge that CAPSS does not face. Decisions have to be made as to what the people of the State can afford regarding the payment for State Government and as to what the people of the State are willing to pay.

CAPSS, therefore, does not make observations and recommendations as adversaries of anyone in State Government. What we are attempting to do, however, is to make clear the educational consequences of various options for funding that are under consideration. Were we to do anything less than that, we would not be meeting our responsibilities to advocate for the best educational program for the State's children.

CAPSS remains prepared to assist the Legislature in any way that it can as the Legislature develops a budget for the next two fiscal years.