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**Testimony of Sal Pascarella.
Superintendent of Schools, Danbury
In Support of:**

**SB 816, AN ACT ESTABLISHING A MINIMUM LEVEL OF FUNDING UNDER THE
EDUCATION COST SHARING GRANT FORMULA.**

Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee, I am Dr. Sal Pascarella, Superintendent of Schools for Danbury, and I thank you for this opportunity to testify on Why Connecticut Needs Fair School Funding for all the school children in the state and should pass SB 816.

Education in Connecticut has always been at the cornerstone of pride for our electorate and key to Connecticut's economic prosperity. After 22 years as a Connecticut Superintendent, I believe that never before in our history has education been more crucial to the collective future of our state and to the individual futures of our young people. Our public schools must strive to provide equality in educational opportunity unlike any other time in our history. This is precisely why passage of Senate Bill 816 is so important.

Our state leaders must deeply reflect upon their decision to unequally distribute limited resources to Charter and selected magnet schools, expecting that this delegation of limited funds will lead to better competition and academic performance and outcomes for Connecticut's students. This will come at the expense of the majority of students in the 169 communities who do not attend these schools. The demand is urgent and growing to educate *all* students -- to meet the far more rigorous academic standards of the new common core and to prepare them for post-secondary educational opportunities in conjunction with an increasingly specialized workforce which is needed in Connecticut.

In our state, we know that more families are moving away from the cities and into the suburbs, which now face increasing unfunded mandates and higher costs of providing education. As Co-chairman of CAUS and President Elect of CAPSS, I am also keenly aware of the daunting educational challenges in our urban and suburban districts, which are compounded by increasing poverty and a substantial shift in demographics. The budget acts of 2009 and 2011 each overrode the statutory ECS formula and specified each town's ECS grants for the four years from FY 10 through FY 13. Each town's grant was held constant for each year. Thus,

freezing the ECS amount for each town means that changes in student population and other data changes since then are not taken into account.

I believe this committee realizes that meeting the equal-opportunity challenge in education requires funding all public schools at levels sufficient to provide a rigorous curriculum in a broad range of subject areas, delivered by well-trained teachers, and supported by effective school and district leaders and not only for the wealthy communities. It also requires sufficient funds for schools serving high numbers of low-income students, English-language learners, and students with other special needs.

We must not ignore the obvious: concentrated student poverty in certain schools generates greater needs that, in turn, require resources to support effective programs and strategies such as high-quality early childhood education, full-day kindergarten, after-school and summer-school programs, and smaller classes in the early grades.

Funding alone will not lead to better academic performance and improved outcomes for students. It must be invested wisely, focusing on key areas such as quality teaching, strong curriculum, programs for struggling students, effective supervision, and sufficient supports from state education agencies and institutions of higher education. High poverty schools need sufficient funds, effectively and efficiently used, to achieve established outcome goals and prepare their students for high school graduation and for post-secondary education or the changing workforce.

How we equitably fund our public schools is, therefore, essential if we are to ensure that all students have access to high quality educational opportunities that prepare them to succeed in Connecticut's economy. Leaving this responsibility to the judicial branch does not demonstrate the leadership our electorate expects. Rather, what they expect from you, our elected officials, is to demonstrate breadth of funding support for our greatest resource -- our children -- so they may *all* have access to a quality and equitable education regardless of where they reside.

Accomplishing this goal will result in significantly narrowing, if not closing, longstanding and stubborn gaps in achievement that exist among subgroups of students, while not draining off essential resources necessary to close the gap.

Senate Bill 816 simply asks for the state to honor its promise to a 50% partnership with local communities to provide a quality education for all students. Each and every day in our school rooms and at our local and state boards meetings they often begin with the Pledge of Allegiance. As you know, the ending of the Pledge..."with liberty and justice for all."

I respectfully request that you adopt the recommendation in SB 816 so that the words in our Pledge are not empty promises but a call to action.

Thank you.

Sal V. Pascarella, Superintendent, Danbury Public Schools