



STATE OF CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Connecticut General Assembly Appropriations Committee Testimony of Interim Commissioner Dianna R. Wentzell April 2, 2015

Senator Bye, Representative Walker, Senator Kane, Representative Ziobron and other distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony on Senate Bill No. 816, An Act Establishing a Minimum Level of Funding under the Education Cost Sharing Grant Formula.

The proposed legislation would amend current statute to require the state to fund a town's Education Cost Sharing (ECS) grant at no less than fifty percent of the amount they would receive under the fully funded formula. Under the language as currently drafted the department believes the grant could be calculated in at least two different ways and would seek clarifying language to ensure the implementation reflected the legislative intent.

We believe the intent of the proposed language is to be interpreted as follows:

- all towns are held harmless to the 2014-15 entitlement level as proposed in the Governor's biennial budget request; and
- towns not currently receiving at least fifty percent of the fully funded formula would have the difference added to their grant to achieve that level of funding.

Under this interpretation, funding for the ECS grant would need to be increased by approximately \$15 million over the Governor's proposed budget with 17 towns receiving the increased funding.

To the extent that clarifying language is not added to ensure that towns are held harmless at the 2014-15 entitlement level, the language could also be interpreted as follows:

- the 2015-16 ECS fully funded formula is calculated with the minimum aid ratio in place but with no provision holding towns harmless at the 2014-15 entitlement level; and
- calculation of the 50 percent is applied without holding towns harmless at the 2014-15 entitlement level and with each town receiving 50 percent of the fully funded formula calculation.

The 17 towns currently not funded at fifty percent of their ECS fully funded formula grant would see an increase of approximately \$15 million. However, the 56 towns currently funded at greater than that level would see a decrease, which would result in a reduction of approximately \$25.6 million to these communities and an overall reduction in the ECS account of approximately \$10.6 million.

Please note that for the above estimate purposes we are using preliminary pupil data and October 2013 Free and Reduced Meal counts. The Department would be happy to work with legislative staff to ensure that the language reflects the intent of the legislature. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.