



# Rocky Hill Public Schools

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## Testimony of Mark Zito

### 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, thank you for the opportunity to speak in support SB 816. My name is Mark Zito, and I am the Superintendent of the Rocky Hill School System.

The legislation before you would require that no town receive less than fifty per cent of the education cost sharing grant adjusted fully funded formula, ensuring more equitable ECS funding to towns that have experienced growing poverty since the ECS cap was established.

The original intent of ECS was to provide fair and equitable funding for public schools across the state of Connecticut. Presently, ECS funds are not being distributed appropriately and nineteen towns, including Rocky Hill, currently fall below 50% of target funding. During the thirteen year period from 2000-2013, Rocky Hill experienced an 83% increase in the number of students qualifying for free or reduced-price lunch. While the free and reduced-price lunch metric serves as a major factor in the formula, the district's ECS funding has not increased sufficiently over time to keep pace with this change. Moreover, during this same 13-year period, Rocky Hill's percentage of minority students grew from 12% to 28% while the percentage of children living in non-English speaking homes grew from 10% to 17%. Clearly, Rocky Hill has experienced significant demographic changes which have increased the town's need for a fair application of the ECS funding formula.

For fiscal year 2014-15, Rocky Hill is experiencing a shortfall of approximately \$5.1 million in ECS funds. Our town is funded at just over 40% of its ECS entitlement. While the \$5 million dollar gap may be insurmountable given the current fiscal conditions of the state, even bringing our town up to 50% of ECS target funding would result in an increase of approximately \$800,000. These dollars are certainly required in Rocky Hill to address the growing needs of our student population.

The ECS shortfall results in an additional burden on our local taxpayers. It has also placed undue pressure on the school district's annual operating budget, resulting in larger class sizes, delayed maintenance on important facilities projects, and an inability to fund critical support positions such as elementary assistant principals.

The current ECS distribution is unfair to the students and families in Rocky Hill and the other eighteen towns which fall below 50% of target funding; therefore, I would respectfully urge the State Legislature to address the issue and make the appropriate adjustments in ECS funding.