

SB 816

David Lorenzo Simón
Before the
Appropriations Committee Hearing
On Governor's Proposed Budget Affecting Education

[03 March 2015]

Good evening Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is David Lorenzo Simón. I am a Parent of a West Hartford School child, a Teacher in West Hartford, the Administrative Vice President of the West Hartford Teacher's Association, and a resident of West Hartford, where I live and vote.

Beth Bye has sent a bill to the appropriations committee for review and hopes to see it on the floor soon. This bill would require that no town receives less than 50% of the Education Cost Sharing Grant (ECS) from the state. Over the last decade or so, West Hartford has been terribly underfunded. We have dropped from being the number one district in CT for per pupil spending, in the early 70's, to being somewhere between 125th and 140th in per pupil spending due to being underfunded. Also, the demographics have changed, as we all know in West Hartford. So, hopefully, this bill will be approved and passed so that we would see more funding in the future. Just to give you some perspective, this year alone we will be underfunded by \$37 million making us the 4th most underfunded of 169 towns.

Several of us are testifying tomorrow, Tuesday, at a Public Hearing in Hartford. There we will speak about the positive impact that an additional 10 to 15 million dollars per year could have on West Hartford. This is a general hearing on education funding.

There is likely to be another hearing specifically on SB 816, Beth Bye's bill. If there is such a hearing, it is vital that we have as many people as possible submit written testimony, speak before the committee, or just show up in droves as moral support. If you would be inclined to speak or submit testimony, please contact Dave Dippolino or myself.

ECS Shortfall Talking Points

1. The ECS grant is where West Hartford has seen the largest shortfall - \$301.8 million over 19 years and a \$31.9 million shortfall in 2014-15 alone.
2. When the gap is measured on a per pupil basis, West Hartford has the largest gap, by far, of any town in Connecticut. The 2014-15 gap of \$31.9 million converts to a gap of \$3,015 per student.
3. In 2014-15, West Hartford has the 3rd largest shortfall of any town in ECS funding. Only Waterbury and Bridgeport had larger dollar shortfalls. But Waterbury was receiving 71% of their fully funded ECS and Bridgeport received 83% of their fully funded ECS. West Hartford is only receiving 32% of our fully funded ECS amount.
4. In 2014-15, West Hartford has the 3rd largest shortfall of any town in ECS funding. Only Waterbury and Bridgeport had larger dollar shortfalls. But Waterbury was receiving 71% of their fully funded ECS and Bridgeport received 83% of their fully funded ECS. West Hartford is only receiving 35% of our fully funded ECS amount.
5. Among school districts missing at least \$5 million in ECS funding, West Hartford had the 2nd lowest percentage of funding – receiving only 36% of the full funding. Only Trumbull received less – 34% of full funding – but Trumbull’s gap is only \$6.3 million.
6. Please note that while most towns are receiving less than their fully funded ECS amount, 47 towns are receiving MORE than what the ECS formula would suggest. Groton is getting \$25.6 million when the formula says they should be getting \$21.6 million. Stonington is getting \$2.1 million when the formula says they should only get \$0.6. And Greenwich, of all places, is getting \$3.4 million when the formula says they should only get \$2.1 million.
7. The ECS gap continues to remain large. West Hartford is receiving about one-third of the ECS aid it should receive according to the formula. The actual dollar amount of the ECS gap was \$31.9 million – third behind Waterbury and Bridgeport, but those districts were receiving 70-90% of their ECS aid.

ECS is the state’s primary grant to towns for its Constitutional obligation to fund local schools based on each town’s ability to pay. According to the state formula, ECS should pay for about 35% of West Hartford’s school budget. But it only covers about 12%, leaving the rest to local taxpayers. This means that the average home owner pays about \$1,500 more in local property taxes to cover costs that should be paid by the state.

BTW – In West Hartford, local property taxes for education are about 25% higher because of state underfunding (i.e. underfunding as % of total education budget).

Also, based on an analysis I did in 2013, the local property tax impact on the average home owner to cover the underfunding was \$1,543.

Also, if you want to do some math, you can figure out how much lower your mill rate in West Hartford would be if each home owner paid \$1,543 less than current. Or figure the opposite – how much higher our mill rate is because of the \$1,543.

Thank you for your consideration,

David Lorenzo Simón