



Testimony of Tom Moore

Before the

Appropriations Committee Hearing

In support of

SB816, An Act Establishing Minimum Level of Funding Under the Educational Cost Sharing
Formula

April 2, 2015

Good afternoon Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Tom Moore. I am proud to serve the great town of West Hartford as its superintendent of schools. I have chosen to work here for twenty years as a teacher, coach, and principal before becoming superintendent, and I am fortunate to also be raising my family here, with a ninth grader and seventh grader currently in our schools. While our schools have maintained their excellence, I can say that I fear we are reaching a tipping point in funding, and that the West Hartford that I am a part of is not the same as the one that existed nineteen years ago when this grant came into existence.

I appreciate your sponsorship of SB816, and your hearing from me today, as our public schools deserve a fair piece of the pie. The overall budget shows increases in areas such as Charter Schools, Magnets, and CT Technical High School System. While these programs are deserving of attention, it is at the expense of other programs and grants that are flat-funded, perpetuating or exacerbating long-standing funding and ultimately educational issues. I want all of the students of Connecticut to succeed, for they are all our children, and I hope that you will see that increasing our share of ECS, to even just fifty per cent, will have a dramatic impact on my town, our taxpayers, and our students.

The flat funding of Educational Cost Sharing (ECS) grant is untenable. Nothing in the world is the same as it was nineteen years ago, and neither should funding be. In my school district's nineteen year history with this grant, we have seen the gap in our ECS funding grow from 23%

to as much as a 72% gap. For West Hartford, this translates into a shortfall of over \$300 million over the full 19 year history and a \$31.9 million shortfall in 2014-15 alone. West Hartford has an excellent reputation as a high performing school district, a reputation built on the quality of our curricular programming and the value the community places on education. In 2000, WH ranked in the top one third of the 169 school districts in per pupil expenditure, but over time and due in part to ECS shortfalls, WH now ranks 125th. Were we to measure the ECS shortfall as a per pupil expense, West Hartford would have the largest gap of any school district in CT. The 2014-15 gap of \$31.9 million converts to a gap of \$3015 per student. The next highest gap is \$2700 per student and averages to about \$1100 per student statewide. On strict dollar values, our 2014-15 shortfall in ECS funding was the 3rd largest among all towns receiving ECS funding. Only Waterbury and Bridgeport had larger dollar value shortfalls, but they received 71% and 83% of their full funded ECS calculations versus West Hartford at 36%. Meanwhile, there are 47 towns who receive more than what the ECS formula would suggest is appropriate.

West Hartford prides itself on the success of its school system but as a district we cannot sustain the quality of programming our students deserve, that all students deserve, given the financial obstacles of continued and growing ECS shortfalls and other grant reductions or eliminations. West Hartford services nearly 10,000 students, 1964 of them whose home language is something other than English. This 20% of our student body speaks over 70 different languages. Our racial diversity has grown to 39%, and 21% of our students qualify for free or reduced lunch. Finally, we support over 1100 students (or 11% of our student population) within our special education services and programs. I am happy that we are still a destination district for those parents who are willing to move to West Hartford in order to receive top notch special education services for their children, and I am committed to rewarding their trust. We are proud of our history as a high performing district but our demographics demonstrate that we differ from many of the high performing districts with whom we are often compared. The West Hartford that people think they know based on the restaurants and shops in the town center and the bustling Blue Back Square does not tell our whole story. We have significant percentages of students with varying needs. We stand ready to support all students across a spectrum of need but the inequitable distribution of ECS funding threatens to undermine our efforts.

I would ask that you stand up for equitable education funding by letting us get at least half of our ECS funds. Charter schools and magnets represent one means to bring about change in public education. We believe that our public schools have the right formula to support and

grow students and enable them to excel. Proper, fair support for our local programming is all that is necessary. Invest in us, and we will not let you down.

Thank you,

Tom Moore

Superintendent

West Hartford Public Schools