



## Testimony by Jeffrey Villar, Ph.D. to the Appropriations Committee

February 16, 2016

Good afternoon, distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Jeffrey Villar, and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Council for Education Reform (CCER), a nonprofit that seeks to narrow Connecticut's achievement gap while raising academic outcomes for all students. I would like to share CCER's position on the Governor's Recommended Budget Revisions, and the implications they have for Connecticut's neediest schools and districts.

This year, the Governor's mid-year budget revisions recommend flat funding for the Education Cost Sharing Grant. However, each year, the cost to our districts increase, which means that, in reality, flat funding equates to fewer dollars for education. Rising costs are unavoidable for districts, and failing to account for this reality is a true disservice to them—particularly to the lowest-performing districts.

In addition, the revised budget continues relying upon ad hoc grants to address shortfalls rather than adhering to the Education Cost Sharing formula. The Education Cost Sharing formula was carefully crafted to ensure our neediest students receive the resources they need in order to obtain a quality education. Failing to adhere to the formula only compounds the impact that flat funding for the ECS Grant has on districts, and increases inequities in educational opportunities for our children. We believe that restoring the use of a fair and equitable funding formula, such as the Educational Cost Sharing formula, is an essential step in meeting our collective responsibility.

Further, the Governor's proposed budget revisions reduce funding for major education formula grants, which, in turn, reduces funding to the 30 lowest-performing school districts (Alliance Districts) by \$8.6 million (see Appendix A). In 2012, Connecticut made a commitment to these districts, promising increased state oversight and resources, in order to turn them around. The work of raising achievement in the Alliance Districts is not yet complete, and we believe that it would be unwise to reduce funding for grants that disproportionately impact them.

Also, CCER would like to see continued collective commitment to funding early childhood education in this state. In 2014, Governor Malloy estimated that approximately 4000 low-income children did not have access to high quality preschool programs, and CCER now estimates that the need for high quality preschool has increased to 7500 slots (See Appendix B). Unfortunately, the Governor's revised budget contains no provisions for additional School Readiness slots, and these students' needs

will remain unmet. Connecticut cannot afford to stop investing in preschool regardless of our economic circumstances. The long-term payoff from investing in early childhood is simply too great. In light of this, we are proposing that the Office of Early Childhood be authorized to use any remaining balance of Smart Start early childhood funds to expand School Readiness slots for our neediest students.

In closing, CCER would like to commend the Governor for refraining from balancing the budget on the back of the public education system at large. Nonetheless, we are relying on you, our legislators, to ensure that we don't place that burden on our lowest-performing districts or our youngest students either.

Appendix A: Specific Impact to the Thirty Alliance Districts

For the major formula grants: Education Cost Sharing (ECS) Transportation of School Children, Adult Education, Health and Welfare Services Pupils Private Schools, Excess Cost - Student Based (Special Ed), Priority School Districts and Non-Public School Transportation, the Governor's Proposed FY 2016-17 Revised Budget would reduce funding to the 30 lowest performing school districts (Alliance Districts) by \$8.6 million. Details follow:

Alliance District	Total FY 2016-17 Reduction <sup>1</sup>
Ansonia	73,432
Bloomfield	22,583
Bridgeport	838,020
Bristol	217,690
Danbury	1,228,043
Derby	33,374
East Hartford	217,267
East Haven	85,106
East Windsor	24,660
Hamden	147,015
Hartford	1,074,656
Killingly	64,537
Manchester	107,591
Meriden	281,486
Middletown	256,414
Naugatuck	103,391
New Britain	454,691
New Haven	789,555
New London	195,965
Norwalk	392,630
Norwich	225,165
Putnam	96,443
Stamford	647,147
Vernon	50,495
Waterbury	445,947
West Haven	152,556
Winchester	43,275
Windham	131,426

Alliance District	Total FY 2016-17 Reduction <sup>1</sup>
Windsor	197,534
Windsor Locks	15,838
Total	8,598,096

Appendix B: Increased Need for Early Childhood Slots

In 2014, Governor Malloy estimated that the unmet need for high quality early childhood slots for low-income children was about 4,000.<sup>2</sup> No new state-funded School Readiness slots<sup>3</sup> were added in FY 2015-16 and none have been added in Governor Malloy's Proposed FY 2016-17 Revised Budget.<sup>4</sup>

CCER estimates the need for low-income slots at about 7,500 (see table below).

CCER Estimate for High Quality Early Childhood Slots

Element	Slots
Cohort of 3- and 4-year-olds	76,472 <sup>5</sup>
Estimated Low-Income children	27,984 <sup>6</sup>

**LESS:**

Existing Program Spaces	Slots
School Readiness	11,790 <sup>7</sup>
High Quality State Day Care	2,160 <sup>8</sup>
Head Start	5,700 <sup>9</sup>
Smart Start	356 <sup>10</sup>
Federal School Readiness	428 <sup>11</sup>

<b>Total Needed Slots</b>	<b>7,550</b>
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Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup>This is a calculated number using both Governor's Governor Malloy's Recommended Budget Revisions, February 2016, retrieved February 2016 from [http://www.ct.gov/opm/lib/opm/budget/2017midterm/budget/41\\_section\\_b.pdf](http://www.ct.gov/opm/lib/opm/budget/2017midterm/budget/41_section_b.pdf) and actual grant expenditures from the Department of Education's grant expenditure data found here: <https://www.csde.state.ct.us/public/dgm/grantreports1/paydetlMain.aspx>

<sup>2</sup> Governor Malloy's Proposed FY 2014-15 Midterm Budget Revisions, retrieved from:

[http://www.ct.gov/opm/lib/opm/budget/2015midterm/budget/1.introduction\\_final.pdf](http://www.ct.gov/opm/lib/opm/budget/2015midterm/budget/1.introduction_final.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> This does not include the 400 new full-time School Readiness slots being paid for with federal funds via a new preschool grant for FY 2015-16, retrieved from Governor Malloy's press release in December 10, 2014 from: <http://www.ct.gov/oec/cwp/view.asp?A=4545&Q=557804>

<sup>4</sup> Governor Malloy's Recommended Budget Revisions, February 2016, retrieved February 2016 from:

[http://www.ct.gov/opm/lib/opm/budget/2017midterm/budget/41\\_section\\_b.pdf](http://www.ct.gov/opm/lib/opm/budget/2017midterm/budget/41_section_b.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> This is a calculated number based on the kindergarten and first grade enrollments, which is used as a proxy for preschool aged children. The data source is from Student Enrollment for FY 2012-13 by Race, Gender and Grade, Connecticut Department of Education, retrieved November 2015 from:

<http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2758&q=334898>

<sup>6</sup> This is a projected estimated based on the percentage of children eligible for Free and Reduced Price Lunch in the k-12 system. Data provided to KSG from the State Department of Education.

<sup>7</sup> *Connecticut Expenditures and Early Care and Education Services for Preschool-Age Children*, Office of Early Childhood, retrieved November, 2015

from: [http://www.ct.gov/oec/lib/oec/earlycare/ct\\_preschool\\_age\\_ece\\_expenditures\\_and\\_spaces\\_2007-2015.pdf](http://www.ct.gov/oec/lib/oec/earlycare/ct_preschool_age_ece_expenditures_and_spaces_2007-2015.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> *Smart Start*, Office of Early Childhood, retrieved in November 2015

from: <http://www.ct.gov/oec/cwp/view.asp?a=4547&q=550948>. The total has been amended to take the Windsor students out of the calculation. As a budget reduction, Windsor decided not to go forward with their Smart Start program. This is from: *Windsor Budget Stalls Twice, Pre-K Program Eliminated*, Jennifer Coe, *Hartford Courant*, June 12, 2015, retrieved November 2015 from:

<http://www.courant.com/community/windsor/rnw-wn-0618-budget-vote-20150612-story.html>

<sup>11</sup> *Governor Malloy: Connecticut Wins Competitive Federal Grant to Expand High Quality Preschool*, press release in December, 2014, retrieved in November, 2015

from: <http://www.ct.gov/oec/cwp/view.asp?A=4545&Q=557804>