



Testimony of
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Connecticut Education Association
Before the
Appropriations Committee
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Governor's Proposed Budget Affecting Education

Good afternoon Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Donald Williams, Director of Policy, Research, and Reform for the Connecticut Education Association. CEA represents 43,000 active and retired teachers across the state. I am testifying today on the governor's proposed budget for Connecticut schools.

CEA recognizes that since the great recession of 2008, the Connecticut legislature and Governor Malloy have done a better job than most other states in protecting resources and funding for public education. As you make the difficult budget choices this year, we urge you to continue to prioritize those programs that support and provide for the education of our students, and make a critical difference in the lives of all our children.

ECS Funding and Charter Schools

Under the governor's proposed budget, the state's previously agreed upon commitment to ECS of an additional \$11.5 million will be cut, while funding for charter schools will continue to increase by \$9.3 million. This disparity is not right, and, in a time of shared sacrifice, we urge the legislature to be even-handed in meeting the challenges of the budget.

CEA proudly represents three of the state's first charter schools, and we support the goal of charter schools envisioned when Connecticut's law was passed in 1996: to serve as educational laboratories, limited in number with enrollment capped at one-thousand, that collaborate with traditional public schools. The original charter school legislation did not envision chains of charter school providers, and sought to prevent creating a costly and duplicative system of education.

In the eight years between 2009 and the proposed amounts for 2017, ECS funding will have increased just 8%. During that same time, funding for charter schools will have increased 169%. The unchecked expansion of a parallel charter school system—a system that continues to escape meaningful scrutiny and analysis—results in fewer resources for traditional neighborhood public schools, especially those schools in the greatest need.

Priority Schools, Magnet Schools, and Equity

Contrast the \$9.3 million *increase* in funding for charter schools with:

- the \$2.6 million cut to Priority Schools—those neighborhood schools in the greatest need of help and resources;
- a \$1.2 million cut to School Based Health Centers;
- the \$8 million cut in special education funds—the Excess Cost Grant—that is critical to local schools;
- the \$18 million cut to magnet schools for slots promised to students throughout the state;
- additional cuts in English Language Learner programs, Early Literacy Programs, and After School Programs;
- and a \$350,000 cut for the CommPACT/Community school model that is an investment in educational improvement with positive results that can accrue to all children in a school.

In a time of difficult budget choices, we recommend that the needs of those students in our priority schools and local, neighborhood schools throughout our state remain your top priority. Those are the schools where more than 90 percent of our students receive their education. CEA urges legislators to continue on its path toward fully funding ECS.

Community Schools and CommPACT School Funding

CEA believes that schools must be about more than simply what happens during a school day. Schools, especially those in Alliance District, or designated as Network Schools, must be innovative in marshaling “wrap-around” services such as health, tutoring, before and after school programs, Family Resource Centers, and other services that support a student’s readiness for learning.

Over the past eight years, the state has supported the Community Schools model by funding CommPACT Schools through the Neag School of Education at UCONN. The CommPACT program—CommPACT stands for Community, Parents, Administrators, Children, and Teachers—facilitates the development and administration of the community schools model. It is currently operating in four urban school districts. The “Community Schools” model can cost-effectively address a broad spectrum of children’s needs, and we ask that you to continue to make a modest investment—\$350,000—in this program.

The Cost of SBAC and Standardized Testing

Finally, as you may know, CEA is advocating that Connecticut explore better alternatives to the state mastery exam than the eight-hour SBAC test that is currently administered to third through eighth graders. We are not here to argue the merits of that legislation, but rather to question the costs of SBAC. Critics of our proposal claim that we should not change course

because the SBAC test has already cost Connecticut tens of millions of dollars, and will continue to cost significant sums in the future. The argument seems to be that we have already spent so much money on this test and should therefore stick with it. This raises the question—just how much has the state spent on SBAC, and how costly will it be in the future?

The federal government has already spent about \$350 million on the consortium that designed this test, and the majority of states have now rejected the consortium tests. This committee should know the exact costs of a testing program that may wind up as the most expensive in our country's history.

Thank you.