

**Testimony Regarding
S.B. 177, An Act Establishing a Task Force to
Study Declining Student Enrollment**

Katie Roy, Director & Founder
Committee on Education
Wednesday, February 24, 2016

Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann, and distinguished members of the Education Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in front of you today regarding S.B. 177 and its proposal to establish a task force to study Connecticut's declining student enrollment.

My name is Katie Roy and I am the director and founder of the Connecticut School Finance Project. Founded in June 2015, the Connecticut School Finance Project is a nonpartisan, nonprofit project that aims to fix the illogical and inequitable system by which Connecticut funds its public schools. Our organization strives to serve as a trusted source of accurate school finance data and information, and is focused on three primary goals:

- 1) Building knowledge about how the current school funding system works,
- 2) Bringing together stakeholders who are impacted by how schools are funded, and
- 3) Identifying solutions to Connecticut's school funding challenges that are fair to students and taxpayers, and strengthen schools and communities.

I'm testifying today on S.B. 177 because Connecticut's school finance system is—and will continue to be—substantially impacted by the state's continued declining student enrollment.

Over the past 10 years, Connecticut's public schools have experienced a six percent decline in enrollment, amounting to a total of 34,500 students.¹ During that time period, only 21 local school districts have seen enrollment increases, and the average increase was 433 students.²

Furthermore, the decline in Connecticut's school-age population is projected to continue to decline over the next 10 years. By 2025, Connecticut's 5-19 population is projected to decline 12 percent (from 700,763 to 614,060).³ As a result, only 16 of

¹ Connecticut State Department of Education. (2015). *CT Public School Enrollment_2000.mdb*. Available from <http://ctschoolfinance.org/data/connecticut-school-enrollment>.

² Ibid.

³ Batt, S., Guarino, Z., & Zheng, Q. (2015). *Demographic Change in Connecticut School Districts* [Data visualizations]. Storrs, CT: Connecticut State Data Center. Retrieved from <http://blogs.lib.uconn.edu/outsidetheneatline/2015/07/24/demographic-change-in-connecticut-school-districts/>.

Connecticut's local public school districts are projected to experience increases in their school-age resident populations between now and 2025.⁴

Connecticut's school finance system is not prepared to handle these population shifts and enrollment declines. First, Connecticut has stopped using the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) formula to distribute funding to local school districts.⁵ This means Connecticut is not taking changes in enrollment or student need into account when distributing state funding to school districts. Instead, the most significant factor in determining how much education aid a district receives is how much education aid it received last year. This is particularly problematic when you consider districts experiencing enrollment gains (or very slight declines) over the past five years also serve the highest percentage of low-income students, with 49.5 percent of their students—on average—eligible for free and reduced price lunch.⁶

Second, the current school finance system holds districts harmless.⁷ This means we don't let the formula "run," which would allow dollars to move between districts based on changing enrollment and changing student need. Instead, the rule we follow is that a district can't receive less ECS aid this year than they did last year. This means no matter how much enrollment might decline in a district, state education aid will never go down. As a result, there is no mechanism in place for moving education dollars from places where enrollment is going down to places where enrollment is increasing.

For example, with an enrollment of 10,912, Danbury Public Schools currently receives \$2,708 per student in ECS funding.⁸ Danbury's enrollment is projected to increase 14 percent by 2025 to 12,406 students.¹⁰ Should its state education aid remain stagnant, its ECS funding would decline to \$2,382 per student.¹¹ In comparison, Greenwich Public Schools currently receives \$389 in ECS funding for each of its 8,789 students.¹² ¹³ Should Greenwich experience its projected 27 percent decline in enrollment by 2025, and its state education aid remain the same, its ECS funding will increase to \$530 per student.¹⁴

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⁴ Ibid.

⁵ An Act Implementing Provisions of the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2017 Concerning General Government, Education, Health and Human Services and Bonds of the State. 18 Conn. Acts 15-5, 30 June 2015.

⁶ Connecticut State Department of Education. (2015). *CT Public School Enrollment_2000.mdb*. Available from <http://ctschoolfinance.org/data/connecticut-school-enrollment>.

⁷ Conn. Gen. Statutes ch. 172, § 10-262h (2013).

⁸ Connecticut State Department of Education. (2015). *CT Public School Enrollment_2000.mdb*. Available from <http://ctschoolfinance.org/data/connecticut-school-enrollment>.

⁹ Connecticut State Department of Education, Bureau of Grants Management. (2016). *ECS Entitlements 2000-01 thru 2015-16*. Retrieved 2/23/2016 from: <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/PDF/dgm/report1/ECSEntit.pdf>

¹⁰ Batt, S., Guarino, Z., & Zheng, Q. (2015). *Demographic Change in Connecticut School Districts* [Data visualizations]. Storrs, CT: Connecticut State Data Center. Retrieved from <http://blogs.lib.uconn.edu/outsidetheneatline/2015/07/24/demographic-change-in-connecticut-school-districts/>.

¹¹ Connecticut State Department of Education, Bureau of Grants Management. (2016). *ECS Entitlements 2000-01 thru 2015-16*. Retrieved 2/23/2016 from: <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/PDF/dgm/report1/ECSEntit.pdf>

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Connecticut State Department of Education. (2015). *CT Public School Enrollment_2000.mdb*. Available from <http://ctschoolfinance.org/data/connecticut-school-enrollment>.

¹⁴ Batt, S., Guarino, Z., & Zheng, Q. (2015). *Demographic Change in Connecticut School Districts* [Data visualizations]. Storrs, CT: Connecticut State Data Center. Retrieved from <http://blogs.lib.uconn.edu/outsidetheneatline/2015/07/24/demographic-change-in-connecticut-school-districts/>.

¹⁵ Connecticut State Department of Education, Bureau of Grants Management. (2016). *ECS Entitlements 2000-01 thru 2015-16*. Retrieved 2/23/2016 from: <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/PDF/dgm/report1/ECSEntit.pdf>

Connecticut needs a school finance system that is able to respond to population shifts and changing district enrollments. Declining enrollments will continue to pose problems to how Connecticut's public schools are funded until the state implements an equitable system that:

- Uses a funding formula to fund all students based on their learning needs;
- Distributes education dollars in a way that is consistent, predictable, efficient, and transparent;
- Takes community wealth into account and works within the confines of the state's budget.

I respectfully ask the Committee to keep this mind as it considers S.B. 177 and looks further into Connecticut's enrollment changes.

Thank you again for allowing me the opportunity to testify today, and I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Katie Roy', with a stylized flourish at the end.

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