March 6, 2019

Appropriations Committee Co-Chairs Toni Walker and Catherine Osten and Members of the Appropriations Committee:

I oppose HB 7148, An Act Concerning the State Budget for Biennial Period ending 6/30/21 because the components of it, collectively, will do significant damage to public education in Connecticut.

The number and type of potential financial cuts to the public education system are overwhelming and potentially, unrecoverable, impacting a generation of students. I ask that you consider them together and review them for their collective impact.

- At the local level, budgets are defeated when boards of education propose large increases year over year. Local boards work to keep those increases low because they are sensitive to the impact a potential increased mill rate has on the average homeowner. When the towns are assigned a portion of the teachers’ retirement pension, the board budgets will carry the increase. In order to pass budgets, educators may face hard decisions about student programming, curricular offerings and staffing. Cuts in current staffing, something that is happening already through declining enrollment in many regions of our state, will only exacerbate the teachers’ retirement pension crisis.

- The reduction of ECS funding to many communities, which would be phased in over the next few years, will result in increases to board of education budgets as the local municipalities push the loss of revenue to the general fund onto the schools either in part or whole. ECS funding, meant to equalize educational experiences and address inequities in ability to pay from town to town, is flawed at its foundation. The number associated with that foundation ($11,525) is too low and does not reflect an appropriate per student expenditure in any community. Local boards across the state would have to look at the largest portion of their budget, salaries and benefits, and reduce staff and/or programming so that they can present a budget that will survive a public vote.
• Withholding ECS funding from small districts who do not share superintendents and/or regionalize completely, is tone deaf to the actual problems that keep districts from regionalizing or engaging more fully in regional efforts, namely a cumbersome process burdened by layers of legislation, is not incentive. Instead, it puts local boards of education in a predictable and untenable situation. They will be forced to ask superintendents to run larger districts that do not want to become one district and want to keep their own neighborhood schools and, again, communities will take their opinions to the voting booth when the school budget is presented.

I ask that you review these components of proposed HB 7148 through the total impact each discreet component will have on our public education system. Education, along with jobs, has historically drawn people to our state. Creating an environment of paucity and putting local districts in the position of having to cut services to pay for these new and significant expenses, will have a crushing impact that will be felt for many years.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Superintendent Jan Perruccio