

Dear Members of the ECS Task Force,

My name is Lisa Lenskold, and I have been a resident of Norwalk, CT for 10 years, I am an active parent, currently serving as PTO President at Nathan Hale Middle School, and PTO Council President for the past 2 years.

As our student performance indicates, Norwalk Public Schools have been doing adequate work with very little resources. During the last 5 years we have been forced to cut everything from copier paper, libraries, teachers, classroom aides to Central Office staff. I realize this is not unlike many cities in the nation and this is a current crisis. However, I continually ask myself, "how much better could our students be doing if they had more resources?" Our PTOs (parents) have funded most of the library media centers, purchased classroom and library books, provided scholarships for the students that can't afford field trips, hold numerous fundraisers just to keep things status quo in the schools. These needs continue to GROW every year. We have nowhere else to look for additional funding. We need help from the State of CT. Yet, the State of CT believes Norwalk is situated on the "Gold Coast" and therefore must be a wealthy town like Greenwich, Westport and Darien. That could not be further from the truth. Yes, there is some degree of wealth in Norwalk, however it is counterbalanced by a growing level of poverty. These "wealthy" homeowners are taxed at a huge rate, some of which many of them can't even afford any longer. Most of us are just middle class families trying to do the best for our children.

During the last few years, Norwalk has struggled to provide a good education for our students, however the City has been forced to cut every budget, education is no exception. My husband and I regularly ask each other if this will be the year that we relocate our family, or decide to send our kids to private schools. We love Norwalk, but the high taxes, budget cuts and struggling schools lead us to re-evaluate our situation regularly.

What I believe is extremely important, yet confusingly absent from the ECS Formula is the percentage of children that qualify for Free and Reduced Lunch. This is a clear indicator of the growth of poverty in Norwalk. In the past 5 years, the number of students that qualify for Free and Reduced Lunch has jumped from 2,555 students in 2005 to 4,744 in 2010 (an increase from 23.1 % of our total student body to 43.7%.) Also, 13% of that base represents ELL students. This is a huge shift in our culture and in the needs associated with our school system. Shouldn't the needs of the children be taken into account when distributing valuable state education funds?

The ECS Task Force has been asked to review the current state of the ECS Formula. We hope you will discover, as we have discovered in Norwalk, that the current formula does not do a fair and equitable job of distributing valuable state funds to our schools. Please be the catalyst that changes the formula, creates transparency and weights each city and town fairly in distributing state education funds.

Thank you.