



Testimony
Education Cost Sharing Task Force Public Hearing
July 12, 2012

My name is Mary Pat Healy and I am the Executive Director of the Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition (BCAC). I appreciate the opportunity to comment before the ECS Task Force tonight.

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Mary Pat C. Healy
Executive Director

We all know and agree that the ECS formula is broken. It must be reworked so that urban districts get the funding they need to educate our children as they should be educated. There is a greater need for support in Bridgeport and other urban districts because dollars must stretch much further. Let me share just a few facts about Bridgeport schools

- 99% of Bridgeport students are economically disadvantaged, compared to 34% statewide.
- 36% of Bridgeport’s kindergarten students arrive at school with no preschool experience, compared to 20% statewide.
- 13% of Bridgeport students are not fluent in English, compared to 5% statewide.

These factors contribute to poor student outcomes. But they are not insurmountable. Our students can achieve. But resources and supports are critical to mitigate the consequences. For a city like Bridgeport, struggling with the burden of high property taxes, the lack of adequate ECS support has meant chronic underfunding of our schools. In addition, the current formula has meant that cities with similar student demographics receive more ECS dollars than Bridgeport:

- Hartford gets \$9280 per student
- New Haven gets \$8295 per student
- Bridgeport gets \$8008 per student

Were the state to give Bridgeport what it gives Hartford per student, our city would get a whopping \$26.8 million more per year! If the state were to give Bridgeport what it gives New Haven per student, we would get an additional \$6 million per year, which would have gone far to bridge the education budget deficit this year.

We urge you to do a comprehensive reform of the ECS formula, which must be based on current data and on the real cost of educating our children. We know the state budget is tight but we need to start somewhere. Prioritize funding so that poorer cities, like Bridgeport, get the funding they need. We've shortchanged our children for far too long. If we get the ECS formula right, we can give students what they deserve.

We appreciate that the ECS Task Force is developing recommendations to address the serious inequities brought about by the current formula. We understand that the Formula Subcommittee of this task force has been analyzing and dissecting the ECS formula over that past several months. We are very interested in the subcommittee's findings and concerned that they have not yet been able to report its findings to the full task force.

We need to invest in our students. We need to preserve a highly educated workforce in Connecticut so that our state can attract employers. Do what's right for our cities and our students, which, in the long run, makes the state stronger, cities like Bridgeport more prosperous and, most important, our children more successful.

Thank you.