



# State of Connecticut General Assembly

STATE CAPITOL  
HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06106-1591

July 12, 2012

The Honorable Benjamin Barnes  
Secretary, Office of Policy and Management  
Co-Chair, ECS Task Force

The Honorable Andrea Stillman  
Senator, 20th District  
Co-Chair, ECS Task Force

Secretary Barnes, Senator Stillman and Honorable Members of the Task Force:

Thank you for this opportunity to provide you with input regarding the current education cost sharing (ECS) formula and ways to make it fairer for our community and others across the state. We're certain that as you travel through Connecticut listening to stakeholder concerns you'll see the glaring inequities in this formula and seek to find consensus for legislative action in 2013.

As Governor Malloy stated when the members of the task force were appointed, "It is our responsibility to routinely review the distribution of education grants to municipalities to ensure that communities are receiving a fair share of dollars under grant distribution rules, especially in light of constitutional requirements. Unfortunately, it has been quite a while since the state last had a thorough review of this system. We must ensure this formula focuses on improving educational outcomes for all of our students, regardless in which city or town they live."

Indeed, the formula hasn't seen a substantial review since 1995. And some of the formula's inherent flaws have remained since its creation in 1988. That's probably why legislators from all parties and all corners of the state were eager to support the bill creating the task force on which you now serve.

Closer to home, it's no secret that Fairfield County in general, with Norwalk and Stamford in particular, have always felt short-changed when it comes to ECS funding. For many years, legislators of both parties in Norwalk and Stamford have worked to fix, tweak and change the formula. Our bi-partisan efforts have brought us some limited success. Our schools have received increased funding, but it's never been enough to fully fund the needs of our students. And it certainly hasn't been enough to give equitable relief to local property tax payers. We still have a long ways to go. As a delegation, proper school funding is and will always remain our top priority.

The obvious question is, "What to do with the formula in order to make it fairer for all students throughout the state?" The ECS Formula Committee wrote in its June 26, 2012 report, "It is therefore concluded that it would be highly desirable to start over." Clearly the Committee recognizes that the annual tweaks to the ECS formula have never been enough to correct its inherent flaws and give every school district in the state a fair shake.

Norwalk is the sixth largest city in the state. While our population has held constant our demographics have changed. For example, those who qualify for free or reduced lunch now represent over 40% of the school population even though enrollment remains flat. The situation in Stamford is equally grave.

Unfortunately, one of the leading indicators that determine our funding level is a community's grand list. While that may help highlight the overall wealth of a town, it's weighted too heavily, without regard to the example above. Grand list may be a factor, but it should not be the factor.

If education funding is to be fair we need to study all the data at our disposal. The ECS formula should be reflective of the individual student and his/her needs, rather than just what a community looks like as a whole. If we are to truly tackle the largest achievement gap in the nation, then funding the needs of our poor students in every corner must be addressed. Considering the education reforms we passed this past legislative session, our state is on the cusp of truly turning the curve toward excellence.

ECS Task Force  
July 12, 2012

In January, the ECS Task Force published an interim report, which provided an outline of possible action for the final October report. We believe the task force should continue on this track in order to build legislative support, but more importantly to properly fund school districts historically left behind.

In particular, we believe these goals cited in your report will help the students of Norwalk:

- The task force supports efforts to increase ECS funding; establish clear year-to-year funding predictability; and collect and use the most recent and appropriate data to measure wealth, poverty, the foundation level, population, and other formula factors.
- In addition to base ECS funding, the state should provide funding for performance incentives tied to state priorities for student achievement, district and school accountability, and transparency in education spending.
- The task force supports equitable state funding for all interdistrict magnet schools, regardless of location in the state.
- The state should provide greater access to, and qualitative enhancement of, preschool and kindergarten programs.
- The state should explore a fairer and more reasonable approach to funding programs and services for students with special educational needs, including students eligible for special education, English language learners, and students identified as gifted or talented.

We thank the Task Force members for their time, attention and service to our state. Connecticut is at a cross-roads with regard to education funding and this is the perfect opportunity, coupled with the meaningful education reform recently passed, to ensure all children in the state receive a meaningful education that will prepare them for the jobs of the twenty-first century and, in turn, grow high quality jobs in the state of Connecticut.

Sincerely,

Senator Bob Duff

Representative Chris Perone

Representative Gail Lavielle

Representative Larry Cafero

Representative Bruce V. Morris