

Public Comments to the ECS Task Force Meeting  
Bridgeport, CT July 12, 2012  
Sue Haynie, Norwalk Board of Education

My name is Sue Haynie. I am speaking as an individual and I also as a member of the Norwalk Board of Education. Although many people are away for summer holidays, I want to thank you for coming to Fairfield County. Thank you for giving us the chance to discuss the ECS formula. I support a funding system that puts children first and one that accounts for a child's life circumstances. I believe money should follow the child.

Norwalk is the 6<sup>th</sup> largest city in the state and is an urban school district with a majority of its student population being minority and 44% being on FRL. Norwalk is working class.

We have tremendously high property taxes that are 50% higher than Stamford and 25% higher than Darien for example. We support our schools as well or better in terms of funding than almost all our neighboring towns, even though they are much wealthier than us. We can't do it alone. We are seriously shortchanged in the ECS funding formula.

I would ask that you increase our ECS funding to an amount equal to the needs of our students. Lacking that, I would ask that you consider allowing us to be an **Innovation Zone** district, a district that could pilot new initiatives for statewide scale up, and initiatives that tackle thorny issues like Special Ed for instance. As a parent of 2 children with dyslexia who have received special ed services, I will tell you special ed is broken for reading disabled kids. And, reading disabled kids represent a majority of the kids in special ed. Most Connecticut districts spend about 18% of their Operating Budgets on special ed, for Norwalk that's around \$30 million. I don't think special ed funding is spent well. Help Norwalk secure a Federal i3 grant for a regional Literacy Center that would address the needs of special ed/reading disabled and Tier 3 kids and be a learning lab for teachers. We have already submitted a Literacy Center pilot plan to the Federal government two times; the last time we received 34 out of 36 points for "need" from the Federal reviewers. Or, a little more radical, let Norwalk pilot a special ed voucher program along the lines of the Florida McKay Scholarship. Put some market competitiveness into special ed, let parents shop for what they think is the best program for their kids. Or, let us pilot online initiatives to expand Connecticut's use of online and blended learning and virtual classroom models. There is any number of initiatives that can be piloted—we need to increase results, efficiencies and save money. Let us be an **Innovation Zone** and base our funding on results—hold us highly accountable by a variety of measures and 3<sup>rd</sup> party reviewers. If we don't do well, take our funding away. Help us secure the funding and the capacity from non-profits and outside funders. If you can't be more equitable with the ECS funding, then help us help ourselves and help the State of Connecticut at the same time.