

To the Members of the State Tax Panel
September 15, 2015

Thank you for the opportunity to express my views in writing during consideration of tax policy recommendations and solutions at the public hearing of the State Tax Panel. I am a recently retired school psychologist with over 40 years experience in a CT public school system and have been very troubled by what-I-view as the misguided direction that our public schools have had to undertake as privatization forces seek to transform schools to their financial benefit.

It is time for legislative leadership to take charge and commit to fully funding our public schools so that there can be equitable educational opportunities across all public school districts. **This means discontinuing the diversion of precious tax resources to private charter school operators and withholding any furthermore funding of controversial testing which is worthless to teachers, demoralizing for students and their parents, wasteful to taxpayers.** Rather than funneling millions of dollars into questionable educational "reform" initiatives, those scarce financial resources should be put into appropriately and fairly funding our public schools. How many more years of unproven, at times scandalous, experimental changes do our students have to tolerate before the legislature will do as promised and is legally required by fully funding the ECS formula to ensure adequate and equitable resources to CT's public schools?

Given that the 2015 PDK/Gallup survey found the public wanting less testing and more school funding, this gives you a fresh opportunity to bring transparency to a tax and spend process that has been anything but open and equitable. The "smoke and mirrors" of the current administration's wheeling-and-dealing is disgraceful and those legislators who give in to their leadership's heavy-handedness need to be called on it.

I know these issues are incredibly complicated, but certainly a simpler tax code, required transparency, and renewed focus on equitable distribution of resources should be your goal. **A good start would be requiring that both political parties have representation during "behind the scenes" negotiating and decision-making on issues as important as finalizing the State Budget.** For any opposition political party which has a substantial following of voters to be frozen out of the final budget negotiations is undemocratic and simply reinforces why many citizens have lost trust and faith in the fairness of the political process.

Since I understand the plight of CT public schools best, much could be done to save tax dollars in that venue - as the current "reform" agenda is not what-it-is promoted to be; it will, however, mean bucking influential and powerful monied interests.

Best of luck in your endeavors.

John R. Bestor

24 Walnut Tree Hill Road
Sandy Hook, CT