



Dear Senator Winfield,

New Haven Public School District enrollments have increased, yet the funding coming from the state has not risen to meet the need and our schools have suffered. I have seen the negative results up close, ever since my oldest daughter entered Kindergarten at Edgewood Magnet School.

Our schools need increased funding through the ECS formula and the magnet program.

Austerity budgets have caused the following realities in the schools my kids attend.

Staffing shortages

Edgewood school is routinely down full-time elementary teachers for extended lengths of the year, sometimes for a majority of the semester. This leaves in the hands of less-qualified substitute teachers. This is the case at many schools in New Haven.

New Haven is not competing well enough to retain teachers, causing too much turnover and instability in the younger grades, a critical time for learning and development.

This is a direct result of teachers starting out in New Haven, and being hired away by suburban districts that pay more and have better working conditions. It is also the result of teachers not having enough support staff to help manage classroom discipline. I routinely hear from teacher who spend so much time trying to keep kids safe, that their instruction suffers.

One teacher in our school recently left because she did not have support. This leads me to my second point below.

Paraprofessional staff cuts

When my daughter began Kindergarten in 2010, each class at Edgewood had a paraprofessional aide working alongside a teacher from grades K-2. Since then, the school has dropped to having dedicated paras in Kindergarten only while the four classrooms for grades 1-2 share one, and that aide is also called on to substitute teach other grades when the school is short.

Paras provide perhaps the most effective way to manage a classroom for the money. They are kind, they help everyone, and their extra set of eyes and hands head off so many problems that otherwise disrupt classrooms when only one adult is present. The lack of money for salaried employees like paras is a direct result of inadequate state funding.

School library closings

Budget cuts have forced schools to share librarians, which means that libraries are partially open during the week. Of all places, school libraries should be open and accessible to children every moment of a school day.

Classroom Resources

Classes do not have enough books. Not once has one of my children brought home a book for a whole class reading. That is because each classroom has only one set of books and when there are multiple sections, the book needs to stay in the room.

These are but a few of many examples of how our schools do not have the resources to meet the needs of our children and city. The region and state need New Haven to thrive as a city. That will only happen when a belief in the excellence of our public schools is widespread and broadly shared by residents from every neighborhood. I think you would agree we are not there yet.

Thank you for your time.

Matthew Higbee

257 West Rock Avenue
New Haven, CT