

Education Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-948

AN ACT ADDRESSING EDUCATION FUNDING AND RACIAL EQUITY IN

Title: CONNECTICUT.

Vote Date: 3/22/2021

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Change of Reference to Appropriations

PH Date: 3/3/2021

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Education Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill revises the ECS grant and eliminates separate grants for magnet schools, charter school, vo-ag centers, and Open Choice programs. It also modifies the need student weighting by increasing the ELL (English language learner) weight from 15% to 25%, increasing the concentrated poverty weight from 5% to 15% and lowers the concentrated poverty threshold (thus allowing more towns to benefit from the concentrated poverty weight) from 75% to 60%.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Charlene Russell-Tucker, Deputy Commissioner, State Department of Education:

We cannot support this proposal as it is currently written. This bill would require fully funding the ECS formula beginning in Fiscal Year 2022, while allowing for the continued phase out of districts losing money under the formula. This would require hundreds of millions of additional dollars in the ECS grant line item that are currently not included in the Governor's budget. This bill also modifies the weightings for the calculation of Free and Reduced Priced Lunch in the ECS formula for student counts in districts with high concentrations of poverty, while simultaneously increasing the weight for English Learner students. We cannot dictate how the funds are used to ensure districts are achieving the intended outcome of providing additional support to high need students

Sarah Healy Eagan, Acting Child Advocate, Office of the Child Advocate:

This bill increases funding for higher need students and for school districts pursuant to a more urgent timeframe and will help reduce intolerable disparities in how low-income children and children of color access education. Our current system, which relies primarily on taxable local property with a supplement from the state, is exacerbating the gross inequities for students across Connecticut, worsened during COVID-19.

CWCSEO: Steven Hernández, Executive Director; Thomas Nuccio, Children and Families Policy Fellow:

Quality education via equitable funding sources and education support/interventions have the potential of connecting students of color to meaningful workforce opportunities such as career paths, college, and training that connects students with lucrative opportunities both for students and long-term benefits to our economy.

Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities: The \$639 million racial funding gap translates to school districts with majority BIPOC populations spending approximately \$2,300 less per student than majority white districts. The Commission is supportive of this bill's aim to deal with these inequities, in part by reducing this racial funding gap by 68%.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

State Rep. Jason Rojas, House Majority Leader:

Our current ECS formula is not doing enough to support students based on their need and makes distinctions based on the type of school a student attends. We must continue to make the needed adjustments to ensure that we provide equality of opportunity and address the systemic weaknesses that have long plagued education funding in Connecticut.

State Rep. Kara Rochelle, Assistant Majority Leader:

The proposed changes to the ECS formula would provide Ansonia, for example, with an estimated \$21.8 million in ECS funding, approximately \$3.6 million more than current funding levels. This would allow Ansonia to lower class sizes and improve the teacher to pupil ratio, better address the social-emotional needs of students, and provide more diverse course offerings and upgrade outdated technology.

FaithActs for Education: Jamilah Prince-Stewart, Executive Director; Jason Ayala; Shaurice Bacon; William Bailey; Suzie Brown; Rev. Gabrielle Beam; Darlene Bowens; Rev. Trevor Beauford; Pastor Cynthia Bellamy; Julianne Biagioli; James Boursiquot; Shiomi Bouknight-Galberth; Bishop Charles Brewer III; Victoria Bui; Taryn Calderon; Seriffa Chaplin; Brandon Clark; Brittanni Cogdell; Tonisha Cohen-King; Solana Davis; Brittany Coleman; Charlene Colson; Rev. Orsella Cooper-Hughes; Jessica Covington; Bishop John Diamond; Shineika Fareus; Dick Ferguson; Sonia Fitzgerald; Bob Mercer; Bishop Randall Furlow; Pastor Warren Godbolt; Rev. Daylan Greer; Jasmin Guevara; Pastor Thomas Hayes; Robyn Handy; Soncerria Holland; William Howerly; Willie Moye; Rita Jackson; Tyre Jackson; Louis Johnson; Pastor Wesley Johnson; Judith Keenan; Jonathan Joines; Kevin Knight; Alyse Lemon; Rev. Dr. James B. Logan; Keyla Medina; Bishop William Marshall; Pastor Carl McCluster; Bria McCullough; Mary McPherson; Rev. Geraldine McCullough; Pastor William McCullough; Amaryllis Medina; Minister Willie Medina; Kyle Mendelson; Lisa Mendelson; Phoebe Mendelson; Chantel Mendez; Robert Middleton; Shannon Mitchell; Overseer Kenneth Moales; Sonia Moncreiffe; Yadira Morales; Tamara Murphy; Benedicte N'sumbu; Juliet Papius; Bishop Varrick Nelson; Francis Nunez; Pastor Walter Oliver; Jossie Perez; Bishop Theodore Plummer; Alisha Price; Thomas Ragusa; Xiomara Ramirez; Yesenia Robinson; Rev. Cass L. Shaw; Melissa Shein; Shanasia Shelton; Bishop Eron B. Simmons; Carmen Smith; Lawrence Spivey, Bishop Lorenzo Stewart; Yolanda Stinson; Tania Sutherland; Nancy Thompson; Pastor Alan B. Thorne; Pastor Dexter Upshaw, Pastor Jeremy Williams; Simona Williams; Brandon Woods; Doran Wright; Tomyia Young; Pastor Ulysses Youngblood

Our state's education funding system is racist and classist. We spend more on educating affluent white children than low-income children and children of color. Then we spend even more to police, prosecute, and incarcerate those who are failed by our education system. This bill will help make Connecticut a more just and equitable place to live.

Melissa Baez; Janet Brown-Clayton, Executive Director, Highville Charter School; Andrea Busby, Principal, Odyssey Community School; Cony Castellano; David Lewis; Darlene Cazarin Berrios; Melissa Clarke; Bernadette Gillot Lamousnery; Bria Lindsay; Elvert Eden; Executive Director, Sportsometry; Brother Carl Hardrick; Erika Hendrick; Kenneth Joseph; Michael Levin; Allison Martin; Marc Michaelson; Carrie Miner; Dr. Troy A. Monroe, Executive Director; Jumoke Academy Charter School Inc.; Heather Morales; Chianne Parker; Kely Ana Peguero; Joelle Perna; Claudia Phillips; Gregory Perry, Educator; Karla Ramirez; Tara Ramlal; Jenn Renkiewicz; Annie Scott; Barbara Ruggiero, Executive Director, Brass City Charter School; Dao-Saeng-aly; Ashley Santiago; Jessica Swann, Assistant Principal, Odyssey Community School; Don Thompson; Tayon Thompson; Jessy Toro; Ana Valencia; Kayla Waters; Latisha Williams; Rhonda Willigan

Public charter school scholars should receive the same amount of funding as all other public school students. We teach the same children, from the same dirge, the same priority districts, the same socioeconomic strata, and the same needs as their peers in public schools, and we are expected to meet even higher standards than traditional public schools.

Sheree Baldwin Muhammad, Teacher; Brittany Bouchard, Teacher; Jennifer Brewster; Sophanaid Bradley, Teacher; Coleen Broderick; Rosanna Chapleau; Kaitlyn Curran; Shawnett Dawkins; Tycharmell Denny; Brian Donahue; Carina Dozier, Teacher; Clancy Emanuel; Kristen Estabrook; Rashana Graham, Teacher; Stefanie Hill; LaToya Ireland; Lauren Jacobs, Teacher; Helen Keith, Teacher; Sara Kovack, Teacher; Roberta LaBelle-Thomas; Alexander LaForest, Teacher; Fraz Lugay, Teacher; Judith Nacca, Teacher; CJ Parker, Hearing Youth Voices; Gage Salicki; Daniel Spurr; Steven Tatum, Teacher, Claudia Tenaglia, Teacher, Fred Thornley, Teacher; Robert Woods, Teacher; Melissa Yennie St. Juste, Teacher

There is a big difference between the resources available to students in more affluent towns in comparison to the inner cities. Funding inequities across and within our schools are preventing our students--particularly English Language Learners, students of color and children from low-income families--from getting the excellent education they deserve.

Richard Baskin; Kevin Booker; Chrissy Bowman; Barbara Bruno; James Costa; Nicholas Donahue, President, Nellie Mae Education Foundation; Sauda Efia Baraka; Lourdes Fonseca; Janis M. Gomez Anderson; Maebel Ailis Haynes; Yukiyo Iida; Michelle Ignatowicz; Richard Jannelli; Jakob Lopez; Lea Johnson; Chelsea Massey; Andrew McKinnis; Emely Morales Varona; Genene Morehouse; Nurun Nahar; Anne E. Mead, DPS Director of Family, School and Community Partnerships; Tiffany Moyer-Washington; George Nakos; Sophia Nakos; Margaret O'Shea; Laura Orban; Amy Pilato; Valeria Popolizio; Janiya Riley; Shannon Riley; Lisa Ruffles; Patty Salvatore; Willie C Smith Jr.; Kent Tedford; Bishop John R. Thompson; Katherine Tucker; John Whaley

Students deserve to be funded based on what they need in order to be successful in and outside of the classroom. Students who attend magnet schools, charter schools, and other choice schools deserve to be funded through a formula that takes their learning needs into account. Our English Learners, students who are economically disadvantaged, and students navigating through their education in communities that experience concentrated poverty, all deserve additional funding at a rate that makes a real, tangible difference.

Superintendents Mark Benigni & Sal Pascarella, Meriden and Danbury Public Schools; Rachel Chaleski; Kate Conetta; Daisy Torres, President-Elect, CALAS; Daniel Curtis, Research and Policy Fellow, Connecticut Voices for Children; Joseph Dibacco, Superintendent, Ansonia Public Schools; Amy Dowell, Connecticut State Director Education Reform Now Connecticut; Marisa M. Halm, Director, CCA TeamChild Youth Justice Project; Mike Muszynski, State and Federal Relations Manager; CCM; Nathan Quesnel, Superintendent, East Hartford Public Schools; Constance Vickers, Director of Legislative Affairs, City of Bridgeport; Donald Williams, Executive Director; Connecticut Education Association; Stacey Zackin, Manager, WORK SPACE

This bill would fully fund the ECS grant and provide an immediate infusion of funding for the state's neediest students and schools. The changes to the weights for English Learners and concentrated poverty will drive greater funding to districts for equitable learning opportunities for our neediest students. Curtis notes that this bill doesn't address how special education students will get needed resources.

Lillian Bertram: In school, I was labeled as gifted and talented, and was conditioned to believe that I was better than students who were never nurtured and fell behind. I don't want to see another student miss out on opportunities. It is our job to make sure students are properly funded to seek what spark their academic interest.

Kathleen Callahan, Chair, NASW-CT Education and Legislative Action Network;
Lisa Hammersley, Executive Director School and State Finance Project;
Callie Gale Heilmann, President, Bridgeport Generation Now; Natalie Languaise;
Emily Hoyle, Connecticut Women's Consortium
David Scata, Executive Director, ConnCASE

Equitable funding is essential for access to resources and improved outcomes. This bill would help realize the intent of equalization aid in education, leading to a more just and student-centered system which provides learning opportunities for all Connecticut public school students.

Andrew Feinstein, Attorney, Special Education Equity for Kids in Connecticut:

This bill fully funds a revised ECS formula immediately, which is revised to focus more money on districts with high concentrations of poverty and with large numbers of English Learners. Let's not defer attacking structural racism by failing to fund a more equitable school financing system. Yes, this bill would be tagged with a fiscal note of probably close to half a billion dollars but rather than giving up, this Committee needs to pass the legislation.

Connecticut Charter Schools Association: Ruben Felipe, Executive Director,
Yamuna Menon;

Students should be equitably funded in a unified funding formula that accounts for their learning needs, regardless of where they come or their background or family circumstances. This is why we support applying the ECS formula to public charter school students and all public school students.

Connecticut Association of Boards of Education, Inc.:
Vanessa Jenkins, East Hartford Board of Education;
Connecticut Association of School Business Officials;
Maegan Parrott, Director, Step Up New London

The economic challenges faced at all of levels of government are felt most intensively at the local level. Many districts have faced several years of 0% budget increases. Given the number of new initiatives and reforms put in place, this is a time where we need to maintain our commitment to our public schools. CABE also urges removing the cap on the Special Education Cost grant.

ConnCAN: Subira Gordon, Executive Director; Veronica Rosario, Parent Fellow

This bill simplifies the formula by including all public schools. It sends more money where it's needed most: for students in concentrated poverty and English Language Learners. Finally, it sends the needed money now, not ten years from now.

Educators for Excellence-Connecticut: Daniel Pearson, State Director;
Mikaelle Olivier, Outreach Director

With a \$639 million funding gap between white districts and everyone else, we cannot say we are taking the needs of our students seriously. Connecticut has some of the best performing public schools in the country in majority white school districts, while having some of the worst performing public schools in majority BIPOC districts.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Billy Bromage; Melody Gallagher, Teacher; Illisa Kelman;
Matt Wilcox, Vice-President, New Haven Board of Education

Granting equal funding to charters, when they operate with little to no accountability to the public, and do not accept all the students that come to them to be educated like traditional public schools do, amounts to a theft of much-needed funds from the public by private organizations. This will in effect drain dollars away from our most vulnerable students.

Janet Cling: The specific language on lines 307-311 and Lines 1095-1098 legislates double funding of ECS education costs to cities and explicitly states that school districts will continue to be paid for 42,000 kids in CT who are NOT enrolled in those district schools. It's to keep union teachers employed when they're not actually teaching full-time.

Jennifer Drury:

Supporting free public education is the key to our success, especially in New Haven.

Deborah B Schultz: There is no reason why school districts which do not actually teach the student should continue to receive money. By rights, the money should be spent in the schools where the students are being taught. Students in charter, magnet, open choice and vocational/tech schools are far more successful, imagine what those schools could do with 100% of the money.

Reported by: Dallas Emerle

Date: 3/23/2021