



# NEWINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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DR. MAUREEN L. BRUMMETT  
Superintendent of Schools

March 9, 2021

Dear Members of the Appropriations Committee:

I am Dr. Maureen Brummett, Superintendent of Newington Public Schools. I am also president of the Hartford Area Superintendents' Association. Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you today about some very important issues regarding the currently proposed Governor's Budget.

**Education Cost Sharing (ECS) Funding:** There have been many iterations of funding formulas associated with ECS. Unfortunately, none of them have been followed consistently and school districts and towns are left to deal with the ramifications. For example, the Town of Newington received \$13.1 million dollars during the 2015-2016 fiscal year. From 2016 through 2018 ECS funding for Newington was less than 2015 funding. In 2019 it rose slightly and now in 2021 it is slated to be flat funded.

Based on the Governor's proposed budget that flat funds all districts, Newington will receive \$13.7 million in ECS funds. Had the Governor relied on the proposed ECS funding formula, Newington was slated to get more than a \$300,000 increase. So for Newington and many other districts this flat funding is a tremendous loss of revenue for our communities.

The Governor's budget narrative implies that ECS flat funding will be offset by the additional federal ESSER-2 Grant monies. Unfortunately, that logic is flawed as we have been directed by the State Department of Education to use ESSER-2 funding for COVID recovery efforts, not to offset our operating budget. My Town Manager is now asking me to reduce my budget to a 0% increase given the Governor's budget narrative. I urge this legislative body to strongly consider the Connecticut Association of Public Schools Superintendents (CAPSS) Blueprint to Transform CT Public Schools. In this proposal every district would receive a predictable 2.5% increase in ECS funding annually. This would allow towns and school districts to be able to count on a predictable funding stream for ECS and move the state towards a 50% education cost sharing with towns.

**Special Education:** I am certain that the legislators on this committee are well aware that the cost of educating special needs students in Connecticut continues to escalate. In fact, while many districts have been experiencing a slight decrease in their enrollment this has not resulted in a concurrent decrease in education spending. Special education costs are a large part of this

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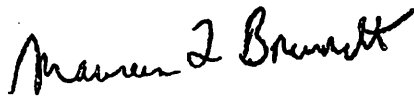
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ongoing cost escalation. There are two things the legislature in Connecticut can do to assist with this issue. First and foremost, and as stated in the CAPSS Blueprint to Transform Connecticut Public Schools, the Excess Cost Grant must be fully funded as soon as possible. This grant was designed to assist school districts with managing high cost special education students by reimbursing them for expenditures that exceed a certain fiscal threshold. Unfortunately, this grant has never been fully funded, so when student expenditures cross this threshold, districts receive less than 80% of the reimbursement they are entitled to. In summary, this inability to reduce special education costs in spite of reduced enrollment is a constant source of tension between Boards of Education and Town Government.

Finally and equally troubling is Connecticut's position on the Burden of Proof in special education due process proceedings. Connecticut is one of only a handful of states in the nation that puts the burden of proof on the school district regardless of who is filing for due process. As a former special educator who has worked in four different states, I assert unequivocally that this significantly contributes to special education cost escalation in Connecticut. Districts are constantly faced with the cost benefit analysis decision when a parent makes a request for a special education service that is high cost and often educationally contraindicated. When this occurs, districts are often advised by their legal counsel to acquiesce as the cost of a legal proceeding (even when the district is likely to prevail) far exceeds the cost of the service requested by the parents. This ongoing practice over time has significantly contributed to the continuous escalation of special education costs in Connecticut.

Thank you again for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Maureen L. Brummett". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr. Maureen L. Brummett  
Superintendent of Schools