



APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

March 9, 2021

The Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM) is Connecticut's statewide association of towns and cities and the voice of local government - your partners in governing Connecticut. Our members representing 168 towns and cities.

H.B. 6439 An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2023, and Making Appropriations Therefor

CCM asks the Committee to reject the Governor's proposal to delay fully-funding of the current ECS formula. CCM is fearful that delaying may establish a precedent for future delays and therefore reduce predictability of the grant amounts each year. In addition, CCM has concerns with using the ESSER funds as a one-time revenue source as it may only perpetuate a fiscal cliff on the horizon. Preferably, CCM urges the Committee to support an equitable and student-centered funding system. This novel approach would reflect district needs and provides greater consideration for the number of English Learners, students residing in districts with concentrated poverty as well as mitigate the enrollment volatility caused by the pandemic. A bill to address these issues is already being considered in the legislature.

CCM has testified in support of SB 948 AA Addressing Education Funding and Racial Equity in Connecticut which was heard by the Education Committee as it would make needed changes to address education financial equity by: (a) accelerating the phase-in schedule of the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) formula to be fully funded by FY 2022; (b) revise the formula used to calculate a town's equalization aid grant by increasing the weight for English language learners and increasing the concentrated poverty weight, and reducing the concentrated poverty threshold; (b) replace the existing funding levels for interdistrict magnet schools, state charter schools, regional agricultural science and technology education centers, and the open choice program with a new weighted funding amount per pupil based on student need; and (c) repeals the charging of tuition for interdistrict magnet schools and regional agricultural science and technology education centers.

The current mechanism to provide education funding are inadequate and inequitable to meet the needs of Connecticut's student population. A particular drawback of the current system is that it fails to account for a student-based approach to ensure racial equity amongst school districts throughout the state are in place to improve the outcomes for all students.

The current educational finance system is overly reliant on local property tax revenue. In the country, Connecticut is one of the state's most reliant on the local property tax to fund public education. The cost for public education in our state is over \$12.3 billion and municipal property taxpayers fund 53.3% of that

amount (\$6.6 billion), with the State and federal governments providing the balance. As a result, our system does not consider the vast disparities of wealth and student needs. More specifically, the formula does not account for the needs of English Learners. In recent years, the student population consisting of English Learners has grown substantially. Unfortunately, public policy has failed to address this trend.

CCM ask the Committee to support an education policy that would not only accelerate the full funding of the ECS, but also expand the ECS formula to give greater consideration for English Learners and those students in districts with concentrated poverty. In making these adjustments, while this proposal will have a greater impact on some districts than others, the bill maintains the commitment of phasing out those district that will see funding declines so that they can be absorbed during a reasonable period of time.

In addition, as education funding has been associated with complex formulas and grants, we urge the General Assembly to streamline the process to create a uniform formula that will be based on the needs of students within a district. Not only will this enhance equity in education finance, but also improve predictability and transparency.

It is time to make a bold attempt in order to address the inequities of Connecticut's current education finance system.

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If you have any questions, please contact M. Randall Collins Jr., Advocacy Manager of CCM at rcollins@ccm-ct.org or 860-707-6446.