

Good afternoon Co-Chairs Representative Walker, Senator Osten, Vice Chairs Representative Dathan, Senator Hartley, Ranking Members Representative France, Senator Miner and dedicated and passionate members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Matt Conway, and I am here today as the Superintendent of Derby Public Schools and Co-Chair of the CAPSS Legislative Committee to speak IN OPPOSITION TO: Senate Bill 886, An Act Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations Concerning Education.

### **Governor's Biennium Budget: Level-funded**

The Governor's current proposal strips \$125,000,000 in funding from 66 districts of which 25 are alliance districts. Of the \$125,000,000, it only sprinkles back \$27,000,000 spread out amongst 103 of our wealthier districts. Of the 103 districts receiving increased ECS funding, only 7 are currently alliance districts. While 25 distressed municipalities are receiving a one time allocation in 2022, of which 50% is CRF funds, this does not equal the amount they would otherwise receive under either the current ECS allocation formula nor the [Blueprint to Transform Connecticut's Schools](#). This plan lacks the equity needed across our state both now and long term. As is indicated in the proposal, use of federal funds to support our distressed municipalities, this is supposed to be supplemental not supplanting our current ECS funding. By reducing ECS spending by 98,000,000 and allocating CRF funds to help balance the spending in 2022 this proposal is using the federal funding to supplant rather than supplement.

I believe by supporting the [Blueprint to Transform Connecticut's Schools](#) you can accomplish what the Governor has set out to do, without using federal funding to supplant our ECS dollars and protect against the cliff that will exist for most all districts at the end of 2022.

The [Blueprint to Transform Connecticut's Schools](#) increases the ECS appropriation by 2.5% per year – for the next 15 years – which represents a small increase over the current plan and is still a reasonably digestible amount per year within any one school district. This yields an increase of \$52M more in 2021–22 over 2020–21, and then \$53M, then \$54M, and roughly \$74M in 2035-36. This represents only \$12M to \$20M more per year than the current plan through 2027-28, which is estimated at a \$40M increase per year.

Like the Governor's proposal the [Blueprint to Transform Connecticut's Schools](#) eliminates the planned losses for 95 towns but does so without creating losses to other towns and without using federal funds to supplant ECS funding. (The majority of these 95 towns are not wealthy, and yet they are slated to lose \$7M per year for each of the next seven years).

### **Special Education Funding**

The Governor's Biennium Budget level funds special education.

The [Blueprint to Transform Connecticut's Schools](#) phases in a significantly funded (\$70M more than the current \$140M) Excess Cost Grant; ensuring that it is more timely paid; and supports an incentive system for students to be educated in town, in the region, and in the state.

Note: The State's Special Education Excess Cost Grant has been frozen for nearly two decades because of the pressure on the state budget, leaving all cost increases to come from local sources. This is the single greatest burden on local school budgets.

### **English Language Learning**

The Governor's Biennium Budget: Level funds EL programs

The [Blueprint to Transform Connecticut's Schools](#) adds \$6M more for a total of \$9M in the state grant to be shared among the districts with the greatest EL need. so a more rigorous plan for each EL with accountability for documenting progress in academic growth and English acquisition; encouraging the use of Bilingual Education along with Dual Language and immersion whenever appropriate can be achieved.

### **Early Childhood Education**

Governor's Biennium Budget: Overall budget reduction in 2022.

The [Blueprint to Transform Connecticut's Schools](#) adopts the goal of 100% pre-school experience free for all 3 and 4-year-olds in the neediest towns and for all those below the poverty level.

Encourages local and regional boards and RESCs to be more active conveners of all providers.

Adds \$1M to enhance the necessary partnerships between pre-school teachers and kindergarten teachers, including the sharing of data and best practices.

Adds \$1M to purchase an accurate census of 3 and 4-year-olds served and unserved in the 30 to 40 Alliance school districts.

Standardizes and prioritizes all pre-school programs, e.g., standards, funding, and instructional goals and objectives

Calls for development of a plan to support renovation/construction of space within existing schools to enable additional preschool classrooms; beginning with the neediest towns.

While we made initial investments through Smart Start Grant funding to support public preschool programs we have failed to increase this investment at the current rate of inflation. Today those dollars do not support the programming they were intended to support. We need to increase Smart Start funding at the same rate as ECS funding to ensure the sustainability of our initial investment and programs.

## **Structural Racism & Discrimination**

Governor's Biennium Budget: Delays the phase-in of ECS enhancement for some communities and does not increase funding for recruitment and retention of minority teachers.

The [Blueprint to Transform Connecticut's Schools](#) directly addresses the needs of Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, ELs, LGBTQ students, students with disabilities, and those affected by poverty and trauma through:

1. Developing an “accelerated” learning culture – not based on student deficits, gaps, and remediation, but one based on strengths and abilities, higher content learning, and greater expectations.
2. Providing enhanced pre-service and in-service professional development for teachers and administrators on setting higher expectations for all students, including the examination within each person of unintentional and unconscious bias as it yields lower expectations for students of color and others.
3. Examining disparities in: student enrollments in higher-level classes and equitable opportunities for success; identification rates for special education; school discipline; promotion and graduation rates; and data on early reading success.
4. Plans to remedy the disparities and inequities identified above must be developed, implemented, and evaluated with a goal of “continuous improvement.” The state and each local school district must develop plans and regularly report on progress. The CSDE should provide a template for both data analyses and improvement plans.
5. Increasing Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino educator and leader recruitment and retention, e.g., expand using the model of growing one’s own diverse teacher force taking local paraprofessionals through a program of teacher preparation with a guaranteed job upon completion (for example, see Capitol Region
6. Education Council, CREC). A new state appropriation of \$8M per year would support approximately 12 such programs throughout the state, but predominantly in the neediest urban areas.
7. Using state provided model curriculum as well as local materials, districts must ensure that the historical, scientific, and cultural accomplishments of Black and Hispanic individuals are appropriately included in the locally-adopted, written curriculum as now required by state statute; see State Education Resource Center (SERC) developed materials of 2019.
8. Supporting Educators Rising and similar programs that interest high school students in teaching, particularly in Priority Districts; provide \$500,000 annually to assist start up, cross-town collaboration, diversity, and program evaluation.

The state and each local district should convene a diverse Advisory Committee to help guide a 10-year effort to dramatically reduce racism and discrimination by implementing no less than the strategies above coupled with more targeted local actions that bring long lasting change.

## **Improving Virtual Learning**

Governor's Budget: Does not include new funding streams to accomplish this work. It relies on the Federal funds which will end in 2023. This will create a funding cliff for school districts implementation and maintenance of effort in this area.

The [Blueprint to Transform Connecticut's Schools](#) provides provisions and a to maintain and support the initial investment of federal dollars. The future will also require increased, purposeful, and sustained school-family communication. Technology will help achieve this goal.

The CSDE will need \$2.5M annually to help accomplish the above, set statewide standards, and report on progress.

### **Leadership in Curriculum & Instruction**

Governor's Budget: Level funded, CSDE who is short-staffed in this area.

The Blueprint to transform Connecticut's Schools provides support for:

1. Model curriculum materials that make the best use of national, state, and local curricula for all those districts without a coherent, articulated course of study aligned with state assessments and beyond.
2. Recognizes 21st-century skills of collaborating, innovating, flexibility, and solution-based problem-solving; in addition to core knowledge, develop a portrait of a graduate that includes self-confidence, connections to others, social/emotional competence, communication, responsible citizenry.
3. Elevates expectations for all students by:
  - a. Relentlessly pursuing competent literacy by third grade – for each student,
  - b. Adding greater rigor at each grade and demanding both collaborative and independent student work.
4. Utilizes the most evidence-based school improvement strategies for all students – including more instructional time (with differing methods of instruction), more student centered teaching and learning, greater teacher collaboration, targeted interventions, use of student data, and use of various technologies.
5. Provides the CSDE with \$2M to implement these strategies.

### **Student Well-being**

Governor's Biennial Budget: Continues to support the 80 school based health centers and 11 expanded sites (2021). No new money to expand further.

The [Blueprint to Transform Connecticut's Schools](#) call for developing a state, regional, and local support network for social and emotional learning, mental health and trauma support services, including interagency agreements (particularly with the Department of Children and Families – DCF) local action plans, and model programs.

Adds \$10M per year in new state grants to expand school level mental health and behavioral support programs and services, as well as school safety measures through a mixture of grants by RFP, model-developed and need-based.

Acknowledges the dramatic impact of COVID-19 on students' learning loss and mental health.

### **School District Improvement Grant**

The [Blueprint to Transform Connecticut's Schools](#) recommends merging several (five) state grants into one, new, simplified process for School Improvement to enhance student achievement. The Commissioner's Network (schools), Priority School District, After School, Extended School Hours, and School Accountability grants total roughly \$53M; these should be expanded to \$56M using funds from eliminating several other state grants. (\$3M).

Current distribution formulas for certain grants are outdated and do not achieve the original intent of the legislation due to changes in other legislation over time. **Priority School District Grants is one example of this is the use of TFA as a metric in determining PSD grant funding; Derby's loss of FY21 PSD funding. Statutes related to eligibility for TFA have changed considerably yet we still use TFA as the eligibility indicator for PSD Funds.**

In addition the Blueprint calls for:

1. Ensuring no current Alliance town would receive less than their 2020-21 total of these five grants.
2. Re-upping the most challenged school districts – with greater than 60% of students not proficient – into the Priority District group; and the next most challenged districts – with greater than 50% not proficient–into the Alliance District group.
3. Roughly 40 school districts (about 20 and 20) would be invited into this grant for a three-year period. The size of grants for the most challenged districts should be considerably larger than for the second group, roughly 90% going to Priority Districts and 10% to Alliance Districts.
4. The actual grant amounts for each district should be based on relative wealth, education need, and pupil count.
5. Districts moving in or out of the qualifications would be phased-in or out over a two-year period.
6. Eliminates the annual, separate application for new ECS dollars by Alliance Districts; but these funds will still be sent directly to districts as opposed to towns.
7. Requiring a grant application process that demonstrates thoughtful, data-driven allocation of these extra funds to improve student achievement and close achievement gaps.
8. Failing to demonstrate continuous progress would require greater state intervention in the use of the funds, and could ultimately lead to a period of state take-over. The CSDE should receive \$1M for state intervention.

9. Requiring that students not achieving the proficiency level on the state's assessments, barring other local data to the contrary, receive a sound and appropriate intervention including, but not limited to, one-on-one tutoring, sufficient to raise their achievement.
10. Encouraging the use of local non-profits for after-school, summer school, and other appropriate services—but funds to be awarded locally (not by the state legislature).
11. Encouraging the use of the community school concept with a family resource center, health clinic, 6 a.m.– 6 p.m. childcare, and 24/7/365 use of school facilities.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to give me a call. 203-751-2249 or email me at [mconway@derbyps.org](mailto:mconway@derbyps.org)