

APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE PUBLIC HEARING ON ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY EDUCATION

HB 6439: (COMM) AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH, 2023, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.

MARCH 9, 2021

TESTIMONY from Dr. Greg. J. Florio, Ed.D., Executive Director of CREC

Good evening Honorable Chairs, Ranking Members, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. I am Dr. Greg Florio, Executive Director of the Capitol Region Education Council (CREC). For 50+ years, CREC continues to work with our 35 member districts in the Hartford region to provide an array of cost-effective and high-quality educational programs and services. We also work together as an alliance with other Connecticut RESCs acting as a statewide network in the procurement of educational services and resources.

I request that the legislature consider the following adjustments to the Governor's budget proposal:

1) Magnet School Funding: Enact a 3% increase for magnet schools grants to sustain Connecticut's high-quality, integrated, regional education programs for the over 39,000 magnet school students.

The state's base funding for Sheff-region magnet schools remained statutorily unchanged for nearly a decade until the legislature approved a 2% increase in payment for magnet schools statewide in the 2019 biennial budget. This increase provided short-term relief, but did not cover the full funding need. The current magnet grant only covers 65% of our operating costs.

Interdistrict magnet schools enroll more than 35,000 students in 85+ schools distributed throughout the state. In 2020-21, there are 40 Sheff magnet schools and 18,690 students in Sheff magnet schools. Magnet schools fulfill a mission to ensure that all students have access to high-quality, integrated education. CREC Magnet Schools have made a significant effort to reduce expenditures through cuts to staff and programming and the magnet school programs have run deficits.

Without additional funding, a greater burden will be placed on local towns as a result of increases in tuition from RESC-operated magnet schools. This year, students from CREC magnet schools reside in over 80 towns across the state. Magnet schools enroll a diverse student population and a large portion of magnet school students reside in Alliance Districts with nearly 50% of CREC Magnet School students coming from Hartford and 26% from five of the major cities and Alliance Districts in the Hartford region (Bloomfield, East Hartford, Manchester, New Britain and Windsor). Without the needed increase in the RESC magnet grant, these towns are disproportionately harmed due to the higher amount in tuition they have to pay to the RESCs.

Please include this important 3% increase in the budget for magnet school grants.

2) Sheff Transportation: Create a technical change to 10-264i to allow for transportation grants to be paid on a quarterly basis based on documented vendor bills.

For over 10 years, CREC has managed transportation services for Sheff programs under a contract with the State Department of Education (SDE)'s Regional School Choice Office (RSCO) to transport nearly 14,000 students annually. These services are essential in order for the state to meet the conditions of the Sheff Settlement Agreement.

Currently, CREC pays for the entire cost of transportation until the state completes a full financial audit, and reimburses for services already rendered for each school year in May. It is an on-going issue that creates a financial burden on CREC to manage the service and pay the vendors. In order for CREC to continue providing

Sheff transportation services and to pay vendors in a timely manner, payment of supplemental transportation should be on a quarterly basis. Attached to my testimony is draft language to make this change.

3) Teacher Diversity and Recruitment: Allocate \$4.5 million annually to fully fund the Teacher Residency Program to ensure that approximately 60 new teachers of color are hired across Connecticut.

The State's commitment to increasing the racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of our teaching workforce is laudable, but more needs to be done. In 2019, CREC created a proven method in identifying, training and certifying 26 new teachers of color through our 18 month Teacher Residency Program. As of the 2019-20 school year, educators of color are under-represented (9.6%) relative to the number of students of color (39.6%) in the state. The Teacher Residency Program has demonstrated early success that should be expanded upon with investment from the state.

Given that CT's racial makeup of teachers is predominately white and more than half of Connecticut's students identify as Hispanic, Black, Asian, or two or more races, it is a critical time for us to create teachers whose narrative and lens on life is reflective of this population. It allow for more diverse perspective in the classrooms while enhancing critical thinking and analytical thinking skills for all students. The RESC Alliance is prepared to expand this program statewide through a partnership with over 20 already identified districts. However, support from the state is necessary for successful implementation.

For more information: [CREC 2021 Legislative Priorities.pdf](#)

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2021 SHEFF TRANSPORTATION REQUEST

Proposed Language:

Sec. 261. Subdivision (4) of subsection (a) of section 10-264i of the general statutes are repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective July 1, 2019*):

(4) In addition to the grants otherwise provided pursuant to this section, the Commissioner of Education may provide supplemental transportation grants to regional educational service centers for the purposes of transportation to interdistrict magnet schools. Any such grant shall be provided within available appropriations and after the commissioner has reviewed and approved the total interdistrict magnet school transportation budget for a regional educational service center, including all revenue and expenditure estimates. For the fiscal years ending June 30, 2013, to June 30, 2018, inclusive, in addition to the grants otherwise provided pursuant to this section, the Commissioner of Education may provide supplemental transportation to interdistrict magnet schools that assist the state in meeting its obligations pursuant to the decision in *Sheff v. O'Neill*, 238 Conn. 1 (1996), or any related stipulation or order in effect, as determined by the commissioner. Any such grant shall be provided within available appropriations and upon a comprehensive financial review, by an auditor selected by the Commissioner of Education, the costs of such review may be paid from funds that are part of the supplemental transportation grant. Any such grant shall be paid as follows: For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2013, up to fifty per cent of the grant on or before June 30, 2013, and the balance on or before September 1, 2013, upon completion of the comprehensive financial review; for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2014, up to fifty per cent of the grant on or before June 30, 2014, and the balance on or before September 1, 2014, upon completion of the comprehensive financial review; for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2015, up to fifty per cent of the grant on or before June 30, 2015, and the balance on or before September 1, 2015, upon completion of the comprehensive financial review; for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2016, up to fifty per cent of the grant on or before June 30, 2016, and the balance on or before September 1, 2016, upon completion of the comprehensive financial review; for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2017, up to seventy per cent of the grant on or before June 30, 2017, and the balance on or before May 30, 2018, upon completion of the comprehensive financial review; for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2018, up to seventy per cent of the grant on or before June 30, 2018, and the balance on or before September 1, 2018, upon completion of the comprehensive financial review; and for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2019, **[and each fiscal year thereafter,]** up to seventy per cent of the grant on or before June 30 of the fiscal year, and the balance on or before September 1 of the following fiscal year upon completion of the comprehensive financial review; **and for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2021, and each fiscal year thereafter, any unpaid balance of eligible transportation costs through and including December 31 of the fiscal year based on documented vendor bills through that date on or before February 1 of the fiscal year, and any unpaid balance of eligible transportation costs through and including March 31 of the fiscal year based on documented vendor bills through that date on or before May 1 of the fiscal year, and the balance of the grant on or before September 1 of the following fiscal year upon completion of the comprehensive financial review.**