



**Testimony of
Mathew Hough
President Ansonia Federation of Teachers**

**Appropriations Committee
March 9, 2020**

**Hearing on the Governor's Budget
Recommendations Concerning Education**

My name is Mathew Hough. I am a resident of the town of Oxford with 2 children attending Oxford public schools. I am also President of the Ansonia Federation of Teachers, where I have taught music for 21 years. I have experienced the pandemic both as a parent struggling to support my children and as a union leader fighting to keep my teachers safe. It is with that in mind that I am opposing the freeze to ECS funding in the governor's proposed budget.

We have known for years that Connecticut has a tremendous divide between the haves and the have nots. This is seen easily within the education system and was clearly amplified during the current pandemic. As relief money flowed in, the more affluent towns spent it on purchasing robust remote learning products and technology that would make life easier and provide unique experiences. They added additional staff to reduce class size and allowed many teachers to work from home. In my district and others like it, we spent the money on trying to connect with our students and get them to engage in the learning process. There was no money left to bring in additional staff or provide additional support for remote learning. We were forced to stay remote for an extended period because of class size. It was simply not safe to be in classes with 25 or more students.

The reality is though that this divide has always been there. Funding has been denied to our most at risk schools from every source. The federal government has never fully funded Title and IDEA. The state has never fairly funded schools, and localities can't

afford to make up the difference. The current ECS formula was designed to bridge that gap. Unfortunately, that money is really used to cover the increased cost of doing business. Ansonia does not have the ability to continue to raise taxes, so the schools rely on ECS increases and grants to survive. Because of this, we know what happens when the money dries up. We know firsthand what happens when the grant runs out. Programs are cut and students lose out.

In Ansonia, our elementary schools do not have functioning libraries, there is no band or chorus until high school. Middle school and freshman sports have been cut. Students have limited access to the arts, drama, foreign languages, and other programs most districts consider a standard part of their education. These cuts happened as a direct result of the elimination of grants, more specifically, being successful and losing priority district funding. The alliance grant funds we now need receive help us to increase intervention, keep kids in school, track attendance, and reduce class size. It already has done nothing to close the gap.

We are now at a crossroads once again. The Governor would like districts to rely on ANTICIPATED federal funding, which is really nothing more than a 1-year grant. Things might be really good for us next year. It will allow us to continue to do business. When that money is gone, the district will have to cover 2 years' worth of contractual increases and 2 years of increases to the cost of doing business. Some towns may be able to absorb that cost. History tells us that won't and shouldn't happen in Ansonia. The result will be the reduction of staff, the elimination of programs, and less opportunity for my students. Teachers will be laid off. Most of them will get jobs in other districts. They will be fine. It is my students who will lose. They already have far fewer opportunities than most students and it will only get worse. My students need every bit of the promised ECS funding and more so that they have the educational experiences they deserve, the same experiences most other students in Connecticut already have every day.

I urge you to oppose the ECS freeze in the Governor's budget.