

Testimony before the Appropriations Committee on 5/9/21

Good afternoon to the co-chairs, vice-chairs, ranking members and members of the Appropriations Committee.

I'm Representative Mike Winkler here today to speak against the two-year freeze in the implementation of the Education Cost Sharing formula in H.B. 6439. I had hoped that the ECS freeze would have been declared dead on arrival at the legislature but that's not what happened.

The Education Cost Sharing formula is the most important way the state gets money to local school districts. Recognizing that politics of the worst kind had resulted in some school districts getting more money than could be justified and other school districts receiving less money than they needed, the legislature implemented a ten-year plan to correct the ECS formula.

That year was my first in the legislature and I was surprised and proud that representatives of comparatively well-to-do communities agreed to less money for their towns as part of a grand budget compromise. I now see that some people were betting that the state would never carry through with a ten-year funding commitment including redistribution of educational funding.

Now, only three years into the ten-year ECS plan, we have that proposal that will freeze the ongoing correction of the ECS formula for two years to save money on students with educational needs.

One goal of the ECS formula is to equalize educational outcomes. Schools in predominantly low-income neighborhoods need more resources to reach this goal. They need smaller classes, more teachers and paraprofessionals and specialists, more help and enrichment.

The legislature committed to increasing overall educational funding by about \$40 million per year while also transferring money from comparatively well-off communities to communities with greater educational need.

Freezing the ECS formula guarantees that Alliance districts will take years longer to reach that goal of equal educational outcomes. Some children will fall behind and never catch up because the additional resources which were slated to go to those districts to help those children will be delayed for years and their opportunity will be lost.

Another goal of the ten-year plan to correct the ECS formula was to bring economic and racial equity to school funding in Connecticut. Further delay towards that goal is unacceptable.

Maintaining or accelerating the implementation of the Education Cost Sharing formula should be our most important goal for this legislative session. For me, it is more important than any spending cap.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.