

CONNECTICUT COALITION FOR ***JUSTICE*** IN EDUCATION FUNDING

Letter to the Editor, *Connecticut Post*
August 14, 2007

A misleading report on education

The July 9 Yankee Institute opinion piece, "Race-based racketeering in public education," contains misguided assertions concerning the nature of the CCJEF education adequacy/equity lawsuit against the state. The article also cites several questionable research studies that were conducted, funded, and/or published by notoriously biased ultra-conservatives who seek to privatize American education and are most assuredly not concerned with improving the social and economic plight of poor, minority, immigrant, or disabled children and their families. The attack on interdistrict magnet schools is particularly misguided.

Given the changing demographics of this state and nation, our quality of life and economic future depend on putting such race-baiting and related classist perspectives behind. Today some 195,000 minority children bring diversity to Connecticut classrooms, representing about a third of the state's public school enrollment. And more than a quarter of all public school children come from low-income homes. These children are neither liberals nor conservatives -- rather, they are our future workforce, community leaders, neighbors, and majority population!

Inasmuch as moral and economic imperatives have not yet compelled us to do what is necessary to provide equal educational opportunity, CCJEF fully intends to press its education adequacy and equity lawsuit to enforce these children's constitutional rights. In fact, it is not just the underfunding of urban school districts that is at issue, but rather the inadequate funding by the state of every public school district in Connecticut.

CCJEF is also challenging the inequitable manner in which the too-meager state aid is distributed among municipalities and the educational inequities that stem from too heavy a reliance on local property taxes for funding what is essentially a state constitutional obligation.

Over 30 years ago in its *Horton v. Meskill* decision, the Connecticut Supreme Court already spoke about the failure of the state to properly fund education. Unfortunately, the "devil" has been in the unresolved details. Not only has the state's funding system failed to keep pace with changing educational needs and costs, but also the over-reliance on regressive property taxes has become onerous for low- and mid-income taxpayers, especially senior citizens, young families, and others living on modest fixed incomes.

Indeed, schools, students, and taxpayers in every community are suffering from the state's broken school funding system. And yes, this even applies to school funding in Greenwich -- along with smaller towns that serve predominately white student populations, such as Ashford, Branford, Coventry, Newtown, Plainfield, Shelton, and Windsor Locks. As the 2007 Mastery Test results show, it's not just the lack of academic progress among urban students that is a cause for concern.

Whether state legislators represent suburban, urban or rural communities, increasing numbers of them "get it," as does Gov. M. Jodi Rell and the public at large. But in the absence of sufficient political will to effectively overhaul the system -- and this year's legislative changes fall far short of that mark -- the courts have a pivotal role to play in securing needed reforms and enforcing the fundamental rights of all school children to adequate and equal educational opportunity.

Yale Law School's Education Adequacy Clinic is representing CCJEF and the other named plaintiffs in this lawsuit pro bono, given the civil rights merits of the claims. None of us can figure out how Lewis Andrews in his essay could in good conscience describe our actions as "race-based racketeering." Our action is brought on behalf of all schoolchildren, not just minority students. And "racketeering" refers to purposely fraudulent and deceitful behaviors, such as bribery and money-laundering, conspiracy to commit extortion and other felony acts, or obstruction of justice. Can someone please loan the Yankee Institute a dictionary?

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