



Connecticut Coalition
for Justice in Education Funding

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Children and Their Schools Need to Thrive, Not Just Survive

Two months ago, the Governor released a budget proposal that flat-funded the state's primary education equalization aid program, the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) grant, but arguably did so only by relying on erroneous revenue and deficit assumptions.

Last week, the General Assembly's Appropriations Committee passed a proposed budget for the next two fiscal years that also keeps the ECS grant flat, but appears to more realistically and compassionately address many of the tough issues facing Connecticut in these difficult economic times.

Neither of these proposals do enough to sustain and improve Connecticut's public schools.

Quite simply, flat funding of the ECS is a cut. For most school districts, it is indeed a serious cut that will result in significant layoffs — of teachers, paraprofessionals, literacy and numeracy coaches, assistant principals, social workers, school psychologists, librarians, parent/school coordinators, custodians, etc. — as well as larger class sizes, fewer electives and extracurricular offerings, a curtailment of professional development for teachers, and the termination of many important programs, such as cutting full-day kindergarten back to half-day, dropping world language instruction at the middle grades, eliminating enrichment activities and gifted/talented opportunities, or cancelling certain sports programs that have routinely been offered at the high school.

As municipalities and their school boards struggle to pay for rising wages tied to contractual obligations, ever-escalating health care premiums, soaring special education costs, mounting energy and transportation costs, and increasingly heavy burdens owing to No Child Left Behind and other federal and state mandates, the Governor and General Assembly must recognize that the bulk of education costs cannot continue to be passed on to cities and towns.

The short-term ramifications of the state's broken, outmoded school finance system and its heavy reliance on local property taxes are already apparent: inadequately resourced schools, gross inequities of school quality, unacceptably low academic performance by students in far too many communities, and the nation's worst achievement gap.

Clearly it is our children who suffer most from the state's failed school finance policies and practices. Most notably, it is the children from low-wealth communities, children from non-English speaking homes, and children needing special education services who are most placed at risk by the state's inadequate and inequitable education funding policies — children served by CAUS (Connecticut Association of Urban Superintendents) and Priority District Schools, plus an alarming and growing number of small-town/rural districts.

Neither the Governor's nor Democrats' budget proposal improves the state's flawed school funding system that is jeopardizing our public schools and placing at risk the social and economic well-being of children, families, their communities, and the entire state.

Connecticut is in urgent need of systemic school funding reform to sustain an educational system that passes constitutional muster, prepares young people academically and socially to lead productive and successful adult lives, and ensures the long-term vitality of an informed and engaged citizenry and a globally competitive workforce.

We must focus on ensuring that all our children and their public schools thrive, not just survive.

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