

Testimony of
Ana Batista
President, Bridgeport Education Association

Before the
Appropriations Committee

Re:
**HB 6439 AAC THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH, 2023, AND
MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR**

March 9, 2021

Good afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Ana Batista, and I am a teacher in Bridgeport Public Schools and the President of the Bridgeport Education Association (BEA).

I testify today on Governor Lamont's budget bill (HB 6439) as it affects school children and teachers in Bridgeport.

In 2017, the legislature enacted a phase in of the new ECS formula that began to make progress toward the state meeting its obligation to fully fund the formula for cities like Bridgeport. We oppose the governor's proposal to suspend ECS and flat fund it for two years. We also believe that his plan to use federal funds meant to address COVID to plug the hole in ECS would leave Bridgeport children even further behind.

Bridgeport schools have endured decades of underfunding and steep, that impact critical resources and services. More than 73% of Bridgeport's budget comes from the state budget, so we are particularly sensitive to changes. Since 2016, Bridgeport's budget has declined when inflation is taken into consideration. The governor's proposal to freeze ECS will further decimate Bridgeport.

Over 20% of our children are English learners. 18% are identified as needing special education. Due to the intense poverty in the community every child is eligible to receive free or reduced lunch. The resources we need to provide equal opportunities are significant. Freezing ECS will result in taking more away from children who have the least resources in the state.

Following are some examples impacted by the loss of ECS monies:

1. Desperately needed Social Workers and Guidance Counselors will not be available to students at a time when support for children facing trauma is greatest.
2. Numeracy and Literacy Coaches that were eliminated will not be restored, continuing the long-term harm.
3. Middle school foreign language classes will not be available at a time when we need more future workers able to engage in a world economy.
4. Persistence of inadequate supplies – Our Bridgeport teachers reach into their pockets to buy supplies and basic items students need, but there is only so much they can do.

5. Smartboards will remain in disrepair while students in neighboring districts benefit from the advances of technology used for teaching.
6. Internet access and the availability of devices and computers remains inadequate, as does the district's internet system.
7. Recruitment of teachers of color is hindered by insufficient resources and incentives.
8. Lack of paraeducators in the early grades retards reading and math proficiency.
9. Noncompetitive salaries, handicap recruiting and retaining teachers of Special Education, Bilingual, Science, and other shortage areas.
10. Dangerous and worsening air quality, inadequately maintained HVAC systems, room temperatures that range widely, exacerbate mold and difficult conditions for learning.

All of these are deficiencies that were in existence before COVID-19. The needs of students have intensified during the pandemic. The COVID-related resources that will be required to address students' social and emotional needs, as well as their learning opportunities, are above and beyond what Bridgeport would receive with the planned increase in ECS. That is why the new, short-term federal CARES funds should be designated to address COVID-related needs and not be used to replace ECS increases.

Please keep ECS phase-in funded and ensure federal COVID-related funds get to our classrooms.

Thank you.

Sincerely,
Ana Batista
Bilingual Educator
Bridgeport Education Association (BEA) President