

*Testimony of*  
*Donald E. Williams, Jr.*  
**Connecticut Education Association**  
Before the  
**Education Committee**

Re:

- SB 886      AA IMPLEMENTING THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET  
RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING EDUCATION**
- SB 946      AAC THE MINIMUM BUDGET REQUIREMENT**
- SB 947      AA ESTABLISHING A WORKING GROUP TO REVIEW THE  
EFFECTS OF THE EDUCATION COST SHARING GRANT  
FORMULA ON SMALL AND RURAL TOWNS**
- SB 948      AA ADDRESSING EDUCATION FUNDING AND RACIAL  
EQUITY IN CONNECTICUT**
- SB 949      AAC THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A MONEY-FOLLOWS-THE-  
CHILD APPROACH TO FUNDING PUBLIC EDUCATION**

March 3, 2021

Good afternoon Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty, and members of the Education Committee.

I am Donald Williams, Executive Director of the Connecticut Education Association. CEA represents active and retired educators from over 150 school districts in the State.

**Overview**

- CEA supports following through on the state's commitment to fully fund the ECS formula in the next biennial budget. State education dollars must not be supplanted with one-time federal funds. Those federal funds are intended to help address the impact and inequities of the pandemic, especially in our urban and high poverty school districts.
- CEA also supports proposals to address the education funding needs of small towns, especially those with declining enrollments.
- We support the Governor's pilot program allowing students from Danbury or Norwalk to attend school in a surrounding town.

- We recommend expanding funding for Special Education, and Bilingual programs.
- Finally, CEA recommends replacing the Minimum Budget Requirement, with a restored Minimum Expenditure Requirement, to ensure that local funds budgeted for education and schools are actually released to our students and schools.

## **ECS**

In 2017, the legislature enacted a new ECS formula and phase-in process that has been followed since that time. Now is not the time, with the challenges of the pandemic and education needs greater than ever, to freeze the state's ECS commitment, or rush through changes in the legislature's formula.

Freezing ECS would derail the progress made to maintain a predictable and dependable state funding formula. It will also create a large shortfall in the state's commitment to education in the next biennium, when the one-time federal dollars used to supplant state funding are no more.

CEA believes the state should keep the promise it made in 2017, with the necessary increases in education funding each year. We also support the proposal in SB 947 to study the impact of the existing formula on small towns and thank the committee for including CEA representation in the bill.

We oppose the proposal to replace the state's commitment to ECS with one-time federal CARES funds, because the CARES funds are intended to help with the consequences of the pandemic.

Specifically, the federal funds can help Connecticut address the needs of English learners, students living in poverty, students who have experienced trauma, those harmed by asthma and poor air quality air, and special needs students facing unique challenges in these times.

## **Social and Emotional Needs**

The impact of the pandemic on many school children has been traumatic. Schools need to provide more support from trained, certified social workers, counselors, and mental health professionals. It also means providing more opportunities for children to re-engage in enrichment activities, especially during the summer.

## **English Learners**

The growing number of students in Connecticut schools who are English learners is impacting districts—large and small—across the state. The state's support has been inadequate, and primarily directed to a few large districts. This fails to meet the needs of all English learners in Connecticut.

If we fund ECS as planned, and direct some of the federal funds to address the needs of EL students, we can re-engage students and help meet their needs. We also must keep track of ECS spending for English learners. Districts must be required to report the amount of ECS funds spent on EL students, in the same way that reporting is required for federal EL funds.

## **HVAC, Pandemic Air Quality, and Childhood Asthma**

Federal CARES funds can help the state address the air quality problems in our schools—heating, ventilation, humidity, and air conditioning. Poor school air quality has a disproportionate impact on children in communities impacted by poverty, and fosters conditions that worsen childhood asthma.

Poor school air quality and ventilation also hurt efforts to prevent the spread of infectious disease and viruses, such as COVID-19.

Recently, Vermont used federal relief funds to address school air quality head on by instituting a program supporting indoor air quality in schools. Connecticut must do the same and provide support in the future through the state's school construction bonding funds.

### **Special Education**

CEA opposes the freezing of the Special Education Excess Cost grant. The number of students who require intense services is increasing, and the level of special education staffing is not sufficient—this hurts the ability of schools to meet children's needs. The effects of the pandemic have worsened these challenges.

We must fund ECS as intended by the legislature and direct a portion of the federal relief funds to the needs of special education students during the pandemic.

### **MBR / MER**

CEA urges legislators to restore the Minimum Budget Requirement (MBR) to a Minimum Expenditure Requirement (MER). That was the law prior to 2007.

As currently written, the MBR is a loophole in K-12 education funding. It allows local boards of finance to take taxpayer dollars—collected for education—and shift them to non-education spending, without telling taxpayers. It was a short-sighted change that has since pitted local boards of finance against local boards of education. The fundamental problem is that the MBR tells towns how much they have to collect for education, but does not require that it be spent on education.

We used to have a better, more transparent system that delivers education dollars to our schools. Before July 1, 2007, the Minimum Expenditure Requirement (MER) required towns to spend local taxpayer monies collected for education on education. It is difficult to see how there can be an honest conversation about education funding until we ensure that all state and local taxpayer monies collected for education are spent on education. CEA supports restoring the Minimum Expenditure Requirement to ensure that the dollars we think are going to education actually benefit our students and schools.

Thank you very much for your attention to these issues.