



Connecticut Education Association

Capitol Place, Suite 500
21 Oak Street, Hartford, CT 06106
860-525-5641 | cea.org

Governance

Kate Dias, President
Joslyn DeLancey, Vice President
Tara Flaherty, Secretary
Stephanie Wanzer, Treasurer

Executive Director

Todd Jaeck

Testimony of

**Kate Dias, President & Joslyn DeLancey, Vice President
Connecticut Education Association**

Before the
Education Committee

Re:

**SB 1 AA INCREASING RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS, SCHOOLS AND SPECIAL
EDUCATION**

SB1510 AAC ASSORTED REVISIONS TO THE EDUCATION STATUTES

SB 1511 AAC DISCONNECTED YOUTH

SB 1512 AA ESTABLISHING THE SCHOOL DISTRICT ACCOUNTABILITY REVIEW BOARD

HB 7217 AAC VARIOUS REVISIONS TO THE EDUCATION STATUTES

March 12, 2025

Senator McCrory, Representative Leeper, Senator Berthel, Representative Zupkus, and members of the Education Committee. We are Kate Dias, President, and Joslyn DeLancey, Vice President of the Connecticut Education Association (CEA), which represents educators in over 150 school districts across the state. Today we are submitting testimony on various bills noted below.

We testify today on numerous proposals contained in the bills noted above. We commend the committee's work across these bills to address important themes such as school district fiscal accountability and teacher recruitment and retention. We are also very pleased to see a movement to establish a trust fund to fund a statewide universal Pre-kindergarten program on an ongoing basis.

Regarding fiscal accountability, CEA has advanced proposals for more accurate and transparent school budget reporting. In particular, we have advocated prohibiting the use

of multiple rainy-day funds and confusing reporting practices that mislead voters about how their tax dollars are being used (see attached background). We have also asked that towns that do not spend their entire amount budgeted for their schools be required to detail how the education-budgeted monies were otherwise allocated. And we have drawn attention to the inexplicable growth of higher-paid administrative positions at the expense of fair pay for teachers and paraeducators.

SB 1 requires, among other things, clearer reporting on budget reserve funds, as well as measures of class size, student-teacher ratios, data on vacancies, and non-profit services utilized by school districts. SB 1512 adds additional tools for intervening in schools identified as in need of support under ESSA. In addition to technical guidance, SB 1512 proposes stronger fiscal controls for schools requiring intervention to better ensure that budget dollars are targeted to classrooms.

SB 1510, which also addresses fiscal accountability, establishes a pilot uniform budgeting accounting system. And HB 7217 requires better reporting on budgeted amounts versus actual spending. This provision, which should be applicable to all public school expenditures, would help determine whether investments promised were investments made. Taken together, we endorse these initial steps toward ensuring that funds targeting schools supports teaching and learning.

SB 1 also sunsets the Alliance District Program and Commissioner's Network Schools. We agree that it is time to reimagine how school districts can be better supported. We hope that in doing so, funding for these programs is maintained and repurposed to invest in what we know works best for students: involving and supporting teachers in the decisions affecting their students, classrooms, and schools.

All things considered, these various provisions address how school budgets are spent and provide a window into whether they are spent wisely. For school districts to improve recruitment and retention, meet the growing needs of students in the general education program as well as special education, and address many other needs, they not only need funding that keeps pace with inflation, but they also need to better target funding and reduce expenses outside of teaching and learning. The transparency provisions offered today, along with others CEA suggests, can help accomplish this goal.

We also appreciate the goals of SB 1511, which seeks to reconnect youth to schooling and lifelong learning. We support the bill's approach to improving data collection to better target services and programs, particularly for skill development. We also support another key component of this bill – increasing the base per pupil expenditure foundation used in the ECS formula to reflect inflation.

We commend the legislature's efforts over recent years to phase in to fully funding the formula. However, the formula itself has not adjusted for inflation in over a decade. Even districts that are held harmless to enrollment declines are experiencing a steep decline in

state support in real, inflation adjusted dollars. ECS should keep pace with inflation and should be coupled with the fiscal accountability requirements that ensure that ECS funding gets to schools and into classrooms.

With respect to special education funding, increases in Excess Cost grants help school districts balance their books for placements of high-cost student placements in private provider programs. These funds do not increase funding to address special education teacher workloads, IEP compliance, or quality of services. A significant increase in funds directed to special education classrooms is necessary, especially in light of the federal government's failure to fund programs sufficiently.

Additionally, we support the proposal to add a special education student weight of 50% to ECS – a provision that was initially brought forward by the Special Education Task Force, on which CEA serves. We also note that just as it is the case with weights for English learners, and students qualifying for free and reduced priced lunch, increased funding for special education services delivered via the ECS formula are not guaranteed to be spent on special education. As this idea moves forward, we ask committee members to consider targeting weighted funds to the purpose indicated by the weight, and to also ensure that such weighting does not result in overidentification of students as a means for receiving larger ECS grants.

Adding such a weight would serve as an incentive to school districts to identify students as requiring special education in order to qualify for higher ECS grant amounts. Also, just as it is the case with weights for English learners, and students qualifying for free and reduced priced lunch, increased funding for special education services delivered via the ECS formula are not guaranteed to be spent on special education. We ask committee members to consider other strategies for establishing a grant to school districts for in-district special education services.

We also commend the committee's efforts to address teacher recruitment and retention. SB 1513 includes stipends for student teachers – an initiative CEA brought forward on behalf of our hundreds of aspiring educators. The amount of the stipends is yet-to-be determined, and we urge committee members to look to example from other states noted in CEA's testimony submitted for SB 1513.

We support the idea in SB 1 to expand the availability of diversity scholarships that will help address under-utilization of the program and ensure that funds can achieve their purpose. We also support incentives for attracting and retaining teachers in districts like Alliance Districts that increase pension credit and early retirement bonuses as outlined in SB 1510. Additionally, we recognize that the reemployment of retired teachers proposed in SB 1 is well intentioned, but also recommend clarifications to ensure that positions employing retired teachers cannot replace positions for active teachers.

Lastly, we commend efforts by legislators in this committee, and others, to protect Connecticut's character, culture, and laws by securing into law critical duties of the state threatened to be eroded by federal action. HB 7219 codifies Section 504 of the 1973 Rehabilitation Act, which prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities. We support this bill.

Thank you for your consideration of our testimony.

Honesty in Municipal Board of Education Finances 2025 Session

1. MBR

Towns are not required to spend what they budget for education based on the Minimum Budget Requirement (MBR). It only has to be “budgeted.” This allows taxpayers dollars collected for K-12 to be used for other purposes.

- **Replace the MBR with the Minimum Expenditure Requirement (MER), which requires monies budgeted for education to be spent on education. The MER was in place until 2007 when it was replaced by the MBR.**
- **Require ECS funds to be paid directly to boards of education.**
- **Require towns that do not spend their entire amount budgeted for its schools to detail how the education-budgeted monies were otherwise spent.**

2. Town Surplus and Budget Reserves

Towns often carry large balances in the unassigned portion of their General Fund. It varies widely with some towns having over 20% of their General Fund balance being unassigned. This allows towns to sequester funds that could otherwise be used for salaries/benefits for teachers and municipal workers. There is no standard for an appropriate level of funding for an unassigned fund. However, the Government Finance Officers Association recommends at least two months of operating revenues/expenses which is 16.7% of expenditures (conversely, a percentage that is too low will negatively affect a town’s credit rating). Additionally, some towns hide funds in multiple unassigned budget reserve funds in a way that obscures fiscal transparency.

- **Establish a statutory maximum limiting the amount of monies that a town can have in an unassigned fund.**
- **Prohibit towns from maintaining more than one unassigned fund for the General Fund (e.g. Stamford has two unassigned funds in its General Fund).**

Honesty in Municipal Fiscal Audits

Towns can misrepresent annual audit findings in their auditor’s “Management’s Discussion and Analysis” sections. Currently, this section of an audit is “unaudited.” This allows towns and boards of education to misrepresent their financial situation in multiple venues, including when bargaining with employee bargaining units.

- **Require municipal auditor’s Management’s Discussion and Analysis” sections to be consistent with findings from the audit and should therefore be “audited.”**

3. Honesty in Capital Project Funding

Depending on a town's charter, a town may be able to collect or set aside funds for capital projects that have not been approved (this was happening in Windsor Locks). Consequently, property owners may be over-taxed which can artificially lower the amount of property taxes that can be used for K-12.

- **Prohibit towns from collecting revenue for capital projects that have not yet been approved.**

4. Endowed academies (Gilbert, Woodstock, and Norwich Free)

Endowed academies are not required to provide financial data to SDE even though sending districts pay tuition, which is partially from ECS funds. Consequently, it is difficult to determine how they are spending taxpayer dollars.

- **Require endowed academies to provide financial data like traditional districts, regional districts, and charter schools do.**