

**CONNECTICUT STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
Hartford**

Ad Hoc Committee on Education Cost Sharing and Choice Funding

Minutes

**Monday, August 16, 2010
9:30 a.m.
165 Capitol Avenue, Room 307A
Hartford, Connecticut**

Committee members present: Joseph Brennan, Joseph Cirasuolo, George Coleman, Sherri DiNello, Kathy Guay, Alex Johnston, Vinny Loffredo (designee for John Yrchik), Fred McKinney, Mark McQuillan, Robert Rader (designee for Patrice McCarthy), Allan Taylor, Kachina Walsh-Weaver (designee for James Finley), Dudley Williams

Committee members absent: Vincent Candelora, Deborah Heinrich, Theresa Hopkins-Staten, Douglas McCrory, Sharon Palmer

- I. Commissioner McQuillan called the meeting to order at 9:35 a.m., and members introduced themselves.
- II. Approval of Minutes of July 19, 2010, Committee Meeting
Ms. DiNello moved, Mr. McKinney seconded, to approve the minutes of the July 19, 2010, meeting. Motion carried; Mr. Cirasuolo, Mr. Loffredo, Mr. Rader and Mr. Williams abstained.
- III. Discussion of Survey Results: Core Values
Laura Downs, Discussion Facilitator, welcomed Committee members. Ms. Downs noted the following correction to the Core Values Discussion Summary distributed to members: Page 2 of 4, Item C.2 – last sentence should be changed to “It was noted that transportation grants have been capped and the formula levels have not been funded.”

Ms. Downs summarized for the group the previous Core Values discussion and then proceeded on with the agenda.

“Connecticut’s system for financing public schools is structurally broken.”

The majority of members agreed with this statement. During lengthy discussion, however, members’ comments included:

The statement appears to relate to additional funding. At this time, the State does not have money to add into education.

State responsibility vs. local responsibility. If one looks at ECS as it stands, a large portion goes to the neediest districts in the State.

Regardless of the State’s budget issues, the funding system is still broken. Furthermore, towns have the burden to produce and pay for public education regardless of the State budget.

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Members need to remember that ECS is not the only method of funding – we still must think about Choice. However, Choice formulas are not necessarily all consistent.

If the financing system isn't structurally broken, then why was this Committee formed?

“Connecticut’s system for funding public schools should not be as dependent on local property taxes as it currently is, and the State should pick up a larger share of the cost than it does.”

The majority of members agreed with this statement.

“Connecticut’s ECS formula is sound, but merely needs to be funded adequately.”

Members were split on this statement, and there was lengthy discussion. Members' comments included:

When looking at per pupil expenditures, most needy and most wealthy towns spend about the same. The issue is not the amount of funding, but rather, where is it coming from.

However, if school districts are spending about the same, why are students from needier towns not getting the same services?

There is nothing in the formula that really focuses on towns' ability to pay.

Though there is a penalty for not meeting the minimum budget requirement, some towns do not see it as a disincentive.

The formula is broken - not necessarily totally flawed – but beyond being tweaked.

The Committee should look at the formula theoretically – regardless of State funding.

The formula has changed over the years. It is an ongoing formula, but it has had to be capped, held harmless, stoploss, etc. over the years. But does “capping” mean that the formula is not being used?

Should the term ECS “program” be used, since there are more components to ECS than just the formula itself.

The Committee needs to look at other variables and resources, for example, how special education is funded.

The original charge of the Committee was to focus on Choice options. Discussions have now begun to move to allocation and adequacy. But without knowing how much funding will be available in the future, where will the Committee go with larger picture?

After much discussion, a revised statement was presented to Committee members:
“Connecticut’s ECS formula and accompanying programs are not functioning effectively.”

For further discussion purposes, the group reached consensus on this item.

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“Suburban communities are now being disadvantaged because so much of the State’s contribution to public education is directed to students in urban communities.”

The majority of members disagreed with this statement. Members’ comments included: Communities may be disadvantaged because the system is broken – not because the funding is being directed to urban areas.

The largest unfunded mandate is special education, which is a federal mandate, not state.

A revised statement was presented to Committee members:

“The ECS formula and accompanying programs are not functioning effectively thereby disadvantaging many different types of communities.”

It was noted that the new graduation requirements will require more funding for teachers, building space, etc.

The Committee needs to look at the distribution in the State – where is the money coming from – state/local/federal sources.

Using the word “communities” does not put the focus on children, which is what the focus should be.

“Local control over public school funding is an essential component of a fair and equitable system of educating all children.”

Members were split on this statement. Members’ comments included:

As long as towns are mandated to provide education and fund it, the town needs to have control.

More and more students are attending different schools. But we also need to keep resources with students who are staying in local schools.

“To expand the funding for more Choice options, the State needs to establish a “money follows the child” system, where the local tax dollars normally spent on a student should be transferred to the school he or she is attending.”

Ten members agreed to this statement.

“Parents should have a right to enroll their student in any choice program in the State, irrespective of where they live.”

Ten members agree that Choice options should be expanded, but there was lengthy discussion regarding this matter. Members’ comments included:

What if space isn’t available at certain Choice facilities?

The cost of transportation is the major issue – who will pay for transporting students to other towns?

Especially in the Sheff region, if parents have full right, it could upset the balance in the schools with regard to the *Sheff vs. O’Neill* Settlement.

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Some children may suffer because parents will not make these choices.

A revised statement was presented to the Committee:

“Within limitations, parents should be able to enroll their student in any Choice program.”

Consensus was reached on this revised statement.

IV. Meeting Schedule of Working Group

The next meeting of the Work Group is scheduled for Wednesday, August 25, 2010. The concept of regionalism will be discussed and a determination made on how to present it to the full Committee.

V. Selection of Policy Analyst

Commissioner McQuillan does not yet see the need to bring in a Policy Analyst. He is anticipating that an analyst will be needed by November/December.

VI. Future Discussion Topics

Ms. Downs will summarize all of the Committee's consensus items for discussion at future meetings.

Commissioner McQuillan asked Mr. Johnston to work on a model for Choice options. Mr. Johnston will work with a Rhode Island consultant and Brian Mahoney to gather data for a model to discuss, hopefully at the September 13 meeting.

VII. Commissioner McQuillan adjourned the meeting at 11:25 a.m.