

**Testimony Regarding
H.B. 6439, An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending
June 30, 2023, and Making Appropriations Therefor**

Lisa Hammersley, Executive Director
School and State Finance Project

Chairwomen Osten and Walker, Ranking Members Miner and France, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding Governor Lamont's proposed budget and its pause of the phase-in of the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) formula, which was passed with bipartisan support by the General Assembly in 2017.

The governor's proposed budget comes amidst a pandemic that continues to pose great uncertainty for Connecticut's residents, has laid bare the stark disparities across our state, and has significantly disrupted education.

Now is not the time to abandon an equitable, student need-based education funding formula. Rather it is the time to invest in public education and fully fund our students so they can excel both in and out of the classroom.

The governor's budget relies on one-time federal dollars from the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER II) fund, passed by Congress under the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSA). These funds are neither general operating funds, nor education equalization aid. They are intended to be for preventing, preparing for, and responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has left school districts with extraordinary, and unanticipated costs.

Students throughout our state have suffered from inequitable learning conditions as a result of the pandemic. The federal funding provided by ESSER II must be used to better address these unprecedented learning conditions and provide greater social-emotional support for Connecticut students. It should not be used for balancing naturally occurring budget deficits or an excuse for pausing a funding formula based on the needs of students.

Additionally, pausing the ECS phase-in at FY 2021 levels as the governor has proposed would add to Connecticut's education and racial disparities by favoring less-needy districts at the expense of its highest-need, lowest wealth communities. In total, the governor's proposal would cancel \$103 million in increases for the state's Alliance Districts, while collectively increasing funding for non-Alliance Districts by \$8.6 million.

As it stands, the current ECS formula would not be fully phased in until 2028, and the governor's proposal would delay that to 2030. This means that a 2nd grader today will not see the funding the General Assembly has determined they need and deserve until they are in their junior year of high school.

We must do more for our students than what the governor has proposed. We must do more than the status quo. We must fully and equitably fund all of our students NOW.

I ask the Committee to not only reject the governor's proposal to pause the ECS phase-in and use one-time federal funds to balance the budget, but to support a fully-funded, equitable, and student-centered funding system like S.B. 948 would create.

Currently with the Education Committee, S.B. 948 eliminates the ECS formula's phase-in schedule and fully funds districts beginning in FY 2022; increases and expands the formula's English Learner and concentrated poverty weights; mitigates enrollment volatility caused by the COVID-19 pandemic; and expands the formula to include all public school students. I ask that you consider these important and necessary changes as you craft your budget.

Thank you again for allowing me the opportunity to provide testimony on H.B. 6439 and the importance of fully and equitably funding all of Connecticut's public school students. Please feel free to reach out to me via the contact information below should you have any questions.

Sincerely,

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About the School and State Finance Project

Founded in 2015, the School and State Finance Project is a nonpartisan, nonprofit policy organization, focused on education funding and state finance issues, with a commitment to providing independent analysis, building public knowledge, improving transparency, and developing fair, sustainable solutions.

The organization strives to serve as a trusted, independent source of accurate data, information, and research, and is focused on:

- Increasing awareness and building public knowledge about Connecticut's education finance system, state budget, and overall fiscal health;

- Improving transparency around Connecticut's education and state finances;
- Working collaboratively to develop thoughtful, data-driven solutions that address Connecticut's education funding and state finance challenges; and
- Providing technical assistance to partner organizations seeking to solve education finance-related challenges.

For more information about the School and State Finance Project, visit www.schoolstatefinance.org.