

What will our children lose?

created by the collaborative efforts of



WHAT WILL OUR CHILDREN LOSE (WWOCL) POSITION STATEMENT 2015

The What Will Our Children Lose Coalition (WWOCL, composed of the CT Association of School Business Officials (CASBO), the CT Association of Boards of Education (CABE), the CT Association of Schools (CAS) and the CT Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS), was formed five years ago out of deep concern for the damage that a steep decline in federal funding would have on public education. The Legislature and Governor stopped our members from “going over the cliff” by funding the decline.

We appreciate the efforts that have been made over the last few years on state funding. We also commend the Legislature and Governor for the increased funding for Alliance districts.

However, most districts have not seen significant increases, even in the wake of our new reforms. WWOCL remains concerned about the level of state funding that has resulted and continues to result in the loss of educational opportunities by the state’s children.

Accordingly, WWOCL takes the following positions in 2015 and urges the Governor and the Legislature to address these issues.

THE EDUCATION COST SHARING GRANT (ECS)

Despite the fact that most municipalities in CT have received at least a slight increase in the past three years in ECS Grants and despite the fact that thirty school districts have received over the past two years via the Alliance District program

substantial conditional grants targeted on improving student achievement, forty five districts have not received an increase in state funds for seven years. The result of this has been a gradual decrease in the scope of the educational programs offered to CT's children and in some cases, there has been a decrease in quality as well. CT's school districts have not regained the purchasing power that they lost due to five consecutive years of no increases in state funding for education, years during which those districts incurred cost increases of approximately 3%. This situation must be addressed by an increase in the ECS Program in the next two years which will help districts regain purchasing power that they had seven years ago.

It is the WWOCL'S position, therefore, that:

- The ECS Program is increased by 4% in 2015-16 and by another 4% in 2016-17.
- The Alliance District Program continue to be fully funded in school years 2015-16 and 2016-17

SPECIAL EDUCATION

Children with special educational needs must be accommodated in an effective manner in public schools. School districts across CT make a major effort in this regard all the time. Those efforts, however, are hindered by two factors, one financial and the other regulatory.

The financial factor is inadequate financial support for special education programs from both the federal and state levels. The state government eliminated a number of years ago a general special education grant to local districts and underfunds the only remaining special education grant which is designed to provide financial relief to districts that incur excessively expensive program placements for some children with special needs. The federal government, which mandates provision of effective programs for children with special needs, has never met its own goal to cover 40% of the cost of meeting this mandate. Even in the past four years when additional state funds have been allocated to educational efforts, the funding for meeting the mandate of providing for children with special needs has not increased.

The regulatory factors are the following:

In Connecticut, local districts bear the burden of proof in all cases in which parents and district staff do not agree on an appropriate program for a child and are submitted to due process. This occurs regardless of which party brings the matter

to due process. As a result, whenever a parent challenges a program offered by a district, the district has to weigh the risks and costs of the case because the burden of proof always falls on the district. When a district factors in the financial burden of legal fees that would be incurred for both defending its position as well as being liable for any legal fees incurred by the parent, it most often agrees to services that exceed the program to which the child is entitled. This compromises the ability of districts to provide adequate educational programs for all children.

It should be noted that the United States Supreme Court has ruled that the burden of proof in special education due process be assigned to the party that brings the matter to due process. CT is one of a small minority of states in the country that does not assign the burden to that party.

- State agencies such as the Department of Children and Families and the State Juvenile Justice System place children in program that local districts have to pay for even though the districts have no voice in the placement decisions that are made.

WWOCL, therefore, proposes:

- That the funding cap on the Special Education Excess Cost Grant be removed.
- That the State redefines excess cost to be two times a district's per pupil expenditure, as compared to the 4.5x that is currently in place
- That the burden of proof in special education due process be assigned to the party that brings the matter to due process.
- That all placements made by state agencies be fully paid for by the state.

MINIMUM BUDGET REQUIREMENT

Presently a municipality may reduce its Minimum Budget Requirement (MBR) by \$3,000 per student drop in enrollment. This is much more than what a district saves for each individual student drop in enrollment.

The **What Will Our Children Lose Coalition**, therefore, proposes the following:

That the amount by which a municipality may reduce its MBR per student drop in enrollment be the amount that a district actually saves per student drop in enrollment.

The What Will Our Children Lose Coalition looks forward to working with Governor Dannel P. Malloy and the members of the 2015 Connecticut Legislature to address these issues that are crucial to the well-being of the state's children, to their public education and ultimately to the well-being of the state as a whole.

ABOUT THE COALITION

The What Will Our Children Lose Coalition (WWOCL) was created by the collaborative efforts of the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education, Connecticut Association of School Business Officials, the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents and the Connecticut Association of Schools. As advocates for public education, these organizations pledge to provide information to the community and statewide education leaders in order to support positive results for children in their school districts.