

# CARES Commission

## Responsibly Addressing State Funding for Connecticut Public Schools

The Connecticut Coalition for Public Education calls on the Governor and General Assembly this special session to establish, in law, a Connecticut Achievement and Resource Equity in Schools (CARES) Commission. The commission would include representatives from constituencies with critical education, taxation, and equity perspectives, and special expertise in those areas.

### The Commission's Charge

- To submit to the Governor and General Assembly a strategic plan to address the state's constitutional obligation to fund local schools, from pre-kindergarten to high school, under *CCJEF v. Reil*, and other related court decisions, in time for action during the 2019 legislative session.
- To provide ongoing analysis and recommendations to lawmakers and the public relating to the funding of Connecticut's public schools providing services to students from pre-kindergarten to high school.

### Principles

- I. The funding formula must reflect the true cost of educating students in their respective districts. It must reflect an appropriate base or foundation, as well as account for disparities in both needs and resources among and between districts.
- II. The state education funding formula must be linked to adequate funding. The state must implement a funding formula that is stable, reliable, fair, and with an identified funding source. Merely creating a new formula without identifying a sufficient funding source will repeat the equity and resource problems of the past.
- III. The formula must be constitutional. Enacting a formula prior to the resolution of the *CCJEF* case by the Connecticut State Supreme Court (later this year) risks embarking on an invalid and unconstitutional course. In addition, the formula must be in compliance with *Horton v. Meskill* and *Sheff v. O'Neill*.
- IV. The formula must be the product of an open and transparent process. Rushing to judgment and creating a new formula without public or stakeholder input, discussion, or public hearing and without public accountability may result in unintended consequences and undermine confidence in the outcome.

### The plan must include the following key components:

#### 1. Recommendations for implementing a dependable system for distributing state public education funding

- Conduct a cost study using a research-based method to determine the costs of educating students with varying characteristics in Connecticut.
- Formulate and propose revisions to state funding for education in an open and transparent process accountable to the public.
- Lessen the achievement gap by focusing additional funding on the Alliance and Reform Districts.

#### Goals of formula

- ▶ Provide adequate resources for the education of all public school children.
- ▶ Reduce reliance on highly unequal local property taxation to fund services.
- ▶ Address unequal local tax burdens.
- ▶ Increase equity and fairness (*Horton v. Meskill*), and lessen segregation (*Sheff v. O'Neill*).

#### 2. Recommend a stable, fair, reliable, and identifiable funding source to:

- Fully fund state formula grants
- Address all students' educational needs from pre-K through high school

#### Goals of the recommended funding source

- ▶ End persistent underfunding of education formula grants and other key grants.
- ▶ Ensure sufficient resources in all of Connecticut's towns, especially those less capable of generating revenue.
- ▶ Enable predictability and sustainability in grant allocations to municipalities.

