

Testimony of

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Before the Appropriations Committee

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Re: Governor Malloy's FY19 Proposed Budget Revisions

Good evening Senator Osten, Senator Formica, Representative Walker, and Representative Ziobron and the esteemed members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Sheila Cohen, President of the Connecticut Education Association (CEA). CEA represents active and retired teachers throughout Connecticut.

CEA urges the legislature to reject Governor Malloy's \$67 million in ECS cuts.

CEA also urges that this committee consider restoring TEAM funding in the "Talent" line item to alleviate the unfunded mandate and to ensure that its proven benefits to teaching and learning are not lost.

ECS Funding

Since FY17, Connecticut schoolchildren have had to absorb the impact of \$90 million in cuts to schools. Two-thirds of these cuts came at the hands of Governor Malloy's holdback of Education Cost Sharing funds after the budget had been signed into law. Even though the Governor's holdbacks cut the Alliance Districts the least, perennial underfunding in many of these districts just means they felt less salt in their wounds. The state's failure to fund districts fairly still stings.

To the legislature's credit, the FY19 budget you enacted promised to restore much of the funding slashed in this fiscal year, restoring overall funding for ECS to nearly the level funding in FY17. The state would have been on the path to healing the wound. However, the Governor's proposed revision to the FY19 budget cuts districts by \$66 million from the FY19 amounts the legislature promised in the bipartisan budget. Although the Governor's proposal increases funding to many Alliance Districts in FY19, it does so at the expense of 78 other school districts (including three Alliance Districts—Thompson, Windsor, and Killingly).

What I've described is the view of ECS funding from the Capitol. Now I want to share with you what the cuts mean to the students in our classrooms. Just recently I asked that question of teachers in districts hit particularly hard by the cuts (Bridgeport, Plainfield, and Stratford). Here is what teachers reported:

- **Academics:** Academic classes are being replaced with study halls.
- **English Learners and Additional Services:** There has been an influx of hundreds of students from hurricane ravished areas such as Puerto Rico, but no additional funding for needed services.
- **Student Services:** Districts are reporting a shortage of remedial reading specialists, math interventionists, and behavior management specialists due to attrition and layoffs.
- **Counseling and Social Workers:** Students to counselor and social worker ratios exceed 500 to 1, twice the maximum recommended by their respective professional associations.

- Student to Teacher Ratios: Teacher and paraprofessional layoffs are impacting classrooms (Stratford laid off 50; Bridgeport kindergarten classrooms have no paras).
- Class size: Class size is increasing in the early grades, with some reports of kindergartens exceeding 22 students with no paraprofessionals on staff to help due to layoffs.
- Learning Time: Districts are shortening the length of the school year.
- Unqualified Teachers: Long-term substitutes are being placed in assignments rather than hiring certified faculty.
- Summer School: There are reductions and in some cases the elimination of summer school.

TEAM Funding (Talent Line Item)

I also want to draw your attention to another funding cut to schools that has significantly impacted the state's ability to improve the professional development of new teachers and help retain them. Funding for Connecticut's nationally recognized Teacher Education and Mentoring program (TEAM) was eliminated from the Department of Education's "Talent" line item. TEAM is a critical program that helps beginning teachers become more effective by connecting them with teacher mentors. It also requires new teachers to complete professional training modules designed to help them become stronger in the classroom and more comfortable managing the demands of a career in teaching.

The TEAM program is particularly important in our urban areas. Higher turnover of teachers in urban schools can further disrupt a learning environment where children would benefit the most from stability. It is in our urban schools where the state's neediest children are disproportionately taught by teachers in their earliest years.

State funding for TEAM covers the management and tracking of teacher training module data. This is helpful for district personnel management, especially when teachers change districts. It also covers the cost of stipends paid to mentors who work with beginning teachers. This amounts to about \$500 per new teacher for two years. Also, the elimination of funding has left the data management system in flux and has created an unfunded mandate of about \$150 per new teacher for two years that will either be passed on to school districts or potentially to teachers in their first two years of teaching. Together, these costs present a district like Bridgeport, with 182 new teachers in the program, an unanticipated cost of \$120,000.

The Governor's budget does not restore this funding. CEA urges that this committee consider restoring TEAM funding to alleviate the unfunded mandate and to ensure that its proven benefits to teaching and learning are not lost. A 2013 survey of beginning teachers, administrators, and mentors in Connecticut found the following:

- Positive influence on teacher retention: 75% of beginning teachers in CT reported that their mentors had positively influenced their decision to continue teaching.
- Positive impact on student learning: Administrators reported that the TEAM module process influenced beginning teachers' practice in the following ways:
 - 93.8% becoming a more reflective educator
 - 90.9% positively impacted student learning
- TEAM participants connect new learning to students: Mentors reported that TEAM helped meet the needs of their beginning teacher in the following ways:
 - 90% helped the beginning teacher recognize the link between her/his own new learning and the impact on students
 - 93.7 made the beginning teacher more reflective about her/his teaching

TEAM helps to address teacher turnover, which is disruptive to students and costly to school districts. Without TEAM, teachers with inadequate support in their initial years will struggle unnecessarily, and it is the students who will ultimately pay the price.

We urge you to restore this important program.

Thank you.