

CONNECTICUT COALITION FOR ***JUSTICE*** IN EDUCATION FUNDING

Letter to the Editor, *Hartford Courant*
July 22, 2006

Revamp State Aid Formula

Yes, the Bloomfield schools are underfunded, but the extent to which students are being shortchanged is far more serious than what is depicted in The July 11 editorial "How Not To Fund Schools."

Indeed, the education adequacy cost study commissioned last year by the Connecticut Coalition for Justice in Education Funding found that the operating budget for Bloomfield public schools is underfunded by about \$4.1 million a year if we're to expect most students to meet the state's goals in reading and math.

The real culprit, however, is not the town council. Rather, it is the state of Connecticut, which has the constitutional obligation to adequately fund public schools and ensure that every student has an equal opportunity to acquire a quality education.

Bloomfield schools serve the 14th most impoverished student body in the state, about 2,400 students, of which more than 38 percent qualify for free or reduced-price meals and 94 percent are minorities. Yet in 2005-06, the state's equalization aid (the ECS grant, which accounts for the lion's share of the state's contribution toward school operating costs) provided only \$1,409 per pupil. Latest data show that in 2004-05, the state's share was only about 10 percent of the district's operating costs.

In 1991-92, ECS aid amounted to about \$4.2 million (\$6.6 million in today's currency). After dropping and hovering around \$2.1 million from 1992-93 to 2000, Bloomfield's 2005-06 ECS allocation totals \$3.9 million, a far cry from the purchasing power of that grant 17 years ago. Teachers in those years barely made a living wage; health and energy costs were reasonable; and computers hadn't yet become ubiquitous tools in our classrooms. Adding insult to injury, the ECS cap has cost Bloomfield schools a total of \$4.6 million over the past 11 years, funds that under the equalization formula should have been awarded to the town.

Bloomfield is not a high-wealth town. It ranks 120th in median household income and 11th in unemployment. Its mill rate, 31.03, is the state's 50th highest. That's lower than in past years but still well above the state median of 27 mills. Can Bloomfield taxpayers afford more? Many of them cannot, and that includes the town's growing population of senior citizens.

Revamping the ECS formula and restructuring our tax system to pay for quality schooling via more progressive revenue streams need to be top priorities in this election year and the coming legislative session. Otherwise, we can't expect students and their schools to perform at the levels necessary for growing our economy and sustaining a civil society.

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