

TESTIMONY OF THE
CONNECTICUT COALITION
FOR ***JUSTICE***
IN EDUCATION FUNDING
TO THE
STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

January 20, 2010

The Connecticut Coalition for Justice in Education Funding appreciates this opportunity to submit comments pertinent to the State Board of Education's consideration of a "money follows the child" funding model for state charter schools.

CCJEF opposes the adoption of any such funding scheme. Were it to be enacted, this would represent still another unfunded state mandate that further erodes traditional school districts' own precarious funding mechanisms. It would also increase chaos and uncertainty in the annual planning and financing of schools by local boards of education and their municipalities — potentially causing even greater angst and discord than has already occurred as a result of the economic recession and state budget crisis, interdistrict magnet and Open Choice legislation, and vicissitudes of ever-increasing federal and state education mandates.

A "money follows the child" pathway would, in effect, legitimize statewide open enrollment (at least for charters) at the expense of local property owners, while also potentially depriving local schools of the very pupils and their families whose voices and diversity are important community assets. An unfettered ability to access local funding may also further encourage one or more aggressive charter school management organizations to build their enrollments inappropriately fast and furiously, jeopardizing the quality of education that these small schools purport to offer. Surely the fiscal havoc wreaked on local districts as they face declining enrollments and increased mandated payments to the charters would not be tolerated long before such a funding policy raises serious political concerns.

Indeed, whether such a funding scheme is constitutional under *Horton v. Meskill* or could survive the school funding challenges that will be brought in *CCJEF v. Rell* should give the State Board of Education pause. Adding another special funding stream for still another special set of schools and thereby further depleting resources from an already broken and sorely underfunded education funding system will only serve to make a bad problem worse. The fiscal difficulties for districts having to pay magnet school tuitions is one concrete example of how cost variables are not readily drilled down to student-level costs as required by any "backpack" method; instead, many significant cost variables are step costs tied to economies of scale, local conditions and locally valued school structures, and/or they are fixed costs that do not shed on a per pupil basis.

Clearly a comprehensive restructuring of how Connecticut funds public education is needed, an effort that would address how regular school districts, regional districts, interdistrict and host magnet schools, charter schools, regional vocational agriculture centers, and the state's technical high schools are funded so that every school is able to deliver the educational excellence that all schoolchildren deserve.

Unless and until Connecticut's traditional public school districts (i.e., the 166 that are fiscally dependent on their municipalities and enroll 98.5 percent of all public school students) are adequately and equitably funded — based on a research-based and transparent state-of-the-art formula tied to the real cost of quality education and a significant rebalancing of state and local revenues to lessen the property tax burden for funding the schools — CCJEF urges the State Board of Education not to support the creation of still another unique funding formula to add to the state's hodgepodge of flawed school funding statutes, the convoluted sum of which does not constitute a fair, viable, or legally defensible state funding system.

Thank you for your consideration and this opportunity to weigh in.

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The Connecticut Coalition for Justice in Education Funding (CCJEF) is a broad-based coalition of municipalities, local boards of education, statewide professional education associations, unions, and other pro-education advocacy organizations, parents and public school students aged 18 or older, and other concerned Connecticut taxpayers. Member school communities are home to more than 45 percent of the state's public school children, including some three-fourths of all minority students, those from low-income families, and students from homes where English is not the primary language.