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New federal data shows low-income, minority students shortchanged for education spending; CCM points to underfunding of ECS Grant and over-reliance on property taxes

The Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM) today (Monday, March 23) said that new data from the federal government which shows that Connecticut short-changes low-income minority students regarding spending for local public education **reinforces CCM's long-standing call for the State to address the \$600 million underfunding of the State's largest grant for local public education – the Education Cost Sharing Grant (ECS).**

And the U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan blames the disparity — which has grown nationwide over the last decade — on heavy reliance on local property taxes for school funding. In Connecticut, 52 percent of education spending is provided by municipalities, according to CCM's analysis of this critical local government issue.

In his proposed budget, Governor Malloy flat-funded the ECS Grant and proposed cutting about \$20 million from various state education grants that largely help the neediest districts to help pay for longer school days, full-day kindergarten, early reading interventions and summer school.

Connecticut and local governments are spending 8.7 percent less per student in the poorest school districts than they are in the most affluent school districts, according to data from the U.S. Department of Education.

Districts such as Bridgeport and New Haven spending \$1,243 less for each student during the FY 2011-12 school year than a district such as Darien. High-need districts spend on average \$842 less per student than the statewide average.

The federal government data also shows Connecticut as having one of the largest spending disparities between districts with large numbers of minority students and neighboring districts.

Only nine states have larger disparities than Connecticut -- Arizona, Illinois, Missouri, Nevada, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont and Virginia.

Federal law requires state education departments to ensure that students from low-income families are receiving "comparable" education services. It has not yet been determined in Connecticut whether districts are providing a comparable education, but a trial on the subject is set to begin this fall.

The federal data also shows the disparity impacts 181 schools in Connecticut that enroll almost 58,000 students. These schools would need to spend \$160 million more to make funding equivalent to that in the most affluent districts.

Meanwhile the Connecticut Supreme Court has ruled that the state is responsible for ensuring that every student is afforded a minimum educational standard and "suitable" educational opportunities. The trial to determine if the state is providing schools in the lowest-income districts with that opportunity — and the appropriate funding — is scheduled to begin Oct. 7.