

## Urban School District Financing Policy Brief

Sir Snowden

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### Context Analysis: Background

The world continues to evolve, and new discoveries are made, but there is definitely one thing that remains consistently inadequate and inequitable, which is education for all students. The State of Connecticut education per-student spending budget illustrates that discrepancy (CTschoolfinance.org, n.d.). The Urban school district education budget has one of the smallest budgets in the state of Connecticut with the highest population of civilians. “Urban, Connecticut’s estimated population is 144,900 according to the most recent United States census estimates. Urban, Connecticut is the 1st largest city in Connecticut based on official 2017 estimates from the US Census Bureau” (World Population Review, n.d.). It is interesting to see that Urban, CT has the largest population of individuals, but has the eighth smallest per-student spending budget in Connecticut at \$14, 241 (CTschoolfinance.org, n.d.).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics the Urban school district demographic breakdown is 39% Hispanic or Latino (of any race), 33% Black, 21% White, and 3% Asian (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). The Urban school districts are primarily filled with students of Latino descent who classify themselves as Black, at 72%. The median household income (in 2018 dollars), in 2014-2018 in Urban, CT was \$45,441 and for persons in poverty, the percent is 21.4% (Census, n.d.). It is very concerning to read that the Urban school district is mostly populated with black and brown individuals and their schools are not properly funded

Children in low-income schools are taught to be obedient and learn certain skills while middle/upper-class children are prepared for career jobs and college. “In the era of industrial production, the US public school system largely prepared professional class students for leadership and managerial roles in the private and public sectors while preparing (male) working class and poor students for wage manufacturing labor. Professional class schools prepared students for advanced university education while fostering dispositions of curiosity, dialogue, and debate within acceptable ideological framework. Working class schools prepared students with basic skills and dispositions for obedience to authority, an alignment of knowledge with expert authority, and internalized blame for limited educational and work advancement” (Saltman, 2015, p. 46).

Student enrollment nationwide has decreased through the years, but that does not mean school districts need less funding to provide for their student population. If anything, students’ academic expenses have increased due to the evolution of the world’s business model changing through the years in which there has been a direct correlation between core education curriculum and career opportunities. “Over the past 10 years, the needs of Connecticut students have changed. While the overall enrollment in Connecticut’s public schools has decreased by approximately 36,000 students, the needs of students have increased” (Mismatch Between Funding & Students Needs in Connecticut, 2018, p. 1).

### **Context Analysis – Agenda Setting Arguments for Policy**

According to Mismatch Between Funding & Students Needs in Connecticut report, there are a variety of factors that play role into why school districts in Connecticut are not receiving proper funding. Some of the reasons include communities not being able to pay the local education costs, Connecticut stopped using the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) formula for several years, and the lack of a unified school funding system (2018, p.1). Having an education system in Connecticut that has been broken for so many years without a valuable solution to resolve this matter is very demeaning for our students and educators. School districts like Urban, CT have been underfunded for years and have constantly asked local and state officials for more funding so they can provide their district with adequate educational resources for their student population. Linda Lambeck of the CT Post wrote, in 2011 the Urban School District surrendered to a state takeover only to have the action ruled illegal. Since that ruling, the Urban School District has received little to no funding increases. The year prior

the Urban School District sought \$15 million boost and got just over \$1 from the city, which resulted in staff layoffs and the central office being gutted. In 2019, the Urban School District, without a \$11.5 million boost in funding on top of a \$2.5 million increase promised by the state official who runs the state's largest school district at the time on a \$247.9 million operating budget said there is nothing left to cut without doing serious harm to the district of 20,500 students. In this article Lambeck spoke with Urban School District Board Chairman John Weldon and he said that schools will close, and the Urban School District will become a school system in name only. Urban will have buildings that do not provide the very core services that the district exists to provide. Why would anyone send their child to a school system like that? The school system is being bankrupted. It is insolvent. City Councilman Ernest Newton conceded that the Urban school district does not get enough funding but added that his job is not only to fund schools but police departments, fire departments, and public works. Mayor Gamin's budget gives each of those departments increases, while holding the school funding flat and calling for a tax cut (2019).

Since 2017, the Urban school district has had three different superintendents, which but two out of the three resigned due to standing up to political forces (Fran Rabinowitz and Aresta Johnson. "Fran Rabinowitz was seeking help from the state because she said one local board member was being a "bully: and was preventing things from getting accomplished in her low-performing district. Rabinowitz, 67, also has been a deputy commissioner for the State Department of Education, superintendent of Hamden Public Schools and a key witness against the state in the recent school-funding trial" (Thomas, 2017). Linda Lambeck of the Connecticut Post wrote an article on Urban losing another superintendent in this article it stated, "I know she has been very unhappy for a long time," said Pereira. "I know she cares about our children. I know she understands curriculum and instruction. Her challenge has been leading in a decisive way. There are strong political forces in Urban. Her challenge (has been) in standing up to those forces." City Council Member Ernie Newton, said I know it's been hard dealing with a Board of Education that had its own agenda, maybe we will start electing people who care about the children" (2019). Michael Testani is the Acting Superintendent of Urban appointed on August 1, 2019. Mr. Testani has aspirations of becoming the City of Urban permanent Superintendent.

In order to make effective change, especially in the Urban school district, it will require, the right combination of goals, roles, relationships and

coordination is essential to organizational performance (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 47). The statement by Bolman & Deal is very true. In the about statement by former superintendent of Urban Fran Rabinowitz the local officials (Board of Education) and city/town governing body are not allowing effective Superintendents to make the necessary changes to improve the inadequacies so students can have adequate resources they need to compete in every changing world. The process of creating the Urban school district's budget starts with the Superintendent of Schools because he makes a recommendation to the Board of Education. The Board of Education reviews the budget and approves it with possible adjustments (more or less). Then the city/town governing body approves the school district's budget as part of the city/town municipal budget. It may be more or less than the Board of Education's recommendation, and in some cities/towns there is a referendum (CTschoolfinance.org, n.d.).

### **Formulation – Content of Brief**

This policy is being formulated in response to the lack of proper funding for the Urban school district and to assure that the students of Urban, CT have the adequate educational resources they need to be successful in the classroom. Policy actors will include, but not be limited to the parents and/or guardian, teachers, administrators, superintendent, Board of Education, city/town governing body, and the State of Connecticut Department of Education. These actors should properly formulate the education budget as well as the continued use of the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) formula with transparency at all levels.

The State of Connecticut legislature created a funding formula to determine how much money public schools should receive. The Education Cost Sharing (ECS) formula was established to distribute approximately \$2 billion in state education funding to local public-school districts and possibly make up the difference between what a community can afford to pay and what it costs to run a public-school system (CTschoolfinance.org, n.d.). Connecticut's ECS formula follows a pupil-based model, also known as a "foundation" model, which a majority of states use. The formula uses a per-pupil dollar amount with weighted adjustments for student needs in order to arrive at a per-pupil cost for public education. Connecticut weighs low-income students more heavily by counting students who are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch. Then, using town wealth measures, the formula determines the state's share of this per-pupil cost, which is the ECS grant for a town. In Connecticut, town wealth is measured using property

income (90%) and personal income (10%). State law then imposes minimum or “base aid” standards and adds earmarks for certain towns (Sullivan, 2017).

**Table 1**

*Education Cost Sharing Formulas*

Table 1 Student Need	Funding Per Student
General Education (Non-need) Student	<b>Foundation Only = \$11,525</b>
Low-income Student	Foundation + (Foundation * Low-income Weight) = Low-income Student Funding <b>\$11,525 + (\$11,525 * 0.3) = \$14,983</b>
Concentrated Low-income Student	Foundation + (Foundation * (Low-income Weight + Concentrated Poverty Weight)) = Concentrated Low-income Student Funding <b>\$11,525 + (\$11,525 * (0.3 + 0.05)) = \$15,559</b>
Low-income and English Learner	Foundation + (Foundation * (Low-income Weight + English Learner Weight)) = Low-income and English Learner Student Funding <b>\$11,525 + (\$11,525 * (0.3 + 0.15)) = \$16,711</b>
English Learner	Foundation + (Foundation * English Learner Weight) = English Learner Funding <b>\$11,525 + (\$11,525 * 0.15) = \$13,254</b>
Concentrated Low-income English Learner	Foundation + (Foundation * (Low-income Weight + Concentrated Poverty Weight + English Learner Weight)) = Concentrated Low-income English Learner Student Funding <b>\$11,525 + (\$11,525 * (0.3 + 0.05 + 0.15)) = \$17,288</b>

Table 1 shows all of the ECS formula's the State of Connecticut Department of Education utilizes to create the per pupil spending budget (School Finance 101, 2019, p. 62.).

The key provisions or actions of the policy is for the City of Urban officials making a more concerted effort to provide the schools in their district to aid in providing more adequate educational resources for the students in the district. This provision includes freezing the salaries of the police department, fire department, public works, and city council members. In 2019, the City of Urban received a \$1.3 million increase from the city council and projected a \$2.5 million increase from the state, but the district is faced with cutting at least \$10.1 million because of rising salaries. City Council representatives Ernie Newton and Eneida Martinez, both voted against reducing a proposed tax break and for reducing a police overtime budget increase to shift more funding to the school district (Lambeck, 2019).

### **Legitimation – Vetting the Proposed Policy**

Currently, every town in Connecticut hosts a variety of Board of Education public meetings/forums which allows parents to voice their concern and/or possible solutions, but at times parents feel like their voices are not being heard. This policy will provide parents the opportunity to be part of a committee at their child's school with teachers and administrators working together to figure out solutions to enhance the students' academic experience. The teachers and administrators will be part of a larger committee with the superintendent to bring those findings to, and work with the superintendent to create the districts school budget, which would then be submitted to the Board of Education for approval. Of these actors the Superintendent would be the individual vetting the proposed actions. "Apparently, when schools attempt to mobilize parents in their activities, parents feel more empowered. The normative view of whether schools should ask for parents' opinions in various matters is also explained by asking for opinion, competence and recruitment. Surprisingly, it seems that recruitment can overcome inequality, although competence can be considered as a different proxy for a higher socioeconomic status. Therefore, a partial conclusion of this analysis is the fact that school mobilization can lead to increased parental involvement, reaching farther, even to those parents who feel less efficacious when it comes to school matters (Mihai Radu, 2011, p.111).

Having teachers and administrators involved in the budget creation can provide the superintendent input from those whom are working directly with the students and have the greatest understanding of what the students need. “Taylor stressed the importance of cooperation between workers and managers for this division of labor to succeed” (Burke, 2018, p.31)

The relationship between the Superintendent and the Board of Education is very vitalized for the approval of the created budget. “Leadership is not the same as authority and is different from management” (Burke, 2018, p.299). Effective leaders know how to lead; whether it is through their actions, communication, or ability to get things done. “Leadership can be defined accordingly, that is, the act of making something happen that would not otherwise occur” (Burke, 2018, p.299). Getting your team to rally behind you, motivate them to do and be their best, as well effectively listen and communicate are great examples of leadership. “It’s all for the team and it’s never about the individual” (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 103).

### **Implementation Getting the Proposed Policy Enacted**

“Effective change leaders need to have an above average level of energy and be capable of (1) working long hours when needed, (2) interacting with lots of people, and (3) energizing others” (Burke, 2018, p.325). As a leader you have to be able to motivate and energize your team to achieve all of the goals of the institution and their own personal goals. Being a leader and a follower requires high energy levels, but those roles some time interchange. Leaders have to be great followers as well, because leaders do not know everything.

The policy actors for this criterion include the following: parents, teachers, administrators, superintendent, the Board of Education, and the State of Connecticut Department of Education. The implementation requires everyone’s buying into the proposal and doing their part. Parents are expected to attend and participate in the committee meetings and assist their child or children with homework and being motivators. This policy will provide teachers and administrators the ability to have more input in regard to curriculum as well as receiving professional development and increase in pay.



The Superintendent must work closely with the teachers and administrators to understand that issues or matters that their schools are facing and together create solutions, as well as creating a better relationship with the Board of Education. “The right combination of goals, roles, relationships and coordination is essential to organizational performance” (Bolman & Deal, 2017, p. 47).

Currently, the State of Connecticut has an initiative to hire more Black and Brown qualified teachers and administrators, and this policy will aid in assuring that the Urban school district is hiring more Black and Brown qualified teachers and administrators. “Only 8% of the state's teachers and about 2% of the administrators in Connecticut's public schools are people of color” (Minority Teacher Recruitment, n.d.).

### **Consequences – Accessing and Documenting the Impact of the Proposed Policy**

The policy actors for this proposed policy include the following: parents, teachers, administrators, superintendent, Board of Education, and the State of Connecticut Department of Education. The consequences and information that will be utilized to assess and document the impact of the proposed policy could be a foundation for similar communities that are underfunded. More parents would like to be involved, which would help grow the committee but also expand into new opportunities to help students achieve more academic success.

Having adequate and equitable educational resources for the Urban school district could lead to a higher pupil spending budget and as well shrinking the achievement gap. The hiring of more qualified Black and Brown teachers and administrators in the school district as well as State of Connecticut. The responsibility for the enforcement and communication of this policy rests with all members involved in the committee: parents, teachers, administrators, the superintendent, the Board of Education, and the State of Connecticut Department of Education.



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