

# What will our children lose?

## **Efficiencies and Mandate Considerations: Solutions With No Increase in State Costs**

With a \$3.5 Billion projected deficit in the upcoming legislative session, the governor and legislature face tough decisions that are going to impact all levels of state operations.

Education professionals throughout Connecticut are concerned that the local government share of sales and income tax revenues are in danger and should be protected. Most municipalities and school boards are operating at reduced or zero increases in expenditures, forcing a negative impact on education programs. If this issue remains unattended, student achievement will continue to suffer.

The members of the What Will Our Children Lose coalition propose positive and immediate measures that will allow the state to address local government operations without any impact upon the State's fiscal dilemma. These suggestions allow for the maximum use of programs already in place, but are underutilized due to stringent demands and lengthy approval process.

### ***Prevailing Wage***

**Situation**: The existing statute imposes thresholds of \$100,000 for renovation and \$400,000 for new construction projects. Local communities are being forced to pay a premium for low end infrastructure projects. Reporting and other paperwork demands are such that many smaller local companies do not bother to bid on work in their own towns that would be appropriate to their sizes and for which competitive bids could be offered.

The logic in the current statute behind treating renovation and new project activity is not apparent. The existing thresholds are not indexed for inflation and have not been adjusted in almost 20 years.

**Discussion**: Set legislation for any individual project combining to a single threshold at \$1,000,000.

### ***Special Education: Due Process Burden of Proof***

**Situation**: Unlike 48 other states in the U.S., the burden of proof in special education due process actions resides exclusively with boards of education. This provision effectively places the district participation in the Planning and Placement Team (PPT) and Individualized Education Program (IEP) process on the defensive. Any plaintiff can question decisions made with no consequences. As documented, boards, regardless of a case's merits, are forced to examine the tradeoffs between the expense attendant with capitulation and expense associated with taking the litigation further.

**Discussion**: Legislation to properly apply the burden of proof to the plaintiff in such actions.

## ***Unfunded Mandates***

**Situation**: The Legislature continues to inundate local communities with statutory demands which erode local authority and often lack funding. PA10-111 (Secondary School Reform & miscellany) is an exception to the rule as it was associated by the failed bid to obtain federal “Race to the Top” funding. Good intentioned bills are often passed in order to relieve local burdens, but when combined with others they create a crushing cumulative impact.

For example, a “green cleaning products” bill was passed; mandating districts use only certain products that fit the criteria. Districts implemented the required changes and problems arose when the approved product choices failed to perform to expectations. The state picked up the responsibilities of: product evaluation, reporting, and compliance, leaving districts with unusable product options.

**Discussion**: Refrain from passing laws that in any way needlessly usurp local control or place additional unfunded burdens on local or state agencies.

## ***Public Sector Collective Bargaining***

**Situation**: Personnel expense normally represents the majority of local education funding. Negotiated wage and benefit provisions contain built in annual inflation. In the absence of companion increases in revenues or savings/cuts in other areas, personnel must be laid off for budgets to balance.

Despite willingness by some union locals to accept single year salary freezes, including both step and general wage increases, there have not been as many cases sharing increases in benefits expense. In most instances, management has absorbed benefits increases.

Connecticut has among the highest teacher [public sector employee] salaries in the nation. Benefits generally are far superior in both plan design and cost to those available in the private sector. Taxpayers have been outspoken for some time regarding the need for public sector employees to become part of the solution.

**Discussion**: Enhance local capacity to manage collective bargaining status. By enabling this change, school boards can address necessary changes without the need for complete elimination of collective bargaining. Even with the zero increases that current employees are taking, little difference is being made. Such provisions would stay in effect as long as the state is unable to increase municipal aid levels.

## ***About the Coalition***

The *What Will Our Children Lose?* Initiative was created by the collaborative efforts of the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education, Connecticut Association of School Business Officials and the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents. As advocates for public education, these organizations pledge to provide information to the community and statewide education leaders in order to find attainable results for their school districts. For more information visit [www.whatwillourchildrenlose.com](http://www.whatwillourchildrenlose.com).