

2008 Victories for West Hartford

Increased Early Childhood Education Funding Available to West Hartford

Though there were no increases in state funding for most programs this year, I am glad to report that, with support from my colleagues, I was able to win a substantial increase in state funding for Early Childhood Education (ECE) programs for towns like ours.

During the past decade, the lion's share of ECE funds have gone to priority school districts – school systems with the highest concentrations of poverty and need.

While this approach made sense initially, over time it meant that districts like ours – which educate significant numbers of students whose families are below the poverty line – were not getting the funding their children deserved.

In the coming fiscal year, however, there will be an increase of \$1.2 million dollars in ECE funds available to towns like ours



via competitive grants. These funds, which had initially been directed to priority districts, would have otherwise gone unused in the coming year. Now, instead, they will be available to communities like ours. Which means that more young children in need will have the opportunity to receive quality pre-school instruction – greatly enhancing their ability to succeed.

State Support for Charter Oak Children's Campus

Though this has been a challenging budget year for our state and town, I am glad to report that I was able to win legislative support for planning and design of major reconstruction at West Hartford's Charter Oak Magnet Elementary School.

For several years now, Charter Oak has been open to children from across West Hartford. The school's physical plant, however, has begun to deteriorate, and local leaders made it clear to me that they wished to undertake a planning process that would allow for:

- Renovation or replacement of the current school building; and
- Possible addition of a magnet pre-school to the site.

Normally, our town would have to underwrite the entire cost of planning for these changes. Fortunately, in this case, I was able to persuade others on the Education Committee that Charter Oak's planning process merited state support due to its unique school status and willingness to add a pre-school magnet.

Next year, our school system will receive a \$700,000 state school construction grant to cover planning costs.

In short, it's a big win: Increased funding for our school system, and development of an outstanding children's campus at a site in need of redevelopment.

Eliminating Wolcott School's Carbon Footprint

Earlier this year, Wolcott Elementary School announced an audacious goal: To reduce – and eventually eliminate – the school's "carbon footprint." In plain English, this means that Wolcott will seek to increase conservation and use of renewable energy – minimizing the release of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere.

and achievable. Normally, however, our town would have to bear the entire cost of this undertaking.

I am glad to report that, this year, I was able to win near unanimous support from the Education Committee and the General Assembly for providing state support of up to \$750,000 to help fund this pioneering project.

This goal is commendable

Both our town and state



2008 Legislative Update

This issue includes:

- **The Latest on Education**
- **Useful Information for Homeowners**
- **An Update on State Support for West Hartford**

State Representative

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2008 Legislative Update

Summer, 2008

Dear Neighbor,

I write to bring you up-to-date on the Connecticut General Assembly's 2008 session. I am glad to report that this session was a good one for both our state and our town.



As House Chairman of the Education Committee, I was able to promote a number of bills that will significantly improve state education policies. The legislature enacted major legislation in other key areas as well:

- **Addressing global warming.** Connecticut became one of the first states in the nation to establish caps on our own carbon emissions.
- **Mitigating the mortgage crisis.** In response to skyrocketing rates of foreclosure, the legislature enacted reforms that will help struggling homeowners and penalize predatory lenders.
- **Increasing health care access.** The Assembly passed legislation creating a new health partnership that would have allowed small businesses, non-profits and municipalities to join the state health plan. Though the Governor vetoed this bill, it showed the legislature's willingness to take bold steps to increase health care access.
- **Improving mentoring for new teachers.** Legislation I drafted will help Connecticut establish a new program of supports and mentorship for new teachers – so that they can attain the levels of excellence our children need and deserve.
- **Strengthening support for education.** In the areas of school learning environments and support for new school construction, our community and state won major gains.

This newsletter summarizes these and other key issues of the 2008 legislative session. Please feel free to contact my office by phone or e-mail if you would like further information.

Thank you for taking the time to read about these issues. A well informed citizenry is the bedrock of our democracy, and, by informing yourself, you strengthen our community and our state.

Best wishes to you and your family for a happy, healthy summer and autumn.

Sincerely,



Andy Fleischmann
State Representative, 18th District

Stay Informed...

For the latest information on the issues affecting our district, please visit my Web site:
www.housedems.ct.gov/Fleischmann



State Representative Andy Fleischmann – 2008 Capitol Update

Protecting People From Predatory Lending

Over the past few years, as the housing market grew overheated, questionable lending practices burdened many families in Connecticut with mortgages that became unaffordable as soon as initial interest rates expired. Not surprisingly, the number of families losing their homes to foreclosure hit record levels.

Making sure our state responds appropriately to this crisis has been a key priority for me. And I'm glad to report that the new law the Assembly enacted this spring includes a number of provisions that limit predatory lending practices and assist home-owners struggling with unmanageable loans. We expanded two of Connecticut's mortgage assistance programs, and gave the courts additional power to mediate between bor-

rowers and lenders. Additionally, we established stricter regulations and stronger penalties for lenders who target at-risk borrowers. In brief, this new law brings much needed reforms that will protect all homeowners in our state.

For further information, please contact the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority at 860-571-3500 or the Department of Banking Foreclosure Assistance Office at 877-472-8313.



Leading the Fight Against Global Warming

This spring, I was proud to co-sponsor legislation that makes Connecticut a leader in the fight to curb the carbon dioxide emissions that are driving the global warming crisis. Connecticut's new law establishes mandatory greenhouse gas emission caps of 10% below 1990 levels that must be attained by 2020, and 80% below 2001 levels by 2050. It requires low-carbon fuel standards for all motor vehicle and home heating fuels sold in the state. It will also require revisions to the State Building Code to reflect more stringent energy standards.

To comply with these requirements, the law creates a subcommittee that will assess the impact of climate change on the state and recommend ways the state can adapt to, and mitigate, harmful impacts. Additionally, it authorizes the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Commissioner to contract with a nonprofit organization created to help Connecticut implement an air pollution control program. The bill also requires that:

- The Department of Transportation investigate ways to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through improvements to our transportation systems.
- The DEP track low carbon fuel standards in other states and countries.
- Proceeds from the auction of greenhouse gas emission allowances be used to cover state agency administrative costs.
- The DEP work with other states to develop market-based compliance mechanisms to achieve the greenhouse gas limits.

Taken together, these steps will ensure that our state does its part in responding to the escalating dangers of global warming.

Opening Access to the State Health Insurance Pool

This year, the General Assembly took an important step toward ensuring that all Connecticut citizens be guaranteed the right to quality healthcare. With passage of the Connecticut Healthcare Partnership – a bill I was proud to co-sponsor – we showed how Connecticut can reduce costs and improve coverage by expanding the state health insurance pool. While I was deeply disappointed by the Governor's decision to veto this important legislation, I remain committed to seeking its enactment.



The vetoed bill would have permitted municipalities, nonprofit organizations, and small businesses to join the state employee health insurance plan. The bill required the State Comptroller to provide insurance coverage for employers when they applied for coverage of all their employees. For employers seeking

to cover just some employees, the comptroller could have delayed coverage if the Health Care Cost Containment Committee (HCCCC) certified that the delay would prevent the employer from disproportionately shifting its medical risks to the state.

The bill required that premiums municipal and other employers pay be the same as those the state pays for the same insurance plans. It allowed municipalities to require an employee contribution toward the premium. It also permitted the comptroller to charge participating employers an administrative fee on a per-member, per-month basis. These important measures – which the Governor never mentioned in her veto message – would have ensured the continued solvency of the state employee health insurance plan.

In brief, this bill would have allowed municipalities, non-profits and businesses with fewer than 50 employees to join the state health plan and achieve significant cost savings. Cities and towns could have used these savings to offset pressures on local property taxes. For these reasons and others, I will continue seeking to follow the lead of the 24 states that have already chosen to open up their state health plans to local government employees.

Reforming Programs & Support for New Teachers

Ensuring excellence among Connecticut's teachers is critical to the success of children in our public schools. For new teachers, this means we must provide proper support and training. That's why I worked hard to draft a new law which will reform the Beginning Educator Support and Training (BEST) Program. And I'm glad to report that both chambers of the Assembly passed the bill unanimously.

The new law sets up a committee of key stakeholders – chaired by the Commissioner of Education – that must provide the legislature with plans for a new program of mentorship, support and

assessment for new teachers by January of next year. As of July 1 2009, the act eliminates the BEST program – meaning that the legislature will need to establish the improved mentorship program by that date. In addition, the act eliminates the video component from the BEST assessment for the 2008-09 school year.

These changes reflect



Andy looks on as Governor Rell signs An Act Concerning the BEST Program.

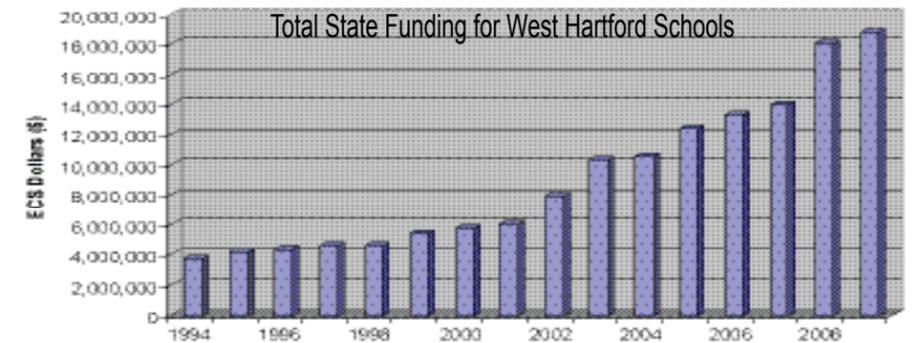
concerns that countless people shared with the Education and Program Review Committees this spring. There was a clear consensus that, in many ways, the BEST program had become a frustrating hurdle rather than a positive experience. With the reforms we enacted this year, we can look forward to a new, more effective program in 2009.

Increased Education Funding for West Hartford

This year's budget process included unprecedented twists and turns. The Governor's unfortunate opposition to any and all budget adjustments for 2008-2009 meant that some additional funding streams for our town – which I worked hard to develop during the Appropriations process – were not included in the final budget. In fact, for the first time since the move to biennial budgeting, there were no changes whatsoever in the second year of the budget process.

Despite this fact, in FY 2009, education grants to West Hartford schools will reach a record total of nearly \$19 million – an increase of more than \$700,000 over last year. Over the past 15 years, state education support has increased by nearly five-fold.

While the trend line below is one we can feel good about, I believe we must revamp the relationship between the state and municipalities in the years to come. We must increase state support, relieve local property tax burdens and ensure that towns can maintain the quality schools that do such a good job of educating our children.



Making Our Schools Safer: Strengthening Connecticut's Anti-Bullying Law

For children to learn well, they must have safe, supportive learning environments. That is why, this past session, I worked hard with my Co-Chairman of the Education Committee and colleagues in the House to strengthen our anti-bullying laws. Schools that may have avoided dealing with bullying will now be required to clarify and report on their policies.

The new law requires that school policies include prevention and intervention strategies – not just intervention after the reporting of incidents. Under this strengthened bullying law, these prevention and intervention strategies may include:

- Implementation of positive behavioral interventions and supports
- School surveys to determine the prevalence of bullying
- Establishment of bullying prevention coordinating committees with broad representation - to review survey results and implement responses
- Clear school rules prohibiting bullying, harassment, and intimidation and establishing appropriate



consequences for those who engage in such acts

- Adequate adult supervision of outdoor areas, hallways, cafeterias, and other specific areas where bullying is likely to occur
- Inclusion of grade-appropriate bullying prevention curricula in kindergarten through high school
- Individual interventions with the bully, parents, and school staff, as well as supports for the bullied child
- School-wide training related to safe school climate
- Promotion of parent involvement in bullying prevention

Taken together, these steps will help ensure that children in Connecticut schools have the safe learning environments they need to learn and excel.