# School + State Finance Project

www.schoolstatefinance.org

# The Civics of Education: Policy and Advocacy

February 7, 2023

*Stamford Edition*

*Built for the Stamford Public Education Foundation*

# Contact Us

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To learn more about the School and State Finance Project, visit us at **www.schoolstatefinance.org**

Or connect with on social media

# About the School and State Finance Project

We are a nonpartisan, nonprofit policy organization that works collaboratively with policymakers, communities, and other key stakeholders to develop data-driven solutions that ensure all public school students receive equitable education funding that supports their learning needs.

## Mission

To eliminate racial and economic disparities in Connecticut education funding.

## Vision

All Connecticut students have equitable funding, access, and opportunities — no matter their race, socio-economic status, learning needs, or zip code.

# Agenda

- What is policy?

- Who is responsible for making policy at both the local and state level?

- How do I add my voice to this process?

- Where can I have the most impact?

# UNDERSTANDING POLICY

# What is "Policy"?

- Policy refers to a set of guidelines designed for decision-making.

- We interact with policy every day, whether it's the return policy of Walmart or the attendance policy at our children's school.

- Within the context of government and <u>public</u> policy, we are talking about what the government (local, state, or federal) chooses to do, or not to do, about a problem.

# What is "Public Policy"?

Policy…

- is made in response to an issue or problem that requires attention.

- might take the form of law(s) or regulation(s).

- is made on behalf of the "public."

- focuses on a goal, such as the solution to a problem.

- is made by a government entity, although ideas can come from outside government.

Policymaking is an <u>ongoing</u> process because the effects of policy are continually reassessed, revisited, and revised.

Source: Project Citizen. (n.d.). What is Public Policy? Retrieved from https://www.civiced.org/project-citizen/what-is-public-policy.

# Difference Between Law/Policy and Regulations

- **Law/Policy** is what guides decision-making.
  - *EX: Policy states all students must have written parental/guardian permission to participate in high contact sports like football. This policy has been determined and is non-negotiable.*

- **Regulation** is how a policy is actually carried out in practice.
  - *Regulation allowed for a form to be **sent home with the student**, signed by the parent/guardian and returned to school.*

# Different Levels of Policy

Policy can come from the federal, state, or local level.

Generally speaking, federal policy overrides state policy, and state policy overrides local policy.

- **Federal Examples:** Standardized testing, federal funding for Title I (economically disadvantaged schools or school districts)

- **State Examples:** ECS, COVID guidelines, curriculum topics, recess time

- **Local Examples:** Uniform requirements for students, parent volunteers in classrooms

# Process of Passing Policy

- **Idea or Issue Brought to Body:** Member of governing body submits the idea for discussion. Bill sponsored by an elected representative and submitted to agenda.

- **Included in Agenda:** Body president approves to include, or it may be voted on to an agenda.

- **Voted into Committee:** To discuss details and draft it.

- **Voted out of Committee:** Committee approves the draft to send to the larger body.

- **Passed by Body:** Added to a business meeting agenda, debated and voted on.

# Things to Consider When Reading through Policy

- Policy is written for a legislative audience, not a community one. Small words, like "must" and "shall," have very different meanings.

- It's normal to struggle to understand what the policy actually means — don't get discouraged!

- Even if a policy says something specific, it could still be executed differently. Make note of instances where this happens because it could mean it's not a very effective policy.

# What Makes a Policy "Good"?

**There is no single answer to this. In order to evaluate whether a policy is "good," there are a few key questions to ask:**

- How acceptable is it for the community? Does it make sense to have this policy?

- Is this a policy created to prevent damage to a community or was it created *after* damage was inflicted on a community?

- Does this policy help create a more positive culture?

- Do people need this policy to guide major decisions or is it just a safeguard?

- How do people in the community feel about this policy?

# Key Areas of Policy Analysis

- **When** did this policy go into effect?

- **What** issue is this policy supposed to address?

- **Explain** what this policy means/does.

- How does it **impact** your community?

- What are the **benefits** of this policy?

- What are the **problems** with this policy?

- What would you **change** about this policy?

# LOCAL POLICYMAKERS

# Local Leaders

- Connecticut has 169 cities and towns, each with their own local government.

- Different types of local government include:
    - Selectman – Town meeting
    - Council – Manager
    - Mayor – Council

- Towns may hire a town manager to run the town's day-to-day operations, regardless of whether they have an elected leader such as a mayor or first selectman.

# Stamford

- Stamford is governed by a Mayor and Board of Representatives:
  - Mayor
    - Runs the daily operations of the city
    - Elected every four years
  - Board of Representatives
    - Acts as the legislative body.
    - Comprised of 40 elected representatives (two representatives from each of the twenty districts).
    - Elected every four years, concurrent with the Mayor's term

# Responsibilities of a Town Council

The major responsibilities of a town council are:
- Establishing both the long and short-term objectives and priorities for the town
- Enacting ordinances in the best interest of the town and its residents
- Adopting the town's annual budget

Town councils may also:
- Oversee the effectiveness of the town's programs
- Oversee the performance of public employees
- Represent the town to other levels of government (regional, state, federal)

# Boards of Finance

- The majority, but not all, of Connecticut's cities and towns have a board of finance.

- The purpose of a board of finance is to consider all the financial aspects of a town, rather than looking through the lens of any single department or program.

- A board of finance:
  - Must ensure the town budget is balanced (this is done through a comprehensive budget preparation process)
  - Sets the property tax rate necessary to support the expenses of the budget
  - Arranges the annual audit of town accounts

# Local Board of Education

- Local boards of education get their power and authority directly from the State of Connecticut. Unlike other local boards, boards of education act as agents of the State.

- Local boards of education make district-wide decisions in areas such as:
  - Budget
  - Curriculum
  - Programming

- The superintendent is the board of education's chief executive officer, and is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the school district.

# How do these local boards interact?

# Interaction among boards

- There is less interaction than you would think among the three boards (board of education, board of finance, and town council).

- Each board has an obligation to its role:
  - The primary advocate for education will be the board of education
  - The town council is advocating for programs for the city that fall outside of education
  - The board of finance is attempting to ensure the city only spends what residents can afford to pay

- To ensure balance, the State has drawn some clear boundaries, particularly with education finance.

- Boards of finance or town councils may reject the education budget, but they have no line-item veto power. This means they can tell the board of education how much money they have but not how to spend it.

# How do I find my local elected officials?

# To find your local elected officials:

- Check your town websites
  - Members of local boards and commissions are most often listed with contact information.  (You can find Stamford's elected official [here](#).)
  - Search the school district or board of education website.  (You can find Stamford's Board of Education members [here](#).)

- Call town hall
  - The town clerk can provide you with this information

- Call the school superintendent's office

- Members of all boards are public servants. Their names are public information, as is their contact information.

- If you are hesitant about how to ask for contact information, you can always ask for their preferred method for community members to reach them.

# STATE POLICYMAKERS

# The Executive Branch

- The executive branch is made up of the governor and lieutenant governor, who are elected jointly to four-year terms.

**<u>Governor</u>**
- The head of the Executive Branch
- Responsible for administering and enforcing state laws
- Develops the state budget, which must be approved by the General Assembly
- Has the authority to sign, veto, or take no action on bills that are passed by the General Assembly

**<u>Lieutenant Governor</u>**
- Serves as the President of the Senate, casting a vote in the event of a tie

- There are no term limits in Connecticut

# The Legislative Branch

- The Connecticut General Assembly (CGA) is the legislative branch in the State of Connecticut.

- The CGA works through committees, and is responsible for passing laws concerning the welfare of residents.

- There are two chambers in the CGA:
  - **Senate** – 36 members, elected in even-numbered years to serve two-year terms.
  - **House of Representatives** – 151 members, elected in even-numbered years to serve two-year terms. Members of the House elect a Speaker who presides over deliberations.

- There are no term limits for the House or Senate

# Additional Things to Know

- The Governor and Lieutenant Governor are elected by the entire state while Representatives and Senators are elected by a smaller geographical area that they represent. This area is called their "district."

- Representatives and Senators sit on committees that exist in the Connecticut General Assembly. The committees include both House and Senate representation. Committee assignments are determined by the political party they belong to.

- Representatives and Senators sit on multiple committees, and the operation of the CGA is such that there may be multiple committees meeting at the same time, so you rarely see an entire committee seated together, although they have other means to access the meeting and stay up-to-date.

# Stamford's State Representatives

- You can find your state representatives [here](here).

- **State Senators**:
    - Senator Maher
    - Senator Miller
    - Senator Fazio
- **State House of Representatives**:
    - Rep. O'Dea
    - Rep. Delany
    - Rep. Paris
    - Rep. Michel
    - Rep. Blumenthal
    - Rep. Khanna
    - Vacancy (148th district)

# How Do I Add My Voice?

# What is Advocacy?

- In the broadest terms, advocacy is any action taken supporting a cause or pleading a case.

- Advocacy is about having your voice heard and considered when decision-makers are considering policy decisions.

- Examples of advocacy can include phone calls or emails to elected officials, writing an Op-Ed or letter to the editor in a newspaper or online publication, or even displaying a lawn sign.

# Some Ways to Advocate

- Speaking up at a local board of education meeting
- Attending a rally showing support for a proposed policy
- Emailing or calling a legislator
- Testifying at a public hearing
- Distributing or signing a petition
- Displaying a sign in your yard
- Sharing a post on social media

Advocacy is about having your voice heard in a memorable way.

Including your story, your lived experiences, is essential for successful advocacy.

# Who is Your Audience?

- Are they…?:
  - Community members
  - Influencers
  - Decision-makers (state or local)
  - Business owners
  - Parents

- Are these people you know, or people you are speaking to for the first time?

- What is their frame of reference on the issue?

# What is your truth on the topic of school finance (or what you are speaking on)?

- What have you witnessed or experienced as a result of inequitable school funding?

- What have you witnessed that made you concerned about how we fund schools in Connecticut?

- Is there a particular moment in time or fact that stands out to you as critical to your willingness to take action?

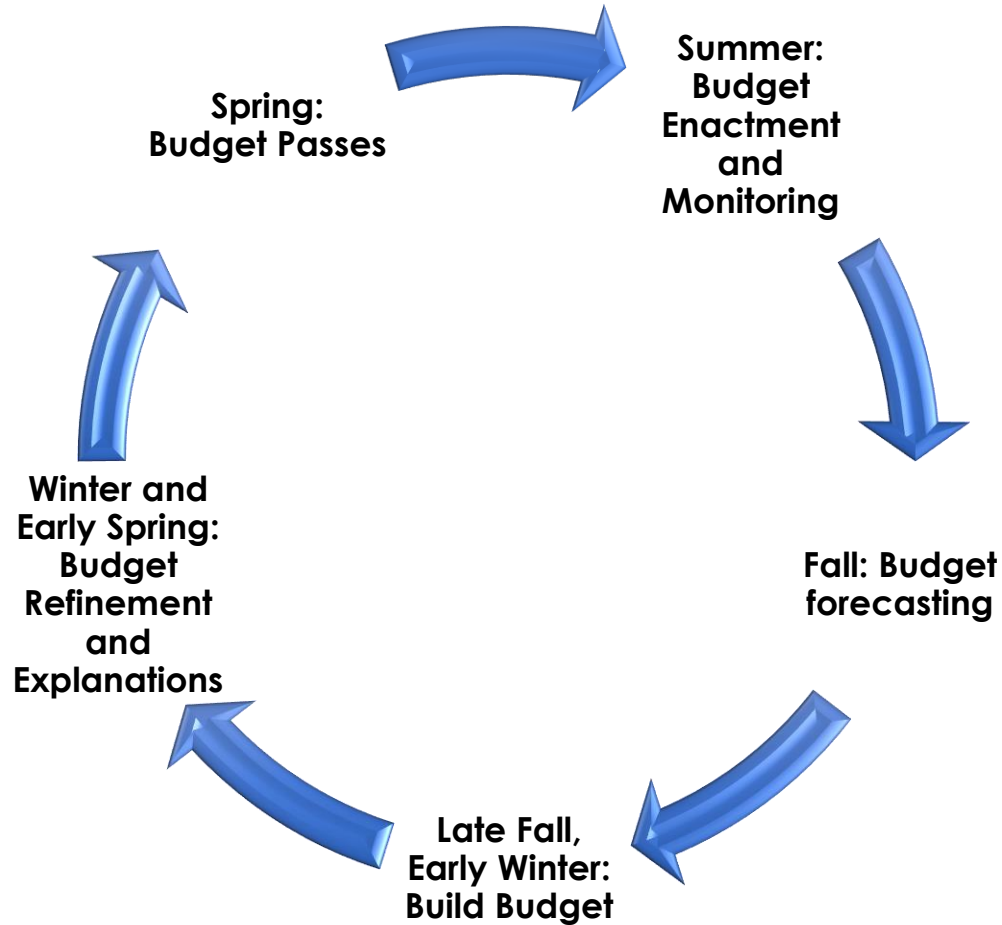# What is the specific problem you are speaking about?

- Make clear connections between school funding inequity (facts) and experiences (story).

- Data should be used for impact. Be thoughtful about this and do not overwhelm your listener or reader with a litany of data.

- Your story is the most important piece of this, and data accents it.

# How will a proposed solution change the problem you are pointing out?

- How will the outcome of your story be different if a proposed change or solution is enacted?

- Think of this as a "pick your own ending" story — you are putting the listener into the position to determine the best outcome for the hero of your story.

# Adding Your Voice for Maximum Impact

# Add your voice year round!



Spring:
Budget Passes

Summer:
Budget Enactment and Monitoring

Fall: Budget forecasting

Late Fall, Early Winter:
Build Budget

Winter and Early Spring: Budget Refinement and Explanations

# Advocate throughout the system

**At the state level:**
- Let your representative and senator know what is important to you
- Testify at committee public hearings on bills

**At the local level:**
- Regularly attend meetings of all civic bodies, not just the board of education
- Routinely weigh in during public comment
- Let your local elected officials know what is important to you via email, phone calls, or in-person conversations

**In public:**
- Write letters to the editor for local publications
- Talk to people about issues you care about and build power

# Decision-Makers and Influencers

- **Decision-makers** are people who have a direct vote in the policy you are interested in. These are the state and local elected officials we reviewed in previous slides.

- **Influencers** do not have a direct vote but are the people the decision-makers trusts. When an influencer talks, decision-makers listen.

- Decision-makers and influencers are situation or issue specific. They may be the same people for several issues, or may change each time.

- Both are important to build relationships with and advocate to.

# Don't go it alone

- Advocacy can be tiring. Support systems are incredibly important, as is self-care.

- Find your five. Split up attendance at city council, board of education, board of finance, and subcommittee meetings. Come together over pizza and share your thoughts and observations.

- Find an advocacy group that aligns with your issue. They can help you identify the most critical points of advocacy and help coordinate.

# About public meetings…

- COVID transformed access to public meetings.

- Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, few meetings were recorded, and few were accessible live online.

- We have found that since March 2020, many communities have implemented remote access to public meetings.

- If you are unable to attend in person, remote access is usually an option.

- If the meeting time presents a conflict, many communities also record their meetings. You should be able to find a link online.

# LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

# House Bill 5003 – Student Centered Funding

- Proposed by the Education Committee at the Connecticut General Assembly:
  - Fully funds Education Cost Sharing (ECS) grants, effective FY 2025
  - Expands ECS weighted funding to students attending public schools of choice (magnet schools, charter schools, AgriScience programs, and the Open Choice program)
  - Eliminates general education tuition billing for magnet school operators and AgriScience programs, effective FY 2025

# Why We Need Student-Centered Funding Now

- Helps Bridge the "Fiscal Cliff" when Federal COVID-relief dollars soon expire,

- Significantly cuts the $700+ million economic and racial gaps in Connecticut education funding

- Makes historic investment in education funding, which research has repeatedly shown improves student outcomes, including:
    - Higher test scores, graduation rates, and academic achievement
    - Higher earnings for life
    - Reductions in adult poverty.

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