

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR COMMENTARY

Working in Coalition

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Did the budget cuts that were announced at the end of December for this year get your attention? Do you realize that those cuts, painful as they were in the middle of the school year, are probably just a warning shot for what schools may face as the two-year budget is developed and adopted?

This year’s Legislative Session, more than probably any other in recent memory, will challenge the educational community. As the State struggles with a \$1.5 billion (with a “b”) deficit, all spending will be under scrutiny.

And, this undoubtedly will include spending on public education.

We have not forgotten that the Governor and the Legislature came to the aid of the schools back in 2011 as it appeared as if educational funding was going “over the cliff” as federal stimulus funding ran out. However, the State has, overall, pretty much flat-funded education, even as costs have gone up. We appreciate the money provided to Alliance Districts, though much of it has come with strings attached.

Now, we are concerned that Alliance District funding, as well as ECS funding for all of our districts is in peril, as illustrated by the recent cuts.

In addition, the Governor has indicated that the State will be attempting to develop a new funding formula to replace ECS, a next-to-impossible task with less money available.

Every Board Member in Every District

As members of our Association, every school board member and superintendent has been invited to a legislative breakfast in their area. They are also encouraged to attend this year’s Day on the Hill, March 8.

And, every district should be in close contact with

your legislators as the Legislative Session continues, to explain what cuts will mean to their district. Personal stories of what will happen in your schools resonate with legislators.

How will CABE, as an association, work to help ameliorate what we expect will be a difficult funding situation?

CABE has great credibility as the representative of boards of education on the Hill, thanks to the thoughtful, credible and passionate work of members of our Board of Directors, *Patrice McCarthy* and *Sheila McKay* in advocating for boards and we believe that we expand that influence when working in coalition with others.

We set some mutually-agreed-ground rules as we build coalitions. Perhaps most important is that we will never violate the positions agreed upon by our Delegate Assembly. As your voice, we always ensure that we stay within the boundaries of those positions.

We understand that our coalition partners work under the same rule we do. We do not expect them to change their fundamental positions, either.

This may appear to make for “strange bedfellows” at times, but under those rules, we look for common ground and agree to disagree on positions in which we are fundamentally opposed. We understand, as do they, that on positions that differ, we will push for our positions before the Legislature – and so will they.

Let me tell you about three coalitions in which we are a part. In all three coalitions, CABE, CAPSS and CAS (representing principals) are members. We are usually closest in positions with these other organizations as a natural result of the roles of all of our members.



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1. **Whatwillourchildrenlose Coalition** - The ‘funny’ name of this Coalition, so-titled because it is dedicated to ensuring that our children do not lose out due to the fiscal situation, also includes CASBO, representing school business officials across the State. The Coalition mostly focuses on funding for our schools, as well as some other issues that affect school resources, such as mandates.
2. **The Big Six Partnership** - made up of CABE, CAPSS, CAS, CBIA (the Connecticut Business and Industry Association), the Connecticut Council for Education Reform (CCER) and the Connecticut Coalition for Achievement Now (Conn-CAN), this group formed as the Governor and Legislature began to adopt education reforms, somewhat in reaction to the Federal Government’s competitive Race to the Top program. The group has stayed together, working on issues like educator evaluation and support, and recently, developing Design Principles for A New Funding Formula.
3. **The Connecticut Coalition for Public Education** - consists of CABE, CAPSS, CAS, both teachers’ unions, the principals’ union, PTA and SDE (ex officio). We work with this Coalition on strengthening public education and have taken stances on funding, the achievement gap and other issues.

Gains for Our Members

With these coalitions, as well as “rolling coalitions” on various issues, we believe that we have increased our influence and strengthened our capacities for dealing with certain issues, like school funding.

Various members of all of these coalitions bring different strengths, contacts and perspectives on issues that help us be more effective. We have also found that greater dialogue with these “partners” help us better understand their views and objectives in regard to the issues facing us. In some cases, we have

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gained greater access to legislators and others.

And, we have helped others better understand our positions and have helped their groups move closer to CABE’s.

No, the meetings we hold aren’t always easy. We have had difficult meetings because of our different views and positions. But, overall, they have been very helpful in strengthening the advocacy work we do.

Board Members

As I wrote above, these Coalitions are very valuable in helping the Governor’s Office, legislators, the State Board of Education and others understand what the effects of various actions they might take will be on school boards, staff and students.

But, the most powerful influencers are often board members and superintendents telling their stories. This year, we need everyone pulling in the same direction.

You can help influence what happens at the State level and affect the education of your students. Please do what you can to ensure that schools have the resources and the flexibility they need to help students achieve as much as they can.

See you on March 8, if not before!