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# CITY OF NEW BRITAIN

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR  
THE HONORABLE ERIN E. STEWART

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## **Continued Investment in Public Education Critical to New Britain's Future**

It's always a guarantee that there are two issues which will be at the top of everyone's mind in town, taxes, and education.

As an executive board member for the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities, this legislative session we have made it a priority to advocate for full funding of the Education Cost Sharing Grant. You may have seen or heard me speak at a press conference last month, identifying how great the need is and how any additional dollars could positively impact our city.

While it is the ultimate desire of every municipal leader to work to increase education funding, often times our local budgetary realities prevent us from making the type of investment we would prefer. It's inevitable that cities like ours need additional help from the State and Federal government to adequately fund our public education systems. The troubling reality is that in our state the inequities in the system make it difficult for a city like ours to keep up. I am a firm believer that the educational success of a child should not depend on their local property tax rate.

This is precisely why policy changes at the state level are crucial, and why we continue to advocate for expediting the process of equitably reworking the Educational Cost Sharing grants formula to help communities like New Britain fully fund our public education systems.

I'm willing to bet that you did not know that for the past 11 years the state has nearly flat funded our ECS grant. While there is a plan to gradually improve this over time, our students can't afford to wait. The State of Connecticut right now is benefiting from massive surpluses, it's time to spend some of that on our public education students. Speeding up this process would result in an additional \$14.4 million annually flowing into the Consolidated School District of New Britain, this would be monumental for our students.

We have been working diligently to increase the quality of life for all our residents and build a brighter future for our city. It has been a multifaceted approach that has included strategic policy decisions, targeted development in almost every neighborhood, and sound fiscal management at every turn. A critical piece of this effort has been investing local dollars in developing high-quality public education that each and every one of our children deeply deserve, but we always need more help.

Investments in education come in many forms, to start, our students need modern school buildings that are equipped to meet the demands of 21st-century education. When we start talking about the ways the City has put in local dollars, it's more than just increasing the annual budget line items. Let's recap: \$30 million was invested for the renovation of Gaffney Elementary, which was completed in 2015. In 2019, the city embarked on a \$49 million renovation of Smalley Elementary school. The most recent school to be renovated was Chamberlain Elementary which will be open this September at a cost of \$50 million and up next is the \$70 million renovation of Holmes Elementary. We are grateful for the reimbursement program that the state has available so that we can continue making these much-needed investments at a price tag that our local property tax payers can afford.

This year, at the April 12 common council meeting, I presented my proposed budget for the next fiscal year, which included an increase in funding of \$5 million to the operating funds of the Board of Education. I have vocalized my belief that simply throwing money at a problem without a well thought out plan on how to ensure maximum impact is pointless. I am confident that under superintendent Gasper 's guidance this increase in education funding will go directly to supporting our students in the classroom, while giving our educators the freedom to do what they do best, teach.

I am fully aware of the challenges we face as a community and a State with regard to education funding, but I am so proud of the substantial progress we have made locally over the last few months. The continued commitment to investing in our public education system here in New Britain and beyond, is a critical piece to building the bright future that our children deserve.