CT mirror
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Take Note(s)

CT Mirror's Education Newsletter

By Theo Peck-Suzuki/Education Reporter
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Hello Reader,

On Friday, the group Special Education Equity for Kids in Connecticut had its annual conference at Wesleyan University. Both keynote speakers talked about the Federal Scholarship Tax Credit, and, well, I got the impression neither of them were big fans. Chicago-based attorney Matt Cohen described the FSTC as part of a broader effort by the federal government to destroy public education. Those who believe the scholarships will benefit students with disabilities from all walks of life, he said, are being "hoodwinked." He urged attendees to tell Gov. Ned Lamont not to opt in.

The other keynote speaker, Preston Green III of UConn's Neag School of Education, warned that parents who use FSTC money to enroll their kids in private schools sign away the rights guaranteed in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act — the federal law requiring schools to provide a free appropriate public education in a student's least restrictive environment.

I'd already heard concerns like these from the state's teachers' unions and superintendents' association, but this time, the message came largely from special education attorneys — which is interesting, given their work often puts them in an adversarial relationship with those other groups. I wrote an article Tuesday digging into this a bit more (you can find it here).

Lamont has said he's still deciding whether to opt Connecticut into the FSTC. If he does, it will open the door for scholarship granting organizations (SGOs) in the state to begin accepting donations and distributing money. Proponents of opting in have said states can create SGOs to benefit public school students, but it takes work, and the clock is ticking. And the scholarships can't cover services students already get for free (for example, it can't pay a public school teacher's salary).

Everyone seems to think Lamont is waiting until after the election to announce whether he's opting into the FSTC. "After the election" is next week, so we might have an answer pretty soon.

Picture Day

SEEK hosted a regular who's-who of Connecticut education leaders for a panel discussion on special ed costs. Left to right: ConnCASE President Aimee Turner; Education Committee co-Chair Rep. Jennifer Leeper; School and State Finance Project Executive Director Lisa Hammersley; Connecticut Education Association Vice President Joslyn DeLancey; CAPSS Executive Director Fran Rabinowitz; and CABE Executive Director Patrice McCarthy. Child Advocate Christine Ghio moderated.
Credit: Theo Peck-Suzuki