

# A Political History of School Finance Reform in Metropolitan Hartford, Connecticut, 1945-2005

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# The School Finance Issue

- Since the 1970s, school funding systems of 45 states challenged in courts
- Political stakes have intensified due to rising increases in public school spending
  - revenues more than doubled during each decade from 1940 to 1990 (Odden & Picus)

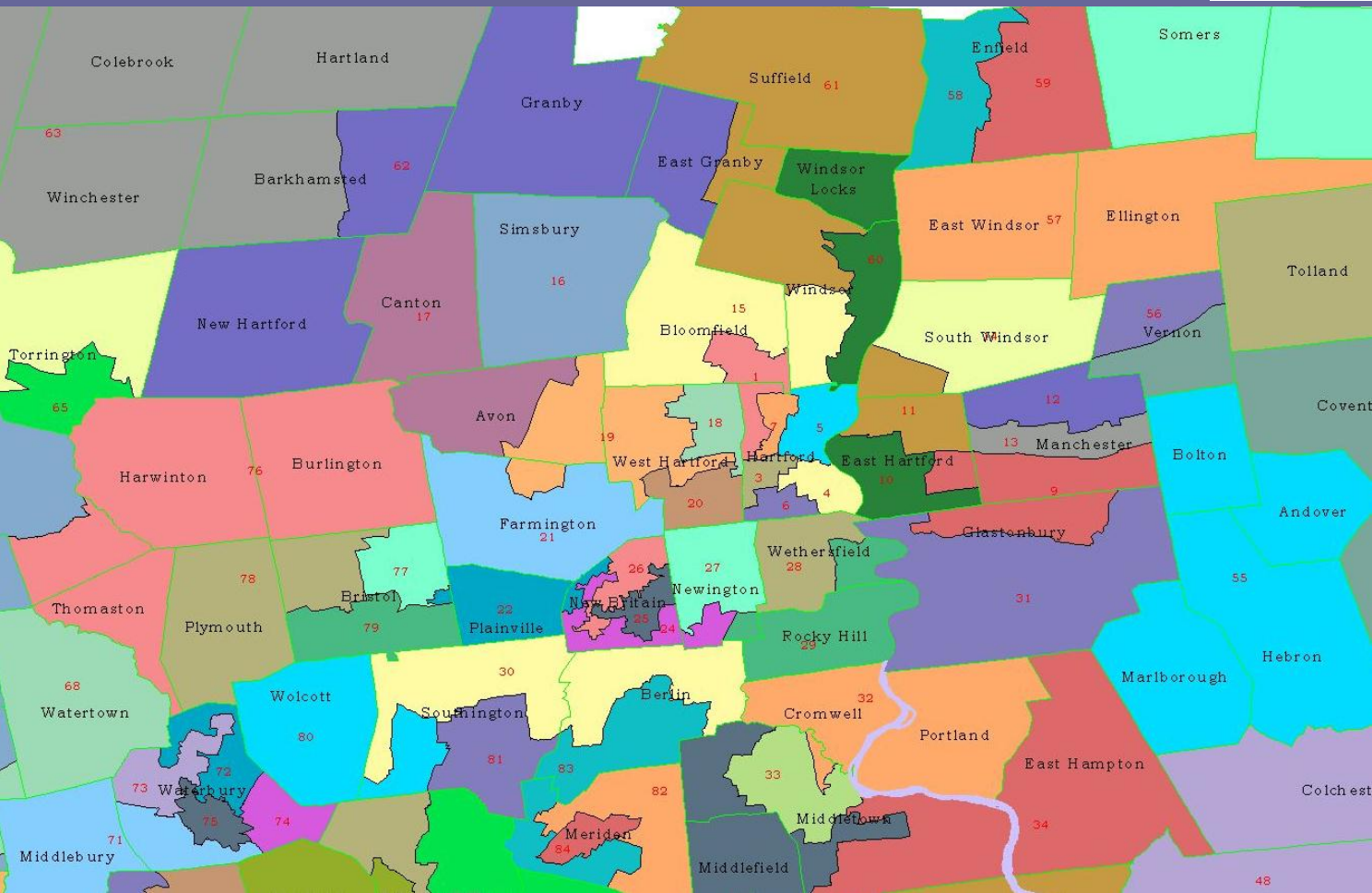
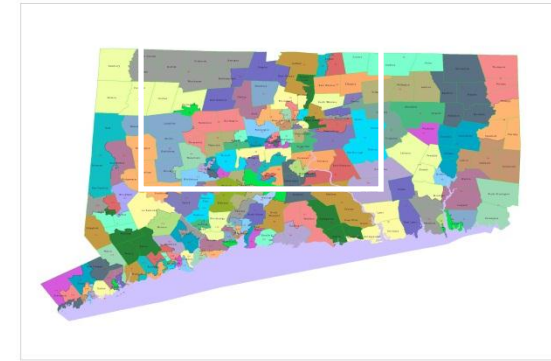
# The School Finance Issue in Connecticut

- How and why did legislators from metropolitan Hartford's urban, suburban, and rural districts debate and vote on school finance bills over time?

# Significance

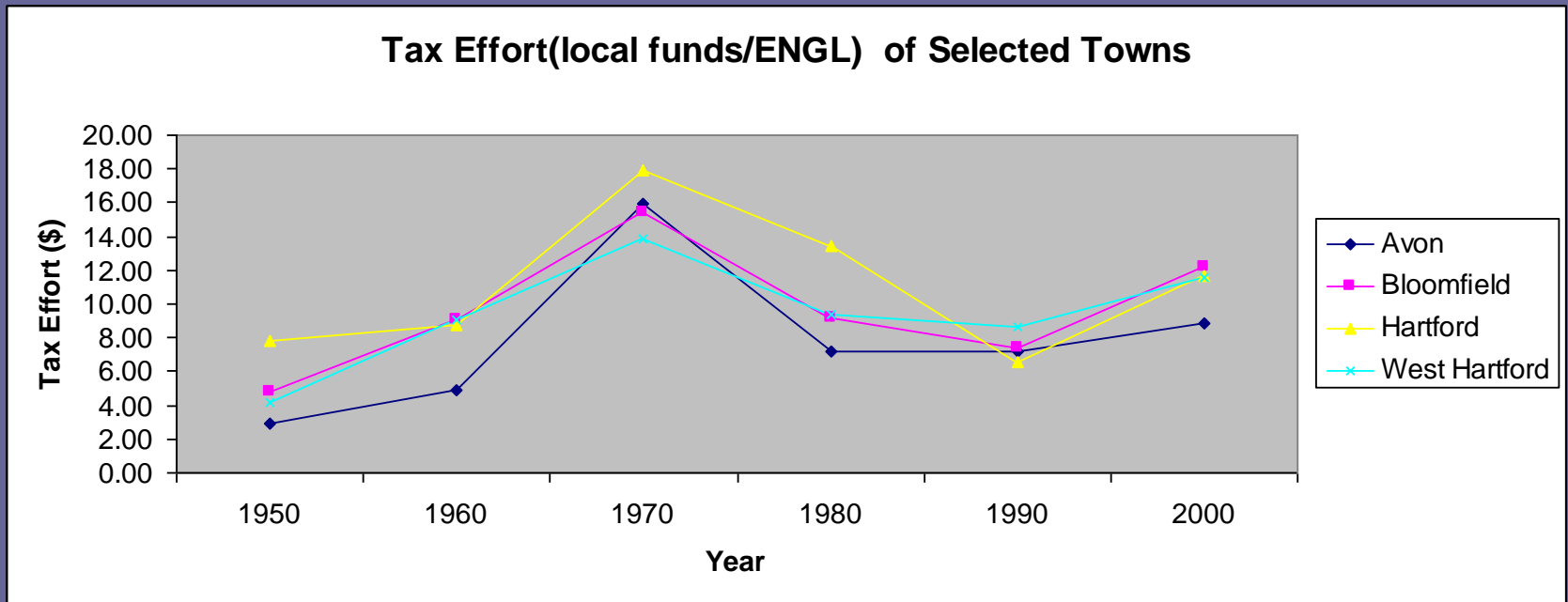
- Study emphasizes conflict between urban, suburban, and rural legislative interests and analyzes them in the context of the metropolitan Hartford area
- Keith Boeckelman, “Suburban State Legislators and School Finance” (2004)
  - Suburban legislators were more likely to oppose statewide financing plans than were those from other regions, even though this opposition did not always mean that the legislation in question failed

# CT House Districts (2001)



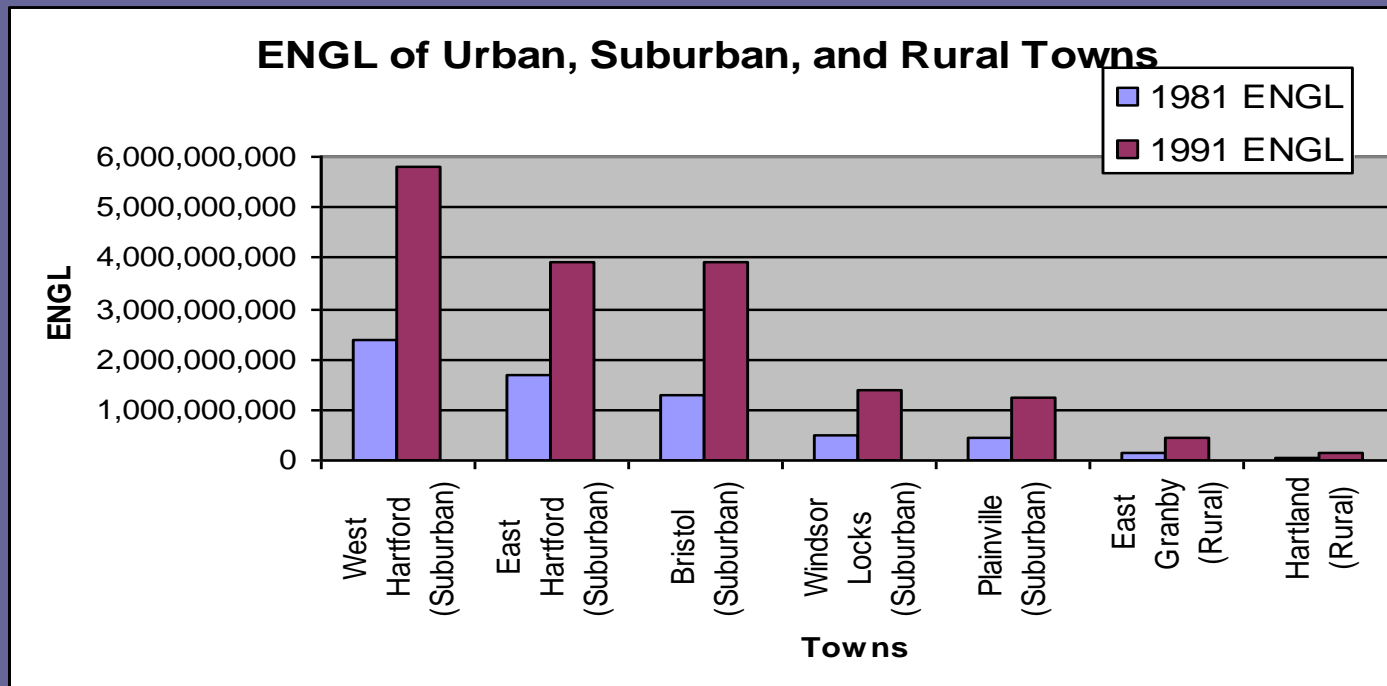
# Definitions: Tax Effort

- The rate at which each town chooses to tax its available property tax base (ENGL = Equalized Net Grand List)
  - The % of the available property tax funds each town allocates for education
  - The key elements of tax effort are that it is a *chosen* rate on an *available* property tax base



# Definitions: High-need

- Towns that do not have a large available property base to tax, relative to the needs of the school population that they serve



# School Finance in CT: Change Over Time

3 major changes shifted debate:

- suburbanization
- redistricting
- Horton v Meskill* school finance case

2 new players appeared :

- wealthy & less-wealthy suburbs

**mid-1960s -1970s**



**1945 - 1950s**

- Urban areas put forth a high tax effort to fund their schools
- Rural towns needed high levels of state aid to develop their schools

**1980s-2005**

- Urban areas, rural areas, & less-wealthy suburbs became high need
- Wealthy suburbs put forth a high tax effort

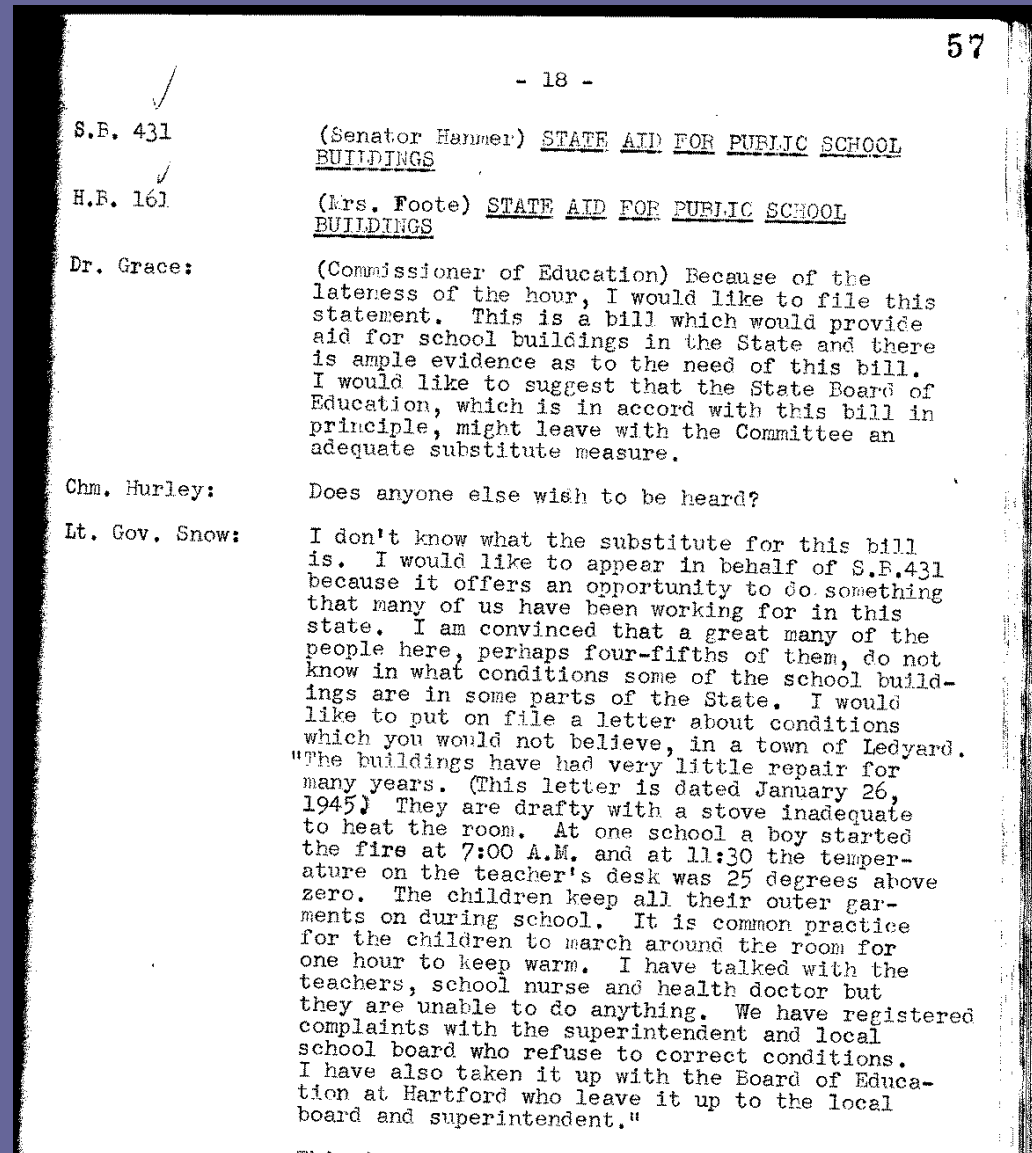


# Historical Research

Legislative history records detailed any controversies that arose surrounding proposed bills

- Education Committee
- Appropriations Committee
- Senate Floor
- House Floor

1945 Education Committee Hearings on Senate Bill 431



# Quantitative Research

- Controversial Roll Call Votes on school finance bills and amendments were analyzed based on the actions of voting Representatives

## Vote for HB-6004 (1975)

Result of the vote:

Total Number Voting: 34

Necessary for Passage: 18

Yea: 27

Nay: 7

Absent and not voting: 2

REGULAR SESSION			CONNECTICUT HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES			1975 LEGISLATURE		
YEAS	N-Y	NAYS	YEAS	N-Y	NAYS	YEAS	N-Y	NAYS
Abate	148		Giordano	99		Natalino	97	
Ahearn	55		Glassman	14		O'Connor	50	
Alessie	122		Goodwin	54		O'Leary	60	
Allyn	43		Gosselin	125		O'Neill	34	
Ambrogio	95		Grande	79		Orcutt	98	
Anastasia	138		Grasser	85		Palola	121	
Anderson	106		Grosso	63		Palmieri	74	
Badolato	23		Hamerman	114		Pawliak	105	
Baehr	123		Healey	72		Quinn	132	
Balducci	27		Hendel	40		Radzwillas	128	
Bartinson	57		Henderson	112		Rapoport	73	
Billington	7		Hermanowski	26		Reynolds	116	
Bogdan	117		Johnston	51		Ritter	6	
Bonatti	65		Julian	52		St. Pierre	22	
Bordiere	24		Kemler	18		Scully	75	
Burke	56		Klebanoff	8		Serrani	144	
Campbell	118		LaRosa	3		Shaw	19	
Carragher	5		Lawless	137		Sherwood	134	
Clampi	76		Leeney	124		Smoko	91	
Clark	21		Liskov	131		Spanheimer	103	
Clynes	81		Lowden	146		Stalberg	93	
Coatsworth	32		Lyddy	126		Sweeney	46	
Cohen	17		Mahoney, F.	13		Tanger	38	
Collins	140		Mannion	107		Tabin	37	
Cokuzzi	71		Martin	39		Traglia	145	
Cressotti	59		Mastrianni	104		Tuliano	29	
Cummings	12		Mazza	115		Turiano	120	
DellPercio	127		McCuskey	86		Vicino	78	
DeMennato	87		McGovern	130		Villano	96	
DeZino	84		McGuirk	139		Walkovich	109	
Doran	36		McManus	88		Walsh	53	
Dzalo	33		Marcier	44		Webber	92	
Esposito	110		Mesite	82		Weigand	83	
Farricelli	102		Metro	64		Willard	11	
Faulise	45		Moriarty	80		Wright	77	
Ferrari	15		Morris, J.	25		Yacavone	9	
Flynn	47		Morrison	58				
Gejdenson	48		Morton	129				
Giles	4		Motto	2				
Gilligan	28		Moynihan	10				

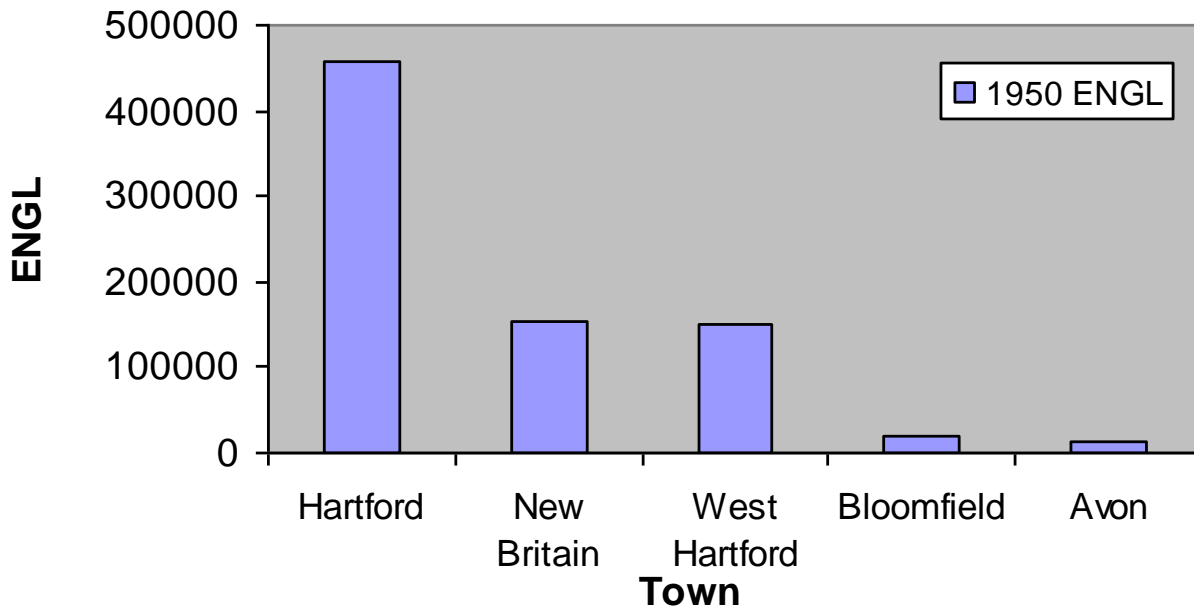
YEAS: <u>118</u>	N-Y: <u>13</u>	NAYS: <u>20</u>	BILL NUMBER <u>HB 6310</u>
			as amended by House <u>A 9 B</u>

1963

# Rural v. Urban in the 1940s & '50s

- Urban areas had a higher property tax than rural towns
  - representatives of rural towns argued for more state aid to help fund their schools.

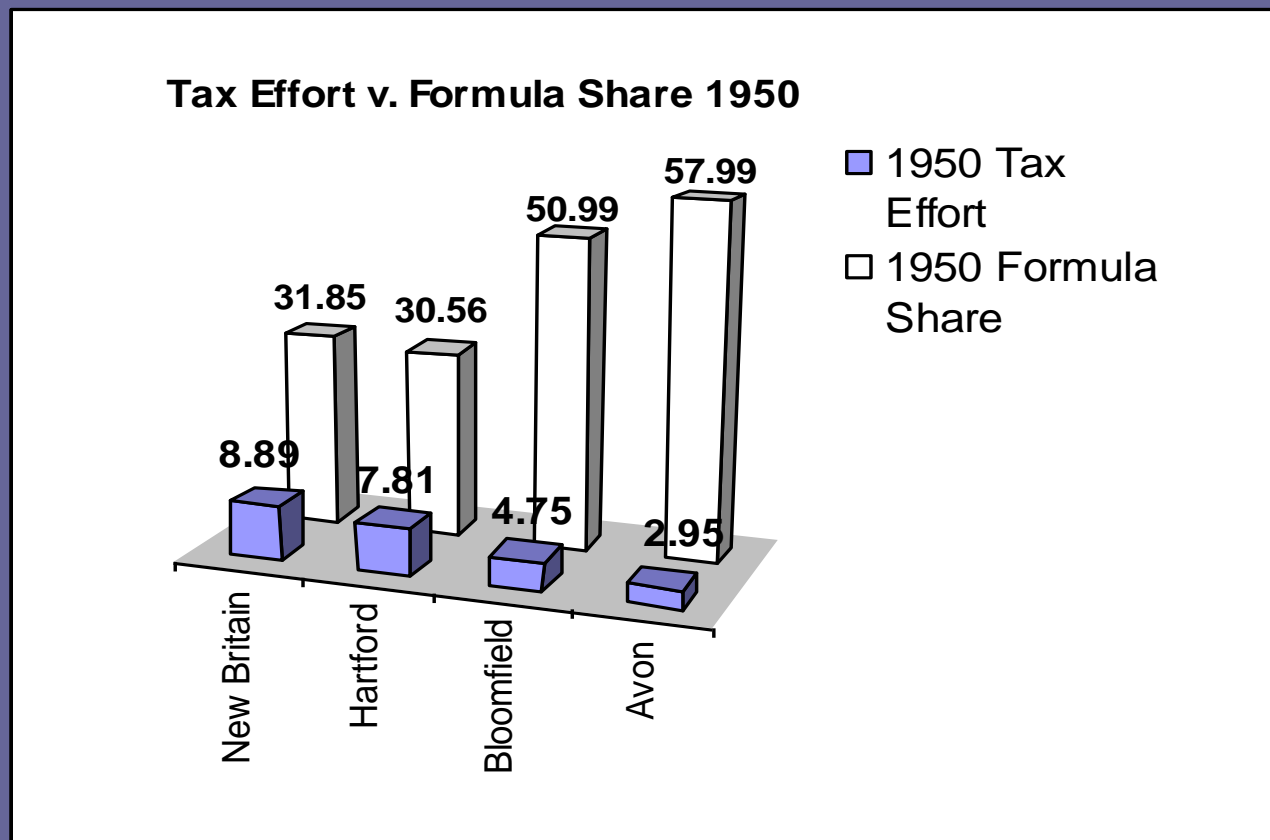
Property Tax Base(ENGL) of Select towns in 1950



“The buildings have had very little repair for many years. They are drafty with a stove inadequate to heat the room... We investigated and found 81 towns with poor conditions and 21 towns with extremely poor conditions.”-Lt. Governor Snow, 1945 Education Committee Hearings

# Rural v. Urban in the 1940s & '50s

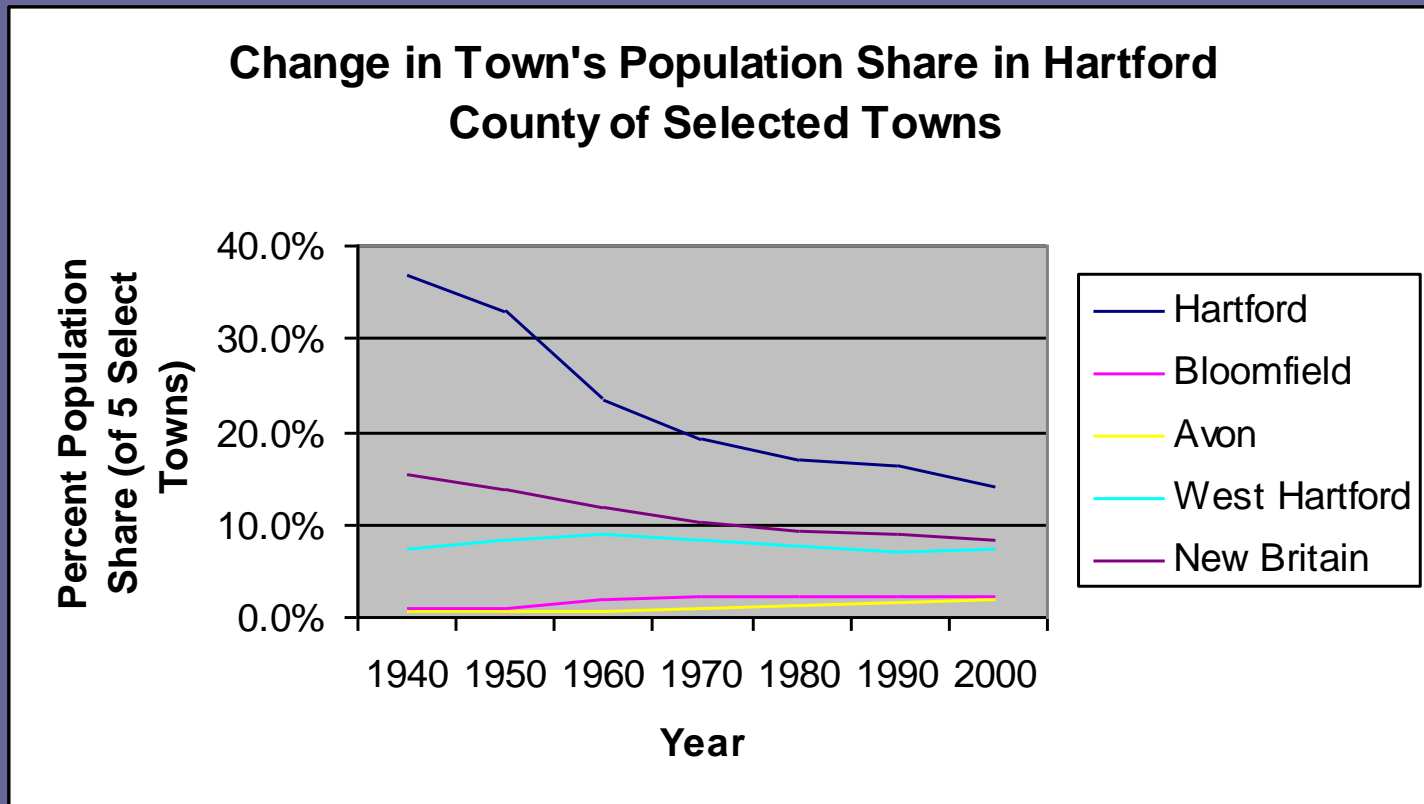
- However, urban areas chose to tax themselves at a higher rate than rural areas
  - Urban representatives argued for property-tax relief



# Changes in mid-1960s & '70s

- **Suburbanization**

- In 1950, 33% of Hartford County's population lived in the City of Hartford. By 1980, the city accounted for only 17% of the county population - a decrease of 16 percentage points.



# Changes in mid-1960s & '70s

- **Reapportionment**

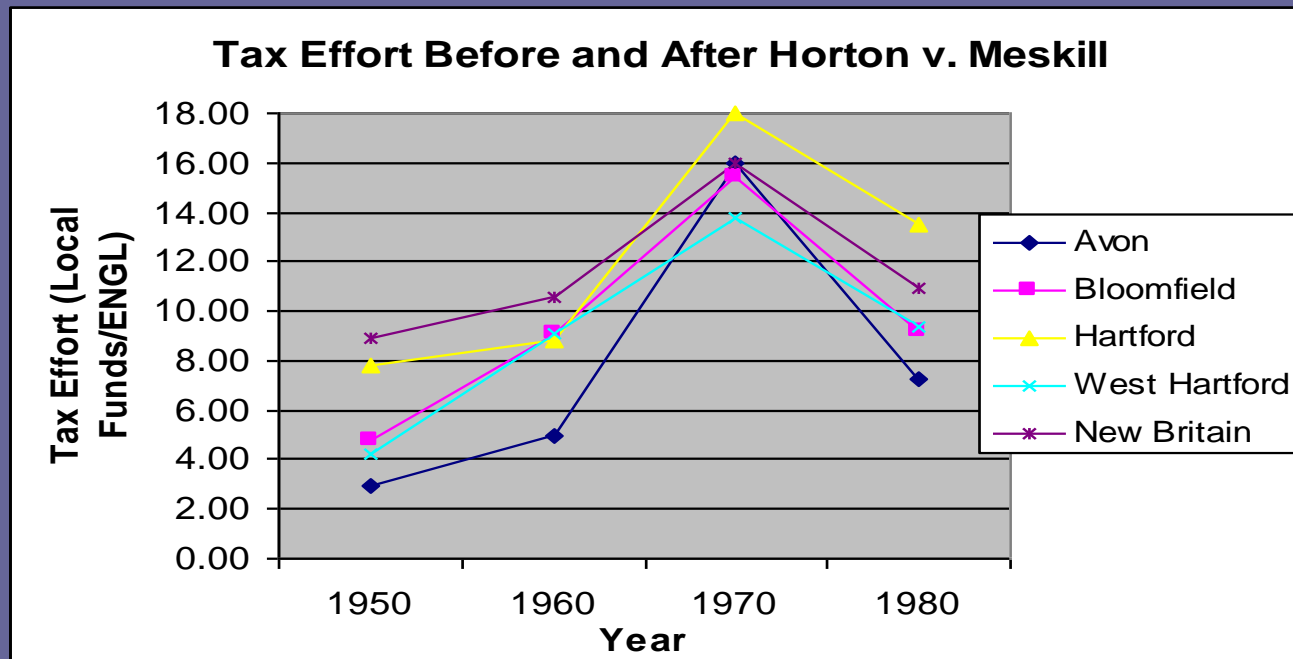
1965 CT Constitutional Convention reapportioned the Senate and House to comply with 'one man, one vote' principle

Percent of CT House seats held by 81 small towns:

before 1965	43%
after 1965	14%

# Changes in mid-1960s & '70s

- 1974 *Horton v. Meskill* school finance case
  - held education funding based solely on property taxes to be unconstitutional
- Guaranteed Tax Base (GTB) formula
  - Benefited high-need towns
  - Result: state aid varied according to the level of property wealth and the tax effort of the locality.



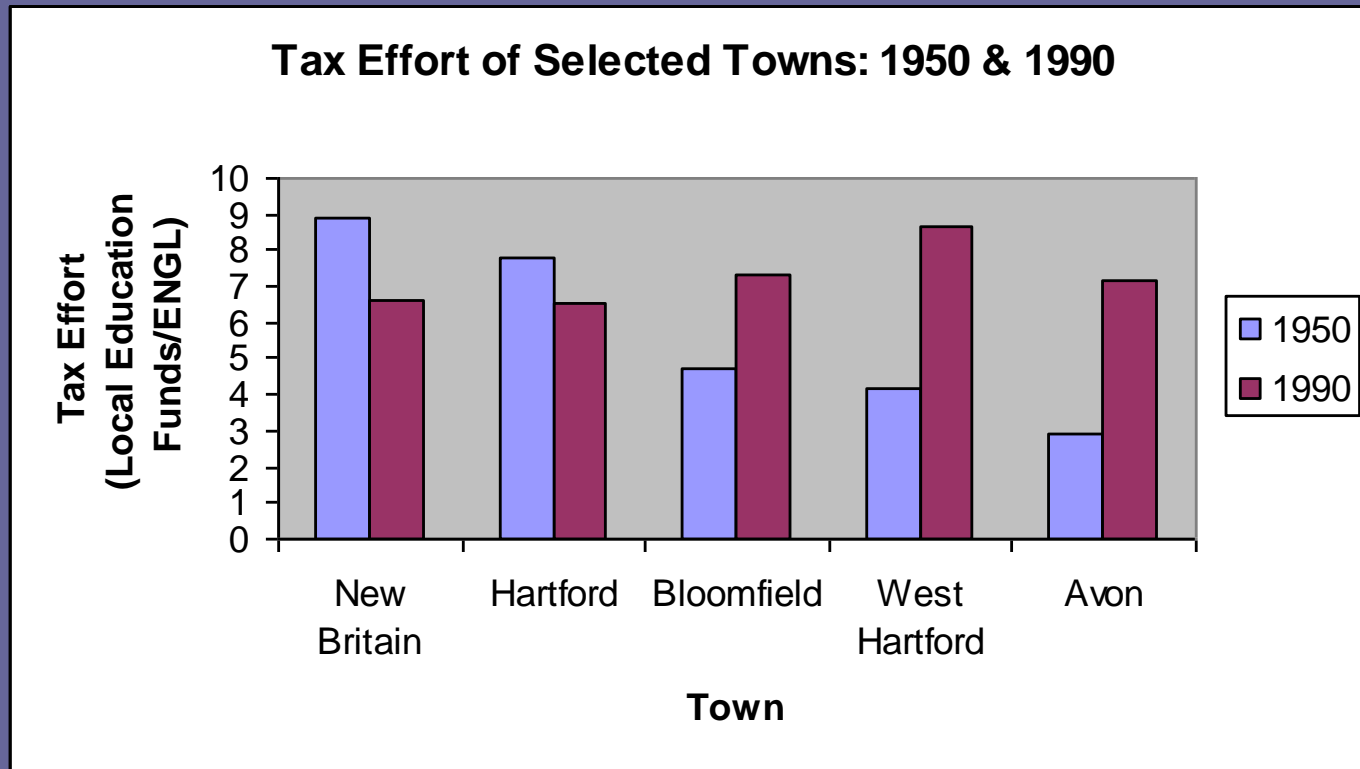
# Changes in Tax Effort

## •1940s-1950s

- Urban areas put forth a higher tax effort than rural areas

## •1980s-2005

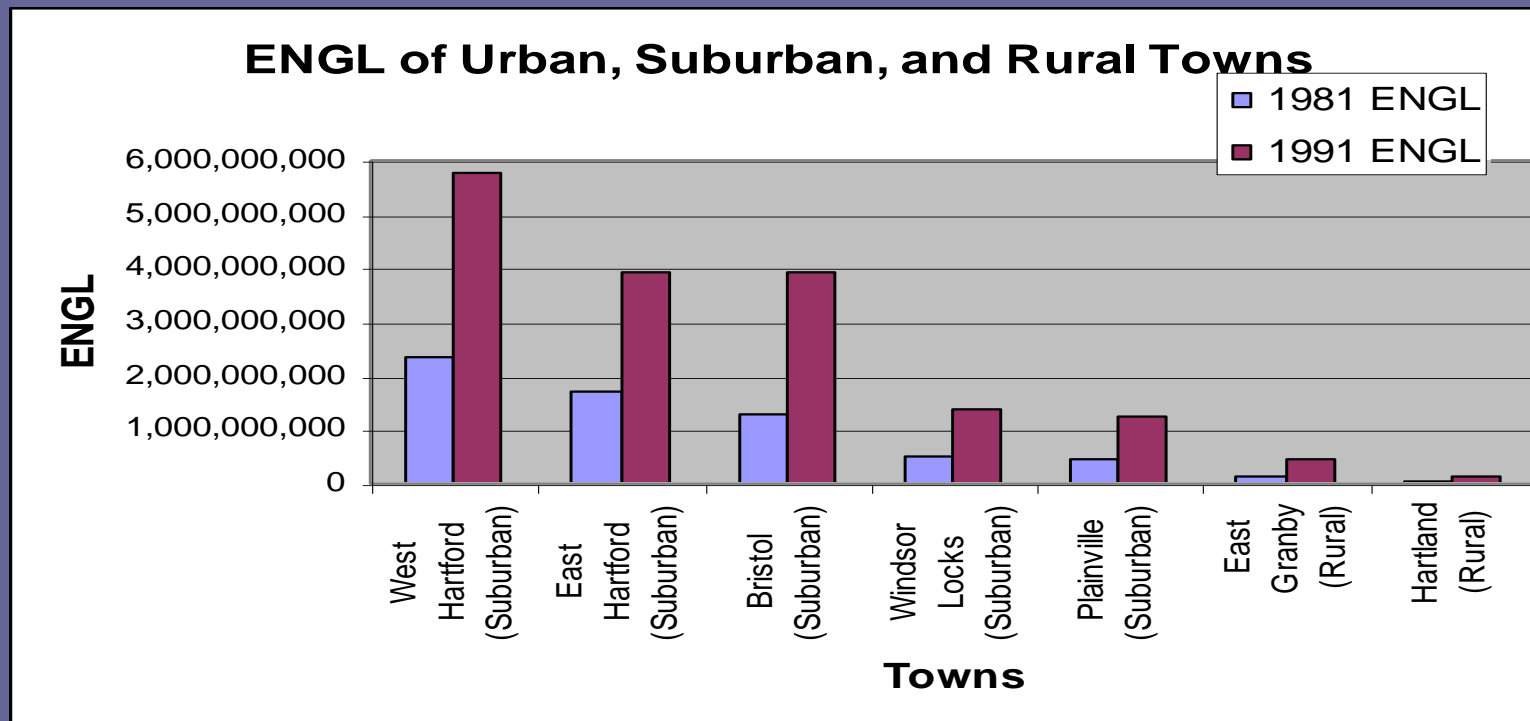
- Urban areas, suburban areas, and rural areas all put forth a high tax rate
- Only the property tax base of wealthy suburbs can support their schools





# After Horton v. Meskill: 1980s-2005

- Wealthy suburban areas had a higher property tax base than urban, rural and less-wealthy suburban areas
- Representatives of wealthy suburban areas argued for tax relief



# After Horton v. Meskill: 1980s-2005

- Representatives of urban, rural and less-wealthy suburban towns argued for state aid to compensate for their lack of property tax base

“Well, one of the things that we do know is that the smallest of towns that are very hard up, that are poor, do not get the same per child help under the ECS formula” -Representative Sawyer, 2005

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