

In Support of Bill #1061, An Act Concerning Increased Funding for Agriscience Programs

In 1993, the State Legislature adjusted the funding structure of the state's 19 regional agriscience programs (vocational agriculture programs) by imposing a tuition cap that is currently 120% of the foundation formula, or \$7,069.00. This is the tuition that the 19 host centers are able to charge for each student in the agriscience program to cover costs. Also, in 1993, the state instituted an operating grant for host centers in the amount of \$700.00 per student to help cover the differences in the tuition amount received by sending towns and the actual costs of educating those students in the host high schools. In 1993, the \$700.00 came close to making up this difference. However, over the last 13 years since 1993, the average costs of a high school student's education has risen dramatically while the \$700.00 grant per student has only slowly risen to the current amount of \$789.00 per student in 2004-2005. In the past five years, the state department of education, as well as local school officials and boards of education at the 19 host centers, have heard increasing concerns over the increasing gap between the tuition received and the outdated \$700.00 per student operating grant, and the actual costs of high school education (currently over \$10,000.00 per student). This has resulted in several host communities arguing that they are subsidizing out of town students' education because the state has not increased the per student operating grant each year since 1993 while the costs of a student's education has increased significantly each year.

Last year, because of this concern, the Commissioner of Education requested that the State Agricultural Education Advisory Committee study the costs of the programs and to provide a benefit analysis.

The report was completed in February of 2006 and clearly shows that there is an immediate need for the state to increase the operating grant from \$700.00 to \$2,500.00 to help close the gap between the state-mandated tuition (\$7,069.00) charged to the sending towns and the actual costs of the student's high school education at these 19 operating centers.

Based on the 2004-2005 school year, the report shows that the average cost of educating students at the 19 host schools is \$10,355.00 per student. The sending towns pay \$7,069.00, and the state's operating grant in that year was \$789.00, leaving a shortfall of \$2,497.00 per student. This shortfall has had to be absorbed by the host schools. This has caused the host towns questioning why they should be subsidizing out of district students in the amounts of up to \$2,500.00 per student. The state has failed to increase the operating grant of \$700.00 significantly since 1993. (It has only slightly increased to \$789.00 in 2004-2005.)

By comparing the state support of all of the state's school choice options, the report found the following information: (2004-2005 figures)

Open Choice	1,742 students, \$6,112 per student or \$10,647,500 state money.
Charter Schools	2,928 students, \$7,360 per student or \$19,732,160 state money.
Magnet Schools	15,833 students, \$5,969 per student or \$67,590,817 state money.
Vo-tech Schools	10,398 students, \$11,769 per student or \$128,764,882 state money.
Ag-Ed Centers	2,850 students, \$789 per student or \$2,288,578 state money.

There is an obvious inequity between the state support of the school choice schools, with the agriscience programs being forgotten about as all other school choice programs have seen funding increases on an annual basis.

The vocational agriculture programs are part of the Connecticut School Choice programs and are located in nineteen regional centers. By law, every student in the state has the opportunity to attend one of the centers. **In the last ten years the number of students attending has increased by 45% with a total of approximately 3000 students attending this year.** These students are studying in the career areas of Natural Resources and the environment, Aquaculture, Plant Science – Landscaping, floriculture, Animal Science, and Agricultural Engineering. The programs are extremely successful because of the three components of work experiences, leadership training and the classroom standards.

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