



State of Connecticut

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Education Committee
Public Hearing Testimony
Tuesday February 13, 2007

Dear Senator Gaffey, Senator Herlihy, Senator Fonfara, Representative Fleischmann, Representative Hovey, Representative Genga and Education Committee Membership:

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill 1061 "AN ACT CONCERNING VOCATIONAL AGRICULTURE CENTER FUNDING." The purpose of this bill is to increase the per pupil grant for students attending vocational agriculture centers to two thousand five hundred dollars to ensure that the education they receive is no less than that offered at other public school.

The Town of Trumbull is fortunate to be home to the Trumbull Regional Agriscience and Biotechnology Center. At this School students are given the opportunity to study a broad range of subjects not often covered in traditional classrooms. Students here choose a focus like animal science or mechanics and take classes that are specially geared toward that concentration. Although 90% of seniors go on to college, the remaining senior class is well prepared to enter the workforce. The skills they have learned here help ensure that they are employable for skilled labor. Graduates from these types of schools can be seen working as vets or landscape designers or yes even farmers.

One of the things that impresses me the most about the Trumbull Regional Agriscience and Biotechnology Center was how excited these kids are to be there. A quick tour of the facility reveals why. Most of the classrooms are designed for hands-on activity and a great deal of emphasis is placed on interaction. Even though the courses and classes are not the same as those offered at our local high school, the education received here is just as good. The skills these students learn help prepare them for careers - not just college and I believe that it is this different approach to learning that has prevented many kids from dropping out. An increase in funding would help expand these opportunities to those who want to learn something different; to those who don't want to go to college; to those who are thinking about dropping out.

And yet, there is a more pressing reason for us to increase funding to these schools. As you are all aware, the State has committed millions of dollars to preserve farms in Connecticut. We have been successful in saving many farms, though we have done little to keep farming itself a viable profession. Farming isn't what it used to be and unless a farmer has the proper training and knowledge, he isn't going to be very successful. It is prudent that we teach the next generation of farmers how to stay competitive and profitable especially since our farmers are facing increased pressure from bigger states and foreign countries.

I thank the Committee for raising this important bill and ask that it please be given a favorable report. It is time that the Legislature stop considering nontraditional schools as unequal and start to properly fund them.