

Testimony
Submitted to the
Education Committee

March 27, 2009

Raised Bill No. 6688: An Act Concerning Education Grants

Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleishmann, and members of the Education Committee:

My name is Dr. Craig Edmondson, and I serve as the Executive Director of Area Cooperative Educational Services, ACES serving the twenty-five districts in South Central Connecticut.

I am submitting written testimony today in support of Raised Bill No. 6688, An Act Concerning Educational Grants. I appreciate the work of the General Assembly during these unprecedented times of fiscal challenges and I thank you for the work you do.

House Bill 6688 allows the Connecticut State Department of Education to continue their work in the support state-wide efforts to voluntarily reduce racial, ethnic and economic isolation through the interdistrict magnet school and the Open Choice programs. The bill provides for this support in the following ways:

- Repeal the current law calling for the 25% reduction of the per pupil ECS allocation for each participating student.
- It supports the CSDE recommendation for increases in funding for receiving school districts in the Open Choice program.
- It increases the support of any one district participating in a magnet school that will send more than 55% but less than 60% of the total population of that school. (This will resolve permanently the financial

issues communicated to the members of the committee regarding the Wintergreen Interdistrict Magnet School.)

All three of these proposed changes will serve as an incentive to participating districts to continue and in many cases increase their commitments to these vital programs. Without adoption, some of our magnet schools are in serious jeopardy of closing and choice participation will be reduced.

These magnet schools have earned strong support from the families and students who have chosen to enroll and from the communities where they are located. Over time magnet schools have also demonstrated improved student achievement, while bringing students together across district lines to reduce racial, ethnic and socio-economic isolation – the identified goals in *Sheff v. O’Neil*. Without the proper funding the state has transformed a voluntary effort into an unfunded mandate at a time when urban and suburban school districts throughout Connecticut cannot continue to find the financial resources to meet the obligations for their own schools much less magnet schools and the acceptance of large numbers of open choice students.

Being outside of the Capital region, I am concerned that with the enormous obligation to meet the requirements of the Sheff stipulated agreement, legislators may be compelled to differentiate funding levels. I ask on behalf of my region that not happen and that all magnet schools state-wide are treated equally in any new formula and subsidy level.

Once again, thank you for your work on behalf of the public school students in Connecticut.