

## WINTERGREEN INTERDISTRICT MAGNET SCHOOL

### Testimony #1

My name is Alysia Gibbs. I am a resident of Hamden, Connecticut and a parent of two students that attend Magnet Schools in the State of Connecticut. My oldest son is a freshman at Career Regional Magnet School in New Haven and my daughter is a third grader at Wintergreen Magnet School in Hamden. With the exception of one school year, my son has attended Magnet or Charter Schools all of his life. He has ADHD and is currently supported through a Section 504 plan. Through Magnet Schools, he has benefited from a smaller classroom size, a higher caliber of teaching staff and the sense of community that the schools he has attended provide. The one year that he attended our neighborhood public school, there were 32 children in the class, it was an open classroom setting, with only one teacher in the classroom and very little opportunity for additional support. He was an average student that fell two grade levels in reading and one grade level in math in just that one year (fourth grade). I knew at that point that Magnet Schools made a big difference in a child's education.

My daughter has been receiving special education services since she was 2. She started with the Birth to Three Program due to speech and hearing issues. After that, she continued speech services through the town of Hamden until she attended Wintergreen Magnet School. She currently receives speech services and was diagnosed with ADD last year. My daughter has also benefited from attending a Magnet School. The smaller class size has helped with her self esteem, her level of confidence, her concentration and her ability to receive hands on assistance from her teacher when needed. Since Kindergarten, she has steadily progressed and this is the first year that she is being close to "on level" socially and academically with her peers. I credit this largely to the Magnet School program. Magnet Schools offer diversity and opportunities that children normally don't receive in neighborhood public schools. These opportunities such as foreign language, technology, science, and arts benefit them in the long run and help to make them productive members of society as they mature.

As a mother of two children that currently attend Magnet schools and a rising kindergartener (that I hope will attend a Magnet School in the fall), I am a strong supporter of Connecticut's Magnet School Program and I urge Governor Rell and the State Legislator to continue to financially support Magnet Schools.

Thank you for your time.  
Alysia D Gibbs

### Testimony #2

**My name is Abby Beale and as a faithful Wallingford, CT taxpayer and dedicated parent of an 8<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grader, I want to believe that the state of Connecticut would want to see MORE schools like the Wintergreen Interdistrict Magnet School (WIMS) in Hamden, not less. With the pending budget issues, it is almost inevitable that this school will not stay as an Interdistrict Magnet School which saddens me greatly.**

**This school offers so much to the children. Here's a quick list of my personal highlights:**

- **As you may know, this is a non-Sheff school but very diverse in its population. My children, who come from a primarily Caucasian town, have had**

## WINTERGREEN INTERDISTRICT MAGNET SCHOOL

the opportunity to make friends with and be exposed to many different races and cultures.

- The school focuses on technology and the students use computers for many of their projects. When my kids were in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, they were creating power point presentations. My now 5<sup>th</sup> grade son is learning to use a palm pilot and my 8<sup>th</sup> grader has a school-issued laptop that he relies on for school work. These are skills they will take with them wherever they go.
- Spanish is offered from kindergarten on and is the language of the U.S. as predicted in the next 20 years. A very useful use of taxpayer dollars.
- The teachers and administration are top notch and very involved with the children, the school and the parents. They have developed a cohesive faculty which greatly benefits the students.
- The parents of this school are SO involved and through our fundraising, we offer incredible cultural enrichment opportunities not many schools can afford. Just last year, we hired a hot-air balloonist to demonstrate their craft in the back yard of the school. We frequently bring in authors and artists to share their talents with the students.
- There are 3 classes per grade totaling around 70 students per grade. In the middle school (grades 6-8), this is especially reassuring as these teens are in a school where everyone knows them and there aren't as many influencers there as would be in a larger middle school.

We live in Wallingford, one of the sending districts, where it takes 30 minutes (if going directly) to get to school. When they take the bus, it takes an hour or more. We've been doing this for 9 years now and truly believe the commute is worth it.

I humbly ask that you consider the value this school offers before changing the management of the school and/or closing it all together. This may mean changing funding options or recruiting more students from outside districts. I know the parents at WIMS would do ANYTHING to keep the school as is. Please let us know how we can help,

I thank you for considering this position. Let me know if I can help with this very difficult decision in a very challenging time.

Abby Beale  
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### Testimony #3

We are the Munstermann family from Hamden, CT. Why is Wintergreen Magnet School important to us? In the last 9 years, both of our children received a great education from Wintergreen Magnet School (WIMS). Now one child will be graduating next May from WIMS and the second child is in fourth grade. The following are some unique features of WIMS that I think will be irreplaceable if this school cannot continue to operate in the current format.

## WINTERGREEN INTERDISTRICT MAGNET SCHOOL

- **Diversity**: WIMS is an interdistrict school and accepts students from 4 different towns with a diverse ethnic and cultural background. In this diverse environment, our children are exposed to many types of people and customs. They make friends with people of different colors and wide ranging cultural identities. In general, this experience teaches them to be tolerant of other kinds of views. It prepares them well for their eventual entries into the society as the microcosm of WIMS reflects what a bigger society is like.
- **Comprehensive Curriculum**: The longer school days and school year allows an expanded spectrum of key subjects to be taught.
  - Essential courses, such as Reading and Writing, Math, Science, Social Studies, are taught with an eye towards each child's development capabilities. What is remarkable is that teachers not only patiently help and encourage the students who are in need of tutoring but also create an environment where top students are challenged to allow them to expand their intellectual capacities to the next level.
  - In addition, WIMS students receive additional instructions in Spanish, Arts, Music, and Gym. Spanish is taught from Kindergarten to 8th grade, which makes WIMS different from other elementary schools. Other than classroom activities, students visited consulate offices of Spanish speaking countries in the United Nations, videoconferenced with students from overseas (to practice their Spanish), to name a few. There is a vibrant Art environment where imagination is encouraged and techniques are taught. Students' masterpieces adorn the walls of WIMS and provide a cheerful place for students to learn. Music plays a big role in students' lives. Other than the school bands of different grades from 4th grade on up to 8th grade, there are orchestra, jazz band, small string ensemble, and chorus. Teachers are active and provide many opportunities for all the students to shine, such as performing at the Carnegie Hall in New York City and at the Big E in Massachusetts, visiting the elderly at Nursing Homes, and many other activities. Gym and fitness are a main focus of WIMS where efforts are made to engage all students in age appropriate fitness activities. All of these experiences create a well-rounded education and indelible memories to WIMS students.
- **Dedicated Administrative Staff and Teachers**: WIMS fosters an environment in which teachers and administrative staff are extremely dedicated to the students. They plan courses with attention to details. They apply for grants to bring more activities to students, such as laptops to 6th to 8th grade students. Extracurricular activities, such as the annual International Festival, Snow Ball, etc., are participated by everybody in school. Many teachers and staff work late into the nights to be there for students and parents. In fact, compared to other schools in the 4 communities where WIMS students are from, WIMS is probably one of the schools with most frequent activities in the evenings and on weekends. It is a testament to the vibrancy of a school.
- **Cutting Edge Technology**: Technology is important to successes in today's world. As stated above, teachers and staff at WIMS recognize that and work hard to provide cutting edge technology to students. In addition to individual laptops to students in junior academy, students from younger grades are just as immersed in technology. They learn from Kindergarten to type on keyboards using a great software program. They compose on Microsoft Word, prepare presentations on PowerPoint, publish their newsletters on Microsoft Publisher. They design programs on Palm PDAs and on the internet. Blackboard, a web-based interactive program, is a useful tool for teachers to assign additional research materials and projects to students and to allow enhanced communications between teachers and parents. WIMS prepares the students well for the 21st century technology.
- **Enthusiastic Parental Participation**: Parents are dedicated as well. Many parents spend their time volunteering at school on multiple fundraising events to provide added money to help with the students' field trips. Other parents volunteered to demonstrate and present their specialties to students.

## WINTERGREEN INTERDISTRICT MAGNET SCHOOL

WIMS bears an important responsibility in our four communities to teach our children. The unique qualities of this school take many years to nurture and flourish and are hard to duplicate in other schools. In this time of economy constraints, a successful education model, like the WIMS, should be supported and not disbanded.

### Testimony #4

There has been considerable talk regarding the state of our educational system and the level of education our children receive.

With all this so called concern, I am appalled at the news in the September 12, 2008 issue of the New Haven Register that the operation of the Wintergreen Inter-district Magnet School is in jeopardy.

As a parent of a student attending this school, I have been abundantly satisfied not only with my daughter's progress and the increase in her scope of knowledge, but in the study habits she has developed during her tenure at this school. It would be disappointing and irresponsible should the legislature enact any provision that would jeopardize the status of the Wintergreen Inter-district Magnet School. The PTO, Principal, assistant Principal, staff and Board of Education members met last night at school to discuss what Hamden Faces. There is a meeting scheduled on Tuesday, December 16, 2008 at 6:30 WIMS sub-committee public session in the board room at The Board of Education 60 Putnam Ave. Hamden. We are looking for support on this matter and need a voice for us with Governor Jody Rell can you help?

While I understand the budget constraints facing our state government, I urge you to use your influence and vote in the state legislature to insure that the education of our children is not the vehicle by which these problems are mitigated. The education of our children should be paramount and the status quo of the Wintergreen Inter-district Magnet School remains intact. Thank you for your consideration.

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## WINTERGREEN INTERDISTRICT MAGNET SCHOOL

### Testimony #5

**This past year has been filled with uncertainty regarding the status and continued well-being of our public schools. The uncertainty negatively impacts the well being of our school family, and the children suffer. Over the past two years, you have made budgetary decisions with our children in mind. You have invested in our public schools and held the system accountable for results. The changes to our education system were necessary and have demonstrated continued improvement.**

**As a public elected official and defender of our public education, without the continued investment and the priority you have placed on fixing our public schools, we will not be able to continue to build on what has been established. It is imperative that we continue to value our education system understanding that without the reforms and investment necessary, our communities will be sorely lacking in producing the quality workforce that is required in our state's economy.**

**This year's budget proposal works against everything that Magnet schools stand for. While we understand that these are tough economic times, I join other Wintergreen Interdistrict Magnet School parents to ask that you continue your leadership on issues related to quality education as the budget is crafted for the next two years. Now is not the time to back away from your commitment to fundamental reform in our public schools. Tomorrow's economic health will be a direct product of today's public schools.**

**As a Connecticut resident, I ask that you keep your commitment to delivering on the promise of great schools for all of our children. This means investing in innovative public schools with breakthrough results like Wintergreen Interdistrict Magnet School, recruiting highly qualified and energetic teachers, and creating transparency in all of our schools to ensure that money flows where it is really needed.**

**Thank you for your time and consideration.**

**Raquel Santiago-Martinez  
PTO President of WIMS  
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