

## Friis, John

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**From:** meri.nordstrom@comcast.net  
**Sent:** Monday, February 23, 2009 1:14 PM  
**To:** Friis, John  
**Subject:** Testimony for Magnet Schools

I believe the time has come for the state of CT to understand the value of education that Magnet Schools uniquely provide. I believe the funding must come from the state for the suburban students who travel long distances and freely attend classrooms with urban students, most, who are Hispanic, African-American, and come from other, diverse cultures and countries. It has been my conclusion and opinion that the magnet schools attract the gifted and talented students from the suburbs. These students, many with very socially progressive and educated parents, are an asset to these classrooms since there is a fundamental spirit of collaboration and innovation in the classroom and, at after-school enrichment programs. These suburban students add a level of camaraderie, and convey a sense of industriousness which benefits both the gifted students of Hartford AND students that might be categorized as "typically learning."

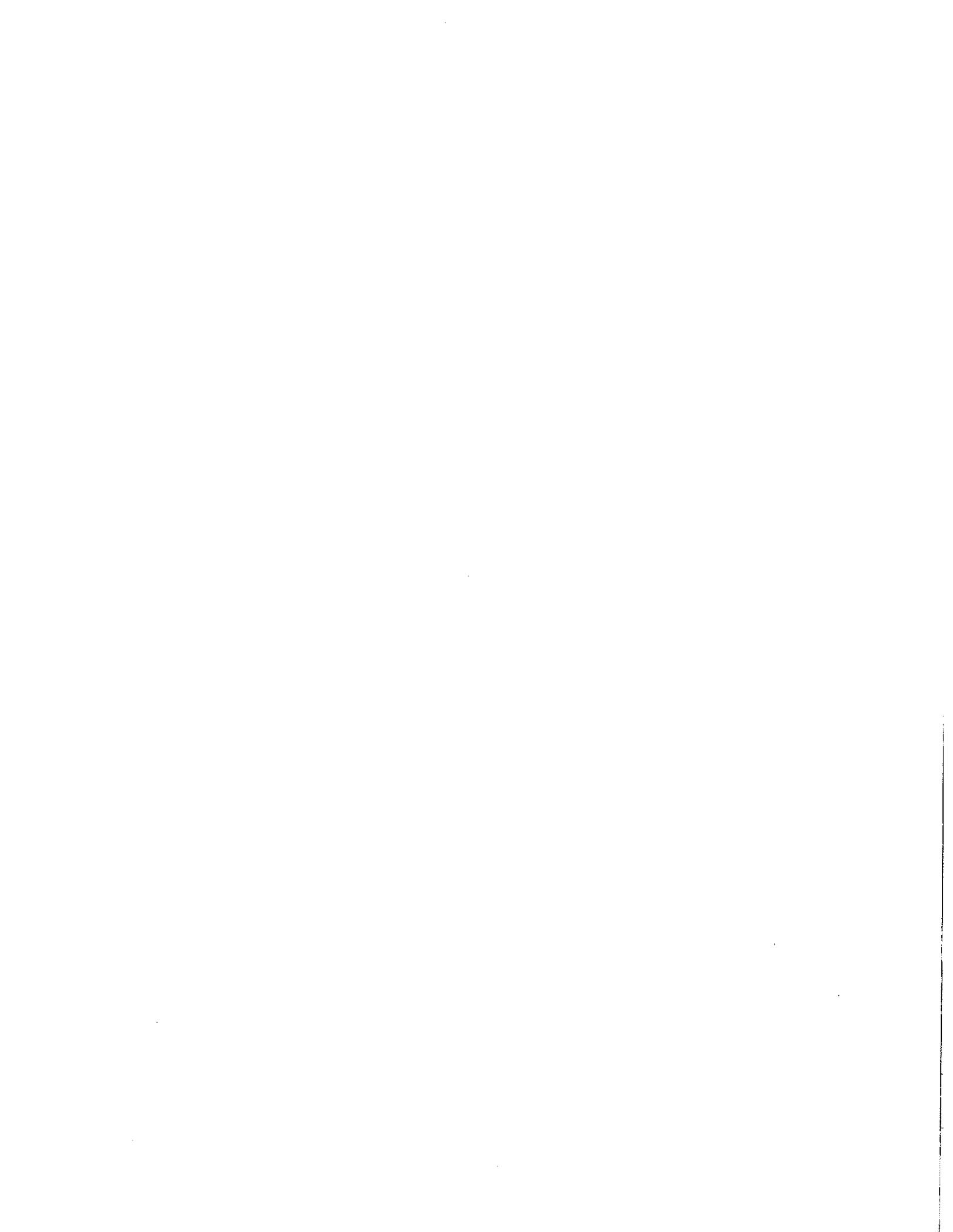
We all know that suburban towns are struggling with funding. Gifted programs k-8 were dropped a long time ago from our town of Simsbury. And, the cost of education for "special needs" children is now 20% of the school budget. Most towns will not be amenable to sending suburban students to Hartford since they will not let go of the funds directed to that student's education...it will just go to fill the endless deficit of "special needs" funding as more and more students move in to town with parents looking for the "best" education for their autistic or otherwise "atypically learning" child...it's only natural.

I think, and, according to social scientists working on analyzing and solving the urban schools dilemma and crisis of education in this country, it takes about 20 years for a program to work/show positive results. Let's remember that magnet schools were established to address school integration/racial isolation in Hartford, a city like many in the U.S. with a huge minority population. The racial isolation must end somehow, and, the magnet schools, particularly, Classical Magnet, is a great example toward moving ahead. Enrollment of white suburban students is up; classroom learning and social behavior within the school is rational and stable, and the suburban kids have thoroughly blended in with their urban peers.

Many of these students return to their home towns where they are enrolled in sports and town activities. In fact, my son won the soccer state championship this year with his Simsbury team. Many of the suburban students are over achievers and strong personalities who add to classrooms whether they are at their local schools or somewhere else. They feel comfortable in the Hartford magnets because they have an innate sense of leadership and cooperation to begin with. They are not "forced" by their parents to travel 30mins-75mins to these schools.

To abruptly underfund the magnet schools now, is really an ethical question for CT government. It is too early to put an end to a trend that is just getting a vibe. I have personally influenced several families in Avon, Canton and Simsbury to send their kids to Classical. The suburban student population is growing because of the unique liberal arts education Classical offers. There is little time for things like assemblies which are of marginal value...more time for the nuts and bolts of academics and learning, theater, music education, etc. The pace is intense. All the kids influence each other as far as pace, understanding of facts and collaboration.

Someone like my son is 2 years ahead of his peers in Simsbury as far as math. He is grateful that he



can forge ahead without having to wait for others to understand math facts he absorbs with wild abandon. Classical allows students with math ability to go faster ahead. In other academic areas, the teachers effectively tailor the learning to all students at Classical.

Eventually, special needs education needs to be federally funded so all children are served. And, I believe gifted education is a must for this country in order to be competitive in the information age of the world. The U.S. is in great jeopardy already. Once again, Hartford schools benefit tremendously from having so many intellectually excited and industrious students coming from the suburbs who uniquely contribute to the school society. The motivated and gifted students of Hartford benefit from being able to be themselves and go full speed ahead with their education in a calm and quiet setting. And; along the way the kids show us that they don't even notice the racial/ethnic differences in their classrooms. Lastly, I sense great harm in not fully funding the magnet schools, since I know personally, that the schools are just in the early stages of really working for the benefit of all.

Please have someone read this as I am unable to be present today.

Thank You, Meri Annina Nordstrom