

Testimony of Tim Sullivan – Education Committee – 2-23-09

Hello ladies and gentlemen. My name is Tim Sullivan and I am lucky enough to be the principal of the Classical Magnet School in Hartford. Classical is a Hartford Host Magnet School serving students from 32 towns in grades 6-12. Our students study the liberal arts through the Classics including seven years of Latin and the study of ancient Greek and Roman civilizations.

Our school was recently recognized by the Magnet Schools of America as a school of distinction and has made the U.S. News and World report rankings of Best High Schools in America for the past two years. We have had 80% of our graduates accepted into four year colleges for each of the past three years, and our students have won state wide recognition in Athletics, Visual Arts, Music, Theater and each of the core academic areas. We are currently compliant with the Sheff desegregation benchmarks and have received 2,270 applications for 140 spots in the upcoming lottery.

I would like share some stories with you. Ideally these stories would be told by the people who lived them, but in their absence I will share their tales.

Nordia Savage is a young lady from the north end of Hartford who is a Classical graduate and now a junior at Williams College. Nordia parlayed her experiences at Classical into a full scholarship at the number one ranked liberal arts college in America and is currently studying in the West African country of Ghana. If she were here today she would tell you that our school was the key that opened the door to her success. She now has the world by the tail, and there are no limits to what Nordia can accomplish.

Sheila Bertrand from Manchester, a freshman at Classical, cannot be here today because she is busy reading the Odyssey in her Rhetoric class. Last year Sheila and her

parents considered sending her to East Catholic, fearful that she would get lost in her large neighborhood school. Late Friday night I said good night to Sheila as she left our school dance and then saw her again early Saturday morning as she left with the track team to compete in the State Open. Sheila literally loves our school. She loves that she feels special and everyone knows and cares about her.

Michael Rodriguez is an 8th grader from Hartford's south end who has friends from all over greater Hartford as a result of being at a magnet school. Whether attending a Bar Mitzvah in West Hartford or a wrestling match in Meriden, Michael has come to understand that he is as bright and intelligent as anyone his age. He cannot be here today because he is an 8th grader taking geometry, and his studies are more important.. He will leave us for a great college someday, and when he gets there he will know that he belongs.

I can go on talking about the young lady from Southington who rides the bus over an hour each day to come to our school in Hartford, or the neighborhood kid with the speech impediment that found his voice as an actor in our school play. I can tell you about the autistic student from Simsbury who has been accepted to all five colleges that he applied to, and the kid living in foster care who just finished second in the state high school wrestling tournament. These stories, each of them individually, are what makes our magnet school, and many others like it so special.

At Classical we have brought together a group of people who believe in delivering the quality of education that is often reserved for the elite members of society. As a high school student I was fortunate enough to attend at school where they had an extensive after school program. They forced me to read novels and conduct authentic

scientific experiments. At my high school they expected everyone to attend college and provided us with an extensive guidance program to prepare us. At Classical we do all of these things this because we know it works. We do it because schools in our affluent suburbs do it. We do it because we believe that the future success of our students is at stake, and we cannot afford to not do it.

These programs however come with a price. We are able to do this because the State of Connecticut, under the Sheff agreement had the foresight to create and fund our school. Under the Governor's proposed budget, that funding is in jeopardy.

Our program requires that our school is funded at the same level as area towns fund their schools. Simply put the \$6,730 currently prescribed under the governor's budget does not allow us to bring the "extras" that the parents in Connecticut expect. A school needs to have a soccer team, a school play, art supplies, a band and guidance counselors. While some of the urban districts, including my own have been forced to "re-prioritize", at Classical we understand that these programs are part of the whole package needed to prepare students for life. Like every other child in Connecticut, we simply ask that the basic elements of a quality education remain in place. The commissioner's proposal of tying the allocation to NCEP makes a great deal of sense. We are not asking to be richer than our neighbors, just that we be placed on equal footing. We can then shape our own budget to ensure that we provide a quality product that makes us competitive with every public school in the area and attractive to our suburban families.

The last story I will share is of a young man who is currently attending 5th grade in a magnet school in Hartford. He has done well academically and his parents have high

expectations for him. They can afford to move to a suburban neighborhood where they can be assured of receiving a top flight education, but they prefer to stay in Hartford and help to make the city they grew up in a great place to live. He has applied to attend Classical Magnet next year and he is now struggling with decision to participate in a sport, or play violin in the orchestra, or even tryout for a school play. His parents take great comfort in the fact that they can stay in their house and offer their child a first rate education. Of course that is a choice that no parent in Connecticut should be faced with.

If you can assure adequate funding levels, comparable to that found in the towns that you represent, I can guarantee those parents that their child will not miss a beat by staying in Hartford. Please vote to support magnet schools at a level approaching the NCEP average. I ask you this as a product of a quality education. I ask you this as the principal of a school that is in high demand and most importantly I ask as the parent of that 5th grader from Hartford. Let my son TJ experience the joy of attending a school that offers students a well rounded education with high expectations. He, and Nordia and Michael and Sheila and thousands like them will pay you back many times over as they lead our state into the future.