

Testimony
Submitted to the
Education Committee

March 23, 2009

HOUSE BILL NO. 6688: AN ACT CONCERNING EDUCATION GRANTS

SENATE BILL 1139: AN ACT CONCERNING SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS
AND THE ELIMINATION OF SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION GRANTS FOR COOPERATIVE
REGIONAL SPECIAL EDUCATION FACILITIES

Good afternoon Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleishmann, and members of the Education Committee. My name is Bruce Douglas, and I serve as the Executive Director of the Capitol Region Education Council (CREC), representing the 35 school districts in the Capitol Region. I am testifying today concerning House Bill 6688: An Act Concerning Education Grants and Senate Bill 1139: An Act Concerning School Construction Projects and the Elimination of School Construction Grants for Cooperative Regional Education Facilities.

House Bill 6688 allows the Connecticut State Department of Education to begin fulfilling its responsibility to provide all of Connecticut's children with a high quality education that will prepare them to realize their full potential. House Bill 6688 helps to resolve the following three major concerns:

- It repeals the current law calling for the reduction of 25% of the ECS for students attending magnet schools from sending towns, thus bringing relief to some of the financial burdens facing school districts.
- It increases the percentage of participation from any one town from 55% to 60% for the purposes of state funding of magnet schools.
- It endorses Commissioner Mark McQuillan's proposal to increase funding to sending school districts for the Open Choice program. This incentive will allow school districts to accept additional Open Choice students.

I am very concerned to see that Commissioner McQuillan's proposal to increase magnet school funding has not been addressed in this bill. We need either full funding or the formula proposed in the Commissioner's original budget submitted to the Governor, whereby the per student grant to RESC operated magnet schools increases to \$10,443 and host magnets to \$13,030. The increase from \$7,620 to \$8,100 per student will not suffice without approximately \$9 million in supplemental funding. The difference between the current \$7,620 per student and the proposed \$10,443 per student totals the \$9 million need for supplemental funding. Nothing else but the Commissioner's proposal or full funding will work at this time. Without proper funding, magnet schools will be forced to close and the

SDE will be unable to meet the Sheff goals of 27%, not to mention the 2013 goals of 41%. There will not be enough funding to operate host or RESC magnet schools.

I encourage you to work with the General Assembly to enact legislation in which the State of Connecticut will assume the full cost of funding magnet schools state-wide. Given the compounding impact of the Stipulated Order to meet the 2013 goals and legislation allowing all of Connecticut's students to apply to magnet schools, school districts will be called upon to pay tuition costs for many more students in the next four years and to accept many more open choice students throughout the Capitol Region.

**SENATE BILL 1139: AN ACT CONCERNING SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS
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Senate Bill 1139 proposes to repeal section 10-76e of the general statutes which allows for such grants. Over the last two decades, section 10-76e has provided funding for many invaluable programs serving the most highly compromised special education children in Connecticut and their families.

For example, through your efforts in supporting these construction projects, in the capitol region alone, over 800 students per year have been provided access to exemplary facilities and programs that have been extraordinarily effective in ameliorating their disabilities. We see students become more independent, learn necessary life skills, significantly reduce harmful and dangerous behaviors, and make measurable academic gains, all representing progress that had not been seen prior to receiving the specialized services that these programs provide. The parents of these children have repeatedly expressed their gratitude and appreciation for the efforts that have been extended on behalf of their severely challenged children. I believe that some of those parents are here today to express their deeply held thoughts about the success of this long standing commitment that you have made to their children.

In addition to serving the parents and the children, these programs have proven to be cost effective for the participating districts. In this current economic climate, when efforts to support regionalization are more important than ever before, it seems to me that the elimination of this long standing, successful example of the effectiveness of regionalized efforts is ill advised.

Finally, Sec. 10-76e currently provides a mechanism for the State Department to govern the construction of regional facilities, giving the State Board of Education the clear ability to approve or not approve any proposal, based on its merit and the demonstrated need for such construction. There does not appear to be a need for further legislation - legislation that would likely make it prohibitive for districts or regional centers to consider such construction, even when it would address

identified needs. We understand and support the requirement that children with disabilities are educated in the least restrictive environment and collectively the RESCs work to ensure that is the case for each and every child. However, for some of the very small percentage of children who require intensive and highly specialized services, they often can be most effectively served in a center-based facility. All of this is consistent with policy adopted by the State Board of Education which states, in part, "The Board presumes that these goals are best achieved in the child's local school, although it recognizes that some children who present significant and/or unique needs require placement in alternate settings to achieve those goals."

In conclusion, I urge you to maintain section 10-76e of the general statutes that will continue to provide funding for many invaluable programs serving the most highly compromised special education children in Connecticut and their families.

Thank you for your consideration.

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Expansion Options for Fiscal Years 2010 and 2011

Sheff

Hartford / CREC Magnet Operating Grants

District-operated (host) magnet schools presently receive \$3,000 for each resident student and \$6,730 for each out-of-district student. Most RESC-operated (regional) magnet schools receive \$7,620 per student. The current funding formula has proven to be problematic for both the Hartford and CREC magnets. The host formula provides a financial disincentive for the Hartford magnets to move towards a 50-50 participation ratio between the Hartford and suburban students that is necessary to achieve the desegregation standard in the schools. The regional funding formula has proven to be insufficient for a number of years, as CREC continually find its schools in the position of requiring supplemental state grants above what the formula provides.

The proposed operating formula would, on a biennial basis, tie the per pupil grants to the state average of Net Current Expenditures per Pupil (NCEP). NCEP reflects public elementary and secondary expenditures supported by local, state and federal revenues but excludes debt service, tuition revenue and mandated pupil transportation.

Hartford (Host) Magnets: These schools would receive 1.10 percent of the average NCEP for every out-of-district student. Resident students would no longer generate a per pupil grant but they would also not be subject to the 25 percent reduction to the resident student count in the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) grant. In addition, as host magnets, there would be no tuition charge for the out-of-district student.

CREC (Regional) Magnets: These schools would receive 88 percent of the average NCEP for every student. Any operating costs in excess of the state grant would be fully borne by the participating towns in the form of tuition.

Below is a summary of the proposed per pupil magnet school operating grant increases:

	<u>Host Magnet Resident Students</u>	<u>Host Magnet Non-Resident Students</u>	<u>Regional Magnets</u>
2008-09	\$3,000	\$6,730	\$7,620
Current Law:			
2009-10	\$3,000	\$7,440	\$8,180
2010-11	\$3,000	\$8,158	\$8,741
Proposed:			
2009-10	\$0	\$13,054	\$10,443
2010-11	\$0	\$13,054	\$10,443

Magnet Transportation Grant

The State currently reimburses districts and RESCs up to \$1,300 per pupil for out-of-district magnet school transportation. This \$1,300 rate has been in place since 2000-01 and no longer reflects the true costs of magnet school transportation. The per pupil grant should closer reflect the realities of today's transportation costs. The proposed per pupil magnet school transportation grant for 2009-10 is \$2,500. For 2010-11, the proposal is \$3,000 per pupil.

OPEN Choice Attendance Grant

Participating districts currently receive a base grant of \$2,500 for each OPEN Choice student. In addition, \$500,000 is prorated to those districts where at least ten Choice students attend the same school. For the last several years, the number of Hartford-area OPEN Choice students has remained around 1,100. Under the terms of the current Stipulated Agreement, it is imperative to begin to increase Hartford-area Choice participation, eventually to as many as 3,000 students. In order to achieve this, increased funding will be necessary.

Base Grant: There is recognition that participation in OPEN Choice entails a variety of administrative, professional development, academic and student support costs at the receiving district level. Under this proposal, each participating district would receive a flat grant to help support these costs. Depending on the level of participation, the base grants would range from \$35,000 to \$75,000.

Attendance Grant: Over the course of the 2009-2011 biennium, the per pupil grant would increase from the current \$2,500 level. The proposed per pupil grant rate would be a function of the participation level in terms of the percent of OPEN Choice students relative to total district enrollment.

<u>Participation Level</u>	<u>Grant Per Pupil 2009-10</u>	<u>Grant Per Pupil 2010-11</u>
Less than 2%	\$3,000	\$3,500
Between 2% and 3%	\$4,000	\$5,000
3% or greater	\$6,000	\$7,000

One Consultant Position

The Department is requesting a new consultant position to work jointly with the Sheff Office and the Bureau of Research, Evaluation and Student Assessment to develop and implement a uniform system of data collection, analysis and reporting in order to 1) enhance communication and reporting of data between stakeholders to increase program effectiveness; 2) measure the effectiveness of strategies outlined in the Comprehensive Management Plan; and 3) measure progress toward performance benchmarks and goals outlined in the Stipulation with regard to the numbers of Hartford-resident minority students educated in quality reduced-isolation settings.