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Education Committee
Connecticut State Assembly
Hartford, CT

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing as a Connecticut parent, voter, and taxpayer about two proposals before you that strike deeply at the continued viability of the ACES Education Center for the Arts (ECA) in New Haven. I am the parent of one current student at ECA, and of another who has applied to attend for the next school year. My perspective is also informed by the fact that I possess a Doctorate in Educational Leadership (1995, Clark Atlanta University) and have over twelve years experience as a classroom teacher, department chair, and high school principal in schools.

The proposal to forbid parents from contributing toward tuition costs at interdistrict magnet schools such as ECA is misguided. If the intention is to increase socioeconomic diversity at these schools, I assure you that no significant equity issues will be addressed by this ban. At a time of growing pressures on local school district budgets, the practical effect will be to remove from ECA a significant population of the student body whose financial contributions help to sustain the program. Absent an increase in the per pupil state contribution for tuition, which is unlikely in the current climate, local school districts will be unable to meet the difference between the per pupil state subsidy of ECA and the actual cost of operating it.

I recognize that the operating philosophy of the public school system in Connecticut is to provide equal opportunity to all students in the state. An on-site visit to ECA, however, would reveal that this program is already one of extraordinary economic, cultural, and social diversity. Although a large percentage of the family stakeholders do pay out-of-pocket to enable their children to attend, I know that this is done – as in my family -- with real personal sacrifice. What you have at ECA is a parent and student population that is so enthusiastic about and committed to the program that they are willing to prioritize and sustain these costs, even at the cost of deferring other family needs. I urge you to re-consider this proposal and to enable us to continue sending our children to the Educational Center for the Arts,

I am also concerned about the Commissioner of Education's proposal that all part-time instructors in Connecticut become certified. I am opposed to this proposal because it would deprive ACES ECA of its highly-specialized, extensively-trained core teachers -- professional artist/teachers recognized in their fields -- who are responsible for the school's 35-year record of success, including a graduation rate significantly higher than the Connecticut average. Their training is the bedrock of the education that defines ACES ECA. They have already incurred significant time and expense attaining their advanced degrees at the masters and Ph.D. levels, and are concurrently teaching at colleges like Wesleyan, Sarah Lawrence, and Yale. They would

not be able to incur the additional time and expense required to become certified, even in the ARC program, and if required to do so (for part-time positions that offer no benefits), they would regretfully be forced to leave their jobs at ECA. Given that there would not be teachers available to hire who would be both certified and, simultaneously, practicing professional artists with college-teaching experience, the end result of the Commissioner's proposal is that the school would be unable to fulfill its guiding principal of providing student contact with professional artists, and perhaps ultimately might close. Moreover, and I state this categorically based upon my training and experience in schools, there is absolutely no evidence that demonstrates that graduates of teacher-training programs are more effective classroom teachers than those who bring a wealth of real world, professional experience to the classroom.

I urge you to take action that will enable ECA to weather the current economic conditions in our state and to continue to provide its distinctive brand of high-quality education to our children. It is fair to say that for many of these students, ECA is a lifeline to future success.

Sincerely,

Tracy Romm

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