

Testimony
Submitted to the
Education Committee

March 9, 2009

GOVERNOR'S BILL NO. 830 AN ACT CONCERNING THE
GOVERNOR'S RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING EDUCATION

Good afternoon Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleishmann, and members of the Education Committee.

My name is Craig Edmondson, and I serve as the Executive Director of Area Cooperative Educational Services, ACES serving the twenty-five districts in South Central Connecticut.

I am submitting testimony today on Governor's Bill 830, An Act Concerning the Governor's Recommendations Regarding Education. I recognize and appreciate the work of the General Assembly during these unprecedented times of fiscal challenges. Thank you for the work you do.

It is with disappointment that I write to express my concern regarding the omission of Commissioner Mark McQuillan's recommended funding for magnet schools and Open Choice in the administration's budget submitted to the General Assembly on February 4. This funding is essential for the sustainability of high quality magnet schools in our entire state. Continued and adequate support for magnet schools is important to the voluntary desegregation efforts begun in response to the needs outlined in Sheff v. O'Neill. Although specific to the Greater Hartford region, the Department of Education programs established in response to the original Sheff decision allowed school districts across the state to voluntarily enter into agreements that created more than fifty exciting opportunities for learning for students, kindergarten through high school, four in which ACES is the RESC operator.

These magnet schools have earned strong support from the families and students who have chosen to enroll and from the communities

where they are located. Over time magnet schools have also demonstrated improved student achievement, while bringing students together across district lines to reduce racial, ethnic and socio-economic isolation – the identified goals in Sheff v. O’Neil. Without the proper funding the state has transformed a voluntary effort into an unfunded mandate at a time when urban and suburban school districts throughout Connecticut cannot continue to find the financial resources to meet the obligations for their own schools much less magnet schools and the acceptance of large numbers of open choice students.

Being outside of the Capital region, I am concerned that with the enormous obligation to meet the requirements of the Sheff stipulated agreement, legislators may be compelled to differentiate funding levels. I ask on behalf of my region that not happen and that all magnet schools state-wide are treated equally in any new formula and subsidy level.

As you know, the Commissioner has proposed a change to prohibit parents from paying for the part-time arts magnet schools. This change would have a detrimental effect on many students attending the arts magnets and once again impose an un-funded mandate on districts.

Our school, the Educational Center for the Arts, (ECA) in New Haven has had this practice in place for over 30 years. I ask that you oppose or delay the implementation of this recommendation to allow for local districts to adequately plan and budget for this mandate.

Once again, thank you for your work on behalf of the public school students in Connecticut.