

Testimony
Submitted to the
Education Committee

March 9, 2009

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

Dear Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann, and fellow members of the Education Committee. I thank you for giving me the opportunity to provide this written testimony.

My name is Elizabeth Feser and I am Superintendent of the Windsor Public Schools. I am here to ask the State of Connecticut to fully fund the cost of magnet school tuitions. I also ask you to support the Commissioner of Education's request to increase the subsidy that suburban districts receive for accepting urban students through the Open Choice program.

Windsor was involved early on with the efforts to desegregate the Hartford Public Schools. When the Metropolitan Learning Center (MLC) was still in its design phase, Windsor stepped up as a partner. We currently have 150 students enrolled in the MLC. We have 60+ students enrolled in other CREC run magnet schools. We have paid tuition faithfully every year for our students in the CREC schools. This year our tuition costs are over \$500,000, an amount which is deeply cutting into our existing program of services.

Compounding this issue is an estimated bill we received this week from the Hartford Regional School Choice Office. The Hartford Host Magnet Schools, beginning with the 2009-2010 school year, are planning to charge tuition for suburban students attending their schools. For Windsor, the tuition for our students attending Hartford Host Magnet Schools will be more than \$850,000, this amount on top of the more than \$600,000 we will pay to CREC next year. Thus, Windsor will be expected to pay **one and a half million dollars** in magnet school tuition.

We simply can no longer afford the cost of these efforts. The tuitions are cutting deep into our existing programs and services. Moreover, due to the expansion of existing magnet schools and the opening of new schools, we have no way of knowing how many more of our students will attend these schools, nor what additional tuition costs will be expected of us. Finally, having no voice in setting the cost of tuitions puts us in a very vulnerable position.

Windsor, districts surrounding Hartford and districts across the state strongly desire to continue to support magnet schools believing they are a viable option for many of our students. I am concerned, however, that districts' commitment to the moral imperative to insure an equitable and quality education for all children and to reduce racial isolation among Hartford children will be threatened by the increasing costs to local districts.

Districts across the state are facing shrinking revenues and increasing salaries, as well as cuts in services, programs and positions. It is inconceivable to think that local residents will approve a budget that cuts local educational programs and service, and sends more local tax dollars to the state to finance the Sheff II Stipulated Order.

If the state is serious about achieving the goals of this order, namely insuring a quality education for all of Hartford's children in non-racially isolated schools, then it needs to take responsibility for fully funding this effort. I fear that if you fail to act now, this initiative will collapse, return to court, and be even more costly for taxpayers in the end, and the greatest losers would be the students.

Thank you for your time.