

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 and Representative Fleishmann and members of the Education Committee. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak to you today.

My name is Jacqueline Cossentino and I am the Principal of CREC Montessori Magnet School. I am here today as an educator, as a parent, and as a citizen to ask the State of Connecticut to fully fund the cost of magnet schools. More specifically, I am asking you to support the Commissioner of Education's recommendation for proposed funding for magnet schools.

The Montessori Magnet School opened nearly twenty years ago as the state's first and only public Montessori school. In the beginning, MMS was a small, voluntary project between the districts of West Hartford and Hartford. Over time MMS has grown to serve 322 students, half of whom come from Hartford and the other half from 29 districts in the capital region. CREC Montessori Magnet School has been twice recognized as a Magnet School of Excellence by Magnet Schools of America. Just as important, CREC Montessori Magnet has earned an international reputation for exemplary public Montessori schooling; we are now a model for many urban districts, including Hartford, seeking to bring Montessori to all children.

Like many of Connecticut's magnet schools, the success of CREC Montessori Magnet School is the result of a combination of creativity, prudent resource management, and fierce determination to realize the goal of providing excellent schooling for all students. That determination is shared among faculty, parents as well as our partner districts.

So impressive is that determination and the kind of education it produces, that I relocated from Virginia to Connecticut in order to be part of the hopeful work of magnet schools. In the course of getting to know my new school community, I asked parents and staff what they thought made MMS so special; and without question, the single most important factor mentioned by everyone I spoke to was diversity.

As both an educator and a parent, I am continually inspired by the efforts, sacrifices, and contributions our parents make in support of their children. Some travel more than 90 minutes each way to and from school. Others make time – in between second and third shifts – to serve on our PTA or prepare a special meal for the class or attend a parent teacher conference. Many more reach out, welcome, and otherwise ensure that they are a positive presence in their children's lives and that our school community is a place of warmth, opportunity, and hope.

Our parents, in other words, are like the hundreds of thousands of parents throughout the State of Connecticut who want the best for their children and who, given the opportunity, will go to enormous lengths to support their child's experience in a high quality school. More than forty years of school reform efforts have taught us that magnet schools are the

most effective and efficient means of not only reducing racial and economic isolation, but of bringing quality education to all students. So compelling is the promise of magnet schools that thousands of families throughout the capital region have sought this opportunity for their children.

As I address you this afternoon, I believe we all share the goal of equitable, excellent schooling for all students in the State of Connecticut. However, the current level of state funding is inadequate to realize that goal. While Connecticut boasts one of the highest per pupil spending averages in the nation, it also, regrettably, logs one of the worst records of disparity between rich and poor. I believe we can rectify these inequities, which are mandated by the Sheff v. O'Neill stipulated order. Doing so will require taking responsibility for fully funding this effort.

Thank you for your time.