

Roy Reale -- 3/5/09

Testimony  
Submitted to the  
Education Committee

March 9, 2009

SENATE 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 Roy Reale. I am a parent of two children who attend CREC's Metropolitan Learning Center Magnet School for Global and International Studies

As with any parent, I want my children to get the best education possible. Having watched one being constructed near my workplace, my initial attraction to magnet schools was curiosity. After a tour, I was genuinely excited by what I saw as a new paradigm in education. I witnessed a method of education focused on bringing different cultures together in a disciplined, professional setting to learn. The idea of structured learning schemas, uniforms, embedded technology, a pride pledge, and low tolerance for poor behavior gave me a feeling of being in the finest private school. And the diversity of the school was a microcosm of the real world in which my children would work and live. The concern for my children was finding a school where they could learn without disruption. My other concern was finding a school with the diversity necessary to thwart the culture shock that closes minds and opportunities in the real world if not addressed at an early age. As a parent, magnet schools address my concerns.

After my initial introduction, the benefits of a magnet school became even clearer. These benefits flow directly from the pillars of the magnet school concept: choice, themed interests, and the "opportunity of diversity." They are powerful and deserve our support.

The idea of students attending a school by choice is profound. While much could be written about the benefits of being among a group of people joined by choice, more could be communicated by a simple question. Reflecting on your life experiences, what was it like to be in a situation where everyone was there because they wanted to be? What was the level of effort, pride, communication and focus you witnessed? That atmosphere is present in magnet schools every day. I knew I could count on an environment conducive to learning and respect for education where people are there by choice. Unsolicited, one of my sons commented to me after a school Outdoors Club meeting "how different it is when people WANT to be there". I never asked what provoked that comment because I already knew.

Also, schools with a themed interest are an opportunity for students to get early exposure to early interests. Through early exposure students get a meaningful opportunity to test out who they are and what they want to do with their lives before making serious choices about colleges or careers. Be it the performing arts, global studies, or medicine knowing who you are and where your talents lay leads to a more productive life

Lastly, the exposure to a broad variety of cultural backgrounds is the greatest gift our magnet schools produce. I think magnets are the ultimate solution to the Sheff vs. O'Neill ruling in bringing together students of various backgrounds on the basis of academic desire and not forced busing, or other random means of achieving merely an outcome but not an educational impact. Diversity exposes students to ideas and ideas introduce opportunity. As a consequence of this "opportunity of diversity," my eldest son has visited China, speaks Chinese, and has attended a bar mitzvah and secured friendships across multiple surrounding towns.

Yet having built a system of magnet schools, we still struggle with the funding process to get students into them. Being from Enfield, I have watched our board of education wrestle each year with both conscience and budget to source tuition for students. Some years Enfield has funded ten students and other years as

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few as four. At the same time, towns such as Windsor have funded over thirty students. As parents, my wife and I also need to attend most board of education meetings to gauge shifting attitudes in magnet school support and literally beg for funding. Under this town based funding approach, the ability to attend a magnet school depends on where you live and how much money is available. Isn't this a form of the consequence Sheff vs. O'Neill sought to remedy? Quality of education based on circumstances of geography and wealth? I suffer the same anxiety on a yearly basis: Will my children be allowed to continue their magnet school education? If they can't, how will I explain to them that the school still exists but they can't go? It is urgent that we push forward with state level tuition funding to provide equal and stable access to magnet schools. It is important that we complete the magnet school vision as it was intended.