

Brandt Smallwood

1/13/09

Opening Statement, Executive Nominations Committee

Good afternoon, Senator Looney, Representative Janowski, and members of the Executive Nominations Committee. I am Brandt Smallwood, one of Governor Rell's nominees for the position of student member on the Connecticut State Board of Education. I am deeply honored to appear before the Committee today and am deeply thankful for the opportunity to address you.

I am currently a senior at Simsbury High School, in Simsbury Connecticut; I was born and have lived in Connecticut for my entire life. I lived for nine years in New Britain, attending public school there, before moving to Simsbury. My early years, in the New Britain public schools have given me insight into life as an urban student, and my eight years in the Simsbury public school system have given me insight into life as a suburban student. These two educational settings were, in my experience, distinctly different. While I was memorizing basic vocabulary words in New Britain, my peers in Simsbury were memorizing the presidents. The inequities in the school systems were apparent, and it is these inequities that I hope to aid in correcting while serving on the State Board of Education. I hope to continue to bring my experiences regarding the achievement gap between school districts to the Board and I am deeply concerned with and interested in the issue of the achievement gap in Connecticut.

Furthermore, within Simsbury high school, I have a unique view of the issues of students. I am a Peer Advocate, trained in peer mediating, conflict resolution, active listening, and other relevant peer support skills. In this function, I have aided students suffering from issues ranging from ordinary stress, to clinical depression. I believe that the first hand knowledge of and insight into student issues, which I possess, gives me a unique perspective of high school students' lives and allows me to effectively represent a broad range of individuals who possess a broad range of concerns. Furthermore, in addition to Peer Advocates, I am currently serving as the Connecticut State Vice President for the Future Business Leaders of America (FBLA) association. I was elected to this role by my FBLA peers last spring, and have helped to organize a State Fall Leadership Conference, bringing together hundreds of

high school students from across the state.

My time thus far on the State Board of Education has been phenomenal. As cliché as this may sound, serving on the Board has been a once in a lifetime opportunity; I have attended every meeting and have sincerely enjoyed discussing issues that affect students my age. I feel that my input has been valued by my colleagues on the Board, and I feel that they appreciate the unique student perspective that I bring to the table. Though intimidating at first, with cameras trained on Board members throughout the meeting, I have become quite comfortable conversing with the other members. I am truly honored to be serving in this function and I hope that you will give me the opportunity to continue on the Board.

Thank you for your time and your attention, I am happy to answer any questions that you may have.