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HB 6380 An Act Concerning the Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2013

Appropriations Committee
February 28, 2011

While we are grateful that HB 6380 funds the Connecticut Technical High School System (CTHSS), we are concerned about one of the Governor's key proposals, which would require that individual vocational technical high schools be phased into their local school districts. The details of this proposal appear in HB 6385.

The CTHSS is not a typical magnet school that can be transferred and run like those currently in the local districts. Our system has thrived and grown because Central Office serves as a hub through which all our schools are connected. Under the leadership of the Central Office, our teachers work with consultants and administrators to develop our distinctive curriculum, create common assessments, plan professional development, and collaborate on any number of projects. One central location allows a connectivity that drives the system and creates synergy. Local magnet schools do not have that shared vision, shared mission, and shared approach. An art school in New Haven does not benefit from the common experience they share with an art school in Groton or Hartford, because they are each run and funded under local boards who maintain ultimate control.

This difference is at the heart of what makes our system both special and successful. Every CTHSS school is part of a shared experience that benefits the students. Each academic area, each trade area, each support service, each administrator has a steering committee comprised of a representative from every school. These steering committees meet regularly to discuss latest trends and research based practices; they share what is working in each school, what is not working, and thus we are always working to continually improve our system, our instruction, our students' success. This collaboration is what has made our system successful and unique. This is the process that has powered each curriculum to ensure it is aligned with State standards. This is the process that designs our district-wide assessments and ensures students are prepared to be successful at CAPT. This is the process that is currently redesigning a new way to provide professional development and evaluate teachers. This is the process that we are using to create a model of evaluation that legislators support – one that aligns teachers' goals with a district mission that all students must achieve, a system that provides support for teachers that are not meeting the goal, and a system that will identify and address teachers who should not be in the teaching profession. And this is the process that HB 6385 would destroy.

No, the CTHSS is not a regular magnet school - we are very different. The original idea behind the magnet schools was to engage students by having a standardized theme in which there was an interest. It was hoped that this interest would help those students who were not successful in the standard school setting be more engaged in their learning. Our students are not the typically unengaged student. We

have some of the brightest students in CT. Our students attend our schools because they want to learn a licensed trade; they want to begin their careers immediately upon graduation, and they want to have the academic background necessary so they can pursue further education or training in college if needed. Our growing enrollment shows we are meeting their needs.

HB 6385 suggests that our seventeen schools should operate and be maintained under seventeen different school boards or RESCs. Once that happens, the common vision is gone, curriculum deteriorates, instruction is compromised, and ultimately students lose. The cost is obvious; the benefits are unclear. Where are the cost savings? The towns and the State will now have to share the cost of educating the students, but will do so less well. What will happen to the over 10,000 students who want to learn a licensed trade and become taxpaying citizens immediately upon graduation? Has anyone put a price on that? In a time of financial crisis, we cannot take actions that will harm our economy, now and in the future.