

February 23, 2011

PUBLIC HEARING TESTIMONY

To: Members of the Education Committee

From: The Southington Board of Education:

Brian S. Goralski, Chairperson

Terri C. Carmody, Vice Chairperson

Jill Notar-Francesco, Secretary

Colleen W. Clark

David J. Derynoski

Rosemarie Micacci Fischer

Patricia P. Johnson

Patricia A. Queen

Kathleen C. Rickard

We appreciate the opportunity to be heard by the Education Committee on issues relating to **Bill #6385, An Act Implementing the Budget Recommendations of the Governor Concerning Education**. As this week is our district's February break and many Board members are away, we have submitted this testimony to you through CREC.

We believe that it is imperative to emphasize and address several items of concern regarding Open Choice as this legislative session goes forward.

The Southington school district greatly enjoys educating the children we have enrolled through Open Choice, and we warmly embrace each child as our own through their high school graduation. We take pride in our efforts to help the State in closing the achievement gap and meeting its Sheff goals. Southington is doing what we can to support Open Choice, and has committed to additional seats in 2011-2012.

We **strongly support** significantly increased funding for the Open Choice per-pupil grant, well above the current \$2,500 level, to districts for each enrolled Open Choice student. Increased funding for each Open Choice student would inevitably provide a greater incentive to districts to offer more suburban seats. Like other districts, we struggle with the great imbalance between the minimal current level of grant funding for each student whom we enroll and the dollars it actually takes to educate a student in Southington. And, further adding to the disparity, we spend hundreds of thousands of precious budget dollars on tuition to send our students to regional magnet schools. The dollars we spend for magnet school tuitions is disproportionate with what we receive for each Open Choice student we enroll.

CREC has been active on behalf of districts to secure additional Open Choice funding. Consideration should be given to CREC's proposal not to open one of the new magnet schools in exchange for the reallocation of those dollars to Open Choice funding. There is great value in this suggestion. Instead of districts sending

additional dollars to yet another magnet school, the state could free up those dollars for Open Choice per-pupil allotments to districts.

At the same time, we have great concern with the following:

- We **strongly oppose** that authority be given to the Commissioner of Education to mandate the number of Open Choice seats a district must accept. Our Board of Education takes great care in planning, revising and maintaining class sizes that align with our district's mission, philosophy and budget. The number of seats a district agrees to fill through Open Choice should remain the sole discretion of the district. Allowing the Commissioner to determine our capacity for seats would undermine and negatively impact the hard work of local Boards of Education who fully understand the needs of their own district. We believe that increasing the funding stream to districts for Open Choice would indeed remedy the need for the Commissioner to mandate participation.
- At this time, we **oppose** the proposal for Crandall Innovation Schools, which would authorize \$2 million dollars for a one-year pilot. We believe that these dollars would be better redirected to the Open Choice per-pupil grant to districts to enroll more students in suburban schools. Revising that grant should be the focus, direction and goal of the Education Committee, legislature and State Department of Education before any Crandall schools are established.

In summary, we believe that lawmakers must incentivize Open Choice with a meaningful, realistic remedy of revised funding for all districts accepting Choice students. Please consider significantly revising the per-pupil grant, along with not mandating participation through the Commissioner and, at this time, not creating Crandall Innovation Schools.

Thank you for this opportunity and best wishes for success in the work ahead of you in this session.