SB 24 – EDUCATION REFORM

Section 11: Consolidation Incentives

Testimony of Christopher Hocker, Member, Region 9 Board of Education
February 22, 2012

The Region 9 School District is a consolidated district consisting of Joel Barlow High School, serving the Towns of Easton and Redding. Region 9, together with the separate school districts of Easton and Redding, are administered in common by one superintendent and other key central office staff, and thereby have already achieved many of the financial and educational benefits of consolidation, but without having done so formally. Yet, based on current population projections, all three districts are each likely to be subject to the financial penalties (euphemistically described as "incentives") set forth in Section 11 of SB 24.

To this local school board member, Section 11 appears to be arbitrary, heavy-handed, and perverse:

Arbitrary, because the standard of 1,000 students, below which penalties would be incurred, clearly has no basis other than as the proverbial "nice round number." The suggestion that a district of 1,001 students is qualitatively preferable than one with 999 students is ludicrous on its face.

Heavy-handed, because no distinction is made between small districts that might derive actual benefit from consolidation, and districts like Easton, Redding, and Region 9 that have already achieved *de facto* consolidation in many important respects.

Perverse, because Section 11 would severely penalize towns like Easton and Redding that have both the willingness and the means to support their schools financially by spending well above the state average on a per-pupil basis. Our relatively affluent towns spend more on education, despite receiving disproportionately less in state funds – and for this we should be penalized?

Section 11 of SB 24 is literally a "one size fits all" approach to educational reform – one that sweeps away differences among communities, ignores a wide spectrum of potentially valid local objections and practical obstacles to consolidation, and further erodes the concept of local control of education.

Consolidation may well be a desirable goal --- for *some* towns, under *some* circumstances -- that should be addressed and encouraged on a careful, case-by-case basis, with significant input from local educators and community leaders who would be most affected. By taking an opposite approach, Section 11 does no service to the towns, to the taxpayers, and most importantly the students upon which it would have a far-reaching and potentially damaging effect.