



## **COMPASS**

*Community, Planning, Accountability, Spirit, and Steering*

**Regional Multicultural Magnet School: COMPASS Committee**

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Testimony Regarding S.B. 24: An Act Concerning Educational Competitiveness (Section 13, Regarding Magnet School Funding)

Kate Colello, COMPASS Parent Advisory Group, RMMS, New London

February 22, 2012

Distinguished members of the Education Committee: good afternoon. My name is Kate Colello. I am a parent of two students at the Regional Multicultural Magnet School in New London. I'm here today representing the members of COMPASS, the parent advisory group at RMMS. I'm also proud to represent the greater RMMS Community, and the communities of the Dual Language Arts Academy, the Friendship School, and the Marine Science Magnet High School, all LEARN Regional Education Service Center magnet schools.

We are thankful and hopeful for the per-pupil increase in magnet school funding proposed by the bill. In particular, we'd like to thank Senator Stillman and Senator Maynard, and Representatives Reynolds, Ritter and Ryan, who have been able to visit RMMS and other LEARN magnet schools this past year to witness first-hand our wonderful schools and listen to our concerns. We welcome others to visit, as well.

I'd like to tell you about the impact RMMS has made on my family. When my husband and I relocated to Groton from New York, we were initially discouraged to hear about our school options. Then we heard about school choice and RMMS. Just a few years later, I'm the proud parent of a now Spanish/English bilingual third-grader, and a very determined Kindergartner. The impact resonates stronger in our decision to remain in Southeastern Connecticut and endure a much longer commute to out-of-state employment based solely on our determination to raise our children in the RMMS community.

But the real opportunity for us has been in finding a learning environment where diversity is revered, where each learner's academic, social, and emotional needs are respected. This is a direct result of the magnet concept. When students of such varied backgrounds come together, their needs are considered carefully and their education adapted accordingly.

Both of my sons are learning at RMMS that they have a voice, and how to use it. Dinner table conversation in my house lately has trended around racism, gender bias, and prejudice. These are high concepts for seven and five-year-olds, straight off the third-grade curriculum. RMMS has taught them, though, to learn by noticing, by wondering. They know that not every question has an easy answer - that sometimes there are no answers at all. Knowing that there are children across Southeastern Connecticut finding their own voices and talking with their own families makes us feel incredibly hopeful for the future. This kind of learning cannot be easily captured in numbers and is what makes an education at RMMS unique and successful.

This remarkable learning environment requires ongoing support. Because RESC magnet schools do not fall under the governance of the Sheff vs. O'Neill lawsuit, these schools currently receive significantly less per-pupil funding than Sheff magnet schools. In fact, non-Sheff magnets have seen no increase since the 2008-2009 school year. As costs increase, level funding becomes an effective decrease. Cuts have already been made to professional development, technology upgrades, and instructional support hours, always with attention toward keeping the impact as far from the student experience as possible. That effort is no longer sustainable.

We appreciate the increase that the bill proposes, but it still does not represent equal per-pupil funding for Sheff and non-Sheff magnet schools. If this discrepancy did not exist, my children's school, in this academic year alone, would have received an additional \$1,524,420. I'm talking about schools with identical expectations regarding not only testing but regional desegregation as well. We are optimistic that the proposed increase indicates that one day magnet funding will be consistent and predictable throughout the state.

I ask today that you remember the impact of RMMS on my children, on my family, and on my community. All magnet schools, not just those in the Sheff region, are making our state a better place. Please continue your support for progress toward equitable funding for all RESC magnet schools, and pass this bill.

Kate Colello, Chairperson, COMPASS Parent Advisory Committee  
Regional Multicultural Magnet School, New London