

SB 473 - An Act Concerning Magnet Schools

Good morning. My name is Craig Cooke and I am the interim Superintendent of Schools in Windsor CT. I have been the interim Superintendent in Windsor since October however I have been an administrator in Windsor for 5 years and have seen first hand the affect the expanding cost of magnet schools has had on our budget. Magnet schools are available to Windsor students in both surrounding towns and within Windsor leading to approximately 8% of our students attending magnet schools. Our costs have risen to 1.4 million dollars this year and we have no reasonable, predictable method to budget for magnet school costs from year to year. For example our budget allotment for magnet school tuition for the current school year was 1.2 million dollars. This means we have had to reduce funding to other areas in order to make up this \$200,000 difference.

Windsor's budgets have been extremely tight averaging only a 1.3% increase over the past 5 years. This new funding has not kept up with the cost of inflation (1.8%) over the 5 years. Moreover, the majority of this new money of 1.3% a year has gone to fund magnet school tuitions meaning Windsor students are being shortchanged.

One of the major strengths of Windsor Public Schools is the diversity of our offerings. Our students start with full day kindergarten, an initiative that it took the Board over 12 years to find a means to offer. We have a Suzuki strings that starts for students in grade 1. We have a gifted and talented program that begins in grade 3 and continues through high school. Sage Park Middle School was awarded 2013/14 CAS Middle School of the Year due in part to the vast offerings for students. We keep our middle school students engaged 8 periods a day and afterschool. If they are struggling, we have the supports available to them. Windsor High School is the only high school in the state with a technology education program tied to NASA. Our students have the opportunity to compete in robotics, race an electrothon car, produce TV shows, etc.. etc... Our high school has course offerings that rival any high school in the state. We received high praise from NEAS&C during our WHS accreditation visit. We have some of the best teachers in the state, with our district teacher of the year traditionally making it to the final stages of the State Teacher of the Year selection process. We have high quality new curriculum throughout the district. Our school buildings, while they may not be brand new, are well maintained, safe, and highly functional. We are proud of these things that make Windsor a good school system.

However I fear that without funding we will be forced to make reductions in these areas I have cited. These reductions could then lead more students to make the choice to apply to magnet schools. Thus leading to more magnet school tuitions. We must stop this cycle. Please support placing a cap on the amount of tuition payments required of districts. This would provide us with both budget control and predictability. It's time to do what is right for the students in the surrounding communities. Thank you for your time and consideration.