

Remarks on Section 30: Interdistrict Magnet School Funding

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Dear Members of the Appropriations Committee,

I am writing regarding Bill #942, Section 30. The language states that funding for magnet schools will remain at October, 2013 levels for the next two years. Therefore, at the end of the 2016-2017 school year, magnet schools will receive a 0% increase for three years in a row.

As principal of the Center for Global Studies in Norwalk, I want to describe the impact of a three-year budget freeze on my specific school. Starting in September, I will have not enough money to pay for my 10 teachers. There will be no money for books, supplies or the student exchanges that make my school attractive to the 250 students who apply for our 80 seats every year. This funding proposal will force significant cuts to a highly successful program.

CGS offers Arabic, Chinese, and Japanese language, history and World Literature courses as our magnet theme, and we give our students a global perspective in a very personal way. Each year, 25% of our students go on two-week travels to China, Japan and the Middle East and live with families, and some 90 students from our seven sister-schools attend our school for two weeks and live with our families.

CGS has been in existence since 1992, making it one of the oldest magnet schools in the state. Our student population comes from 10 different school districts. 55% of our students live outside of Norwalk and 55% of our students are from minority groups. 95% of our students go to college with 75% attending 4-year colleges.

In short, we are doing everything a magnet school is supposed to do: we mix urban and suburban students, we mix students of different races and ethnic backgrounds, and we graduate students who are college-ready and successful.

So how will this current budget proposal affect the Center for Global Studies?

OUR MISSION

The Center for Global Studies will enable students to bridge international and cultural distances through study, travel, and state-of-the-art technology and will prepare them for life in a pluralistic world. Students will understand and accept differences they will encounter in our increasingly global society.

Our operating budget consists of only a few lines – salaries, benefits, supplies, and field trips. For many years, the salaries and benefits accounted for 88%-91% of our budget.

This year, however, under the budget freeze imposed last May, salaries and benefits are now 96% of the budget. This year, we had money to subsidize our trips and offer financial help to needy families, but we purchased no books or supplies.

Next year, we will not even have enough money to pay for salaries and benefits. There will be no money for books, supplies or the field trips to other countries that are the heart of our program. And in the second year of this freeze, the situation will be even worse.

In short, under the current proposal, there is only one option: I must cut teachers and program. I see only two alternatives:

- I can make full-time teachers part-time, increase class size and reduce class offerings. Currently, we offer regular, honors and AP level courses in our subjects. We can lessen the challenge to students by eliminating one of those levels.
- I can reduce the number of students in the school and make four of our full-time teachers part-time. I will lose some of my best teachers who will go elsewhere. It is impossible to find quality part-time Arabic, Chinese and Japanese teachers. This decision will reduce the educational quality of the school.

Neither of these choices is good for students. Both of these choices will hurt our program. Both of these choices are bad.

Magnet schools have been Connecticut's answer to the Sheff lawsuit, and they have been successful in providing a quality, integrated education to thousands of students. But, still, they have been chronically underfunded.

In the eight years that I have been principal, we have received only one increase of 3% on the per pupil rate while a typical teacher salary increased 35% during that time. In spite of such low sums, the Center for Global Studies has grown into a quality school with a waiting list of more than 150 applicants.

If magnet schools are to remain the heart of Connecticut's integration policy, they must be funded at levels that enable us to run quality programs. This budget proposal will begin the dismantling of a highly successful school.

I am sure you do not intend for this to happen and you think, surely, other options are available. But they are not. I urge you to find a way to keep my school whole.

Sincerely,

Roz McCarthy

Director

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