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Thank you Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Committee for giving me the opportunity to speak. My name is Renay Emmanuele and I am from Windsor Connecticut. It is my great honor and privilege to speak to you today on behalf of the Connecticut Coalition for Magnet Schools. Since August of 2012, I have had the pleasure of experiencing Discovery Academy's exceptional program both as a parent and as a Board member of the Parent-Teacher Organization. In my experience, the Magnet Schools in Connecticut demonstrate a level of dedication and excellence that is truly outstanding.

My son began showing a strong aptitude and interest in all aspects of science and engineering as a young toddler. Simultaneously, he began struggling with sensory integration and motor skill development, and often "shut down" or became inconsolably upset when presented with new situations. We began outpatient occupational therapy and enrolled him in the best preschool program that we could find when he turned 3 years old.

Although we were happy with the private preschool program that he attended, we felt that it was imperative to explore potential elementary programs for him to ensure the right fit for his individual strengths and needs. We researched and visited our local public schools, magnet schools, and private programs in the area, and we fell in love with CREC Discovery Academy.

Upon entering the building for the first time, Discovery Academy "felt" different than any other school we had considered. The STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) theme was intricately woven throughout the entire academic curriculum, and it was clear that the teaching approach addressed multiple learning styles.

The school principal and guidance counselor took the time to meet with me and answer all of the questions that I had, and I left knowing that this was the right school for my child. **On the day we received the letter telling us that our son had been awarded a seat, we knew we had literally won the lottery.**

At the start of my son's kindergarten year, it became apparent that my bright child's academic achievements were significantly behind those of his peers who had attended a magnet preschool program. While my son barely had a grasp on the alphabet, writing his name, and counting to 20, some of his classmates were reading and writing short sentences and completing basic addition equations! Within just a few months of attending Discovery Academy, my son was authoring and illustrating 4-page stories with 1-2 sentences per page, counting to 100, and completing addition equations up to 5.

Today, my son is halfway through the second grade and has been a Discovery Academy student for 2 ½ years. In that time, he has gone from being very introverted to becoming a child who is considered a

“Best Friend” by several of his peers. He is at or above grade level in all areas, and has made significant gains with his self-help skills. He is no longer in need of OT services. He received the Discovery Academy PAT (Perseverance All the Time) Award in Physical Education as well as in the classroom, and recently earned his orange belt in Martial Arts. Our son now feels confident and capable, and is able to embrace new experiences and learning opportunities and loves going to school.

The Discovery Academy community features students, families and staff from diverse backgrounds. In addition, several students have specific learning needs or disabilities, including Autism Spectrum Disorder, Dyslexia, Attention Deficit Disorder and Generalized Anxiety. The Discovery Academy culture is one that promotes respect, diversity, perseverance, and self-confidence for all students.

At present time, the comprehensive, thematic, and diverse education programs that the magnet schools offer are not available to all students in Connecticut through their local public schools. I implore you to ensure that these exceptional schools are able to continue to provide opportunities for our children to thrive. Please support long-term, reliable increases in funding for magnet schools.

Respectfully Submitted,

Renay S. Emmanuele

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