

February 24, 2015

Dear Appropriations Committee,

I am writing to urge you to continue funding the State Department of Education Interdistrict (ID) Cooperative Grant program as it currently stands without reduction or modification. This program has served thousands upon thousands of students in Connecticut since its inception in 1994. My organization, Litchfield Performing Arts, Inc., has received support over two decades for two majorly successful programs: Project Poetry Live! and Litchfield Jazz Camp.

Project Poetry Live! (PPL) now in its 22nd year has served students from the western part of the state and as far east as Bloomfield. This program produces documented, measurable improvements in student performance. This year PPL is serving two Hartford schools who will partner with two western region schools, Watertown and Thomaston next year. PPL was one of the first ID programs funded and served as a model for programs that followed. It was so highly regarded that between 2003 and 2006 it received funding from the Federal Department of Education, one of only 32 such programs in the nation. A controlled study of PPL by a Brown University scientist revealed that not only did all students improve on standardized tests and personal growth, but those in greatest need-receiving free/reduced lunch--showed statistically significant improvements on standardized tests--6.1% for math, 3.3% reading, and 5.9% writing. While these results are impressive, they pale in comparison with the gains made between 7th and 8th grade by students in a PPL Waterbury school with up to 88% on free/reduced lunch. 8th graders who had participated intensively in PPL! in 7th grade showed a stunning 13.3% improvement on standardized tests in Writing, 3.3% in Reading when compared with ERG schools who did not participate in PPL!. Surveys over subsequent years found results consistent with these in both academic achievement and reduction of racial isolation. The minority participation in PPL is 51%.

The second program, Litchfield Jazz Camp (LJC) has received funding from the ID programs for most of its 19-year life. The funds are used for need-based participation of CT students. Litchfield Jazz Camp, the teaching arm of the renowned Litchfield Jazz Festival, which celebrates its 20th anniversary this summer, hosts some 250 CT students (served by ID funds) alongside another 150 highly diverse students from all over the U.S. and abroad. This is a four-week residential program and serves students from the Hartford area as well as some 70 cities and towns across the state. Minority participation is 49%.

LJC is one of the most highly regarded summer music programs in the country. ***Without LJC, our son would not be a first year jazz piano student with a Dean's Scholarship at the prestigious Oberlin Conservatory.*** The training LJC provides over and above the music--personal development, college preparation and admissions skills, physical fitness, financial management skills and more--has turned out young people who do extraordinarily well. 72% of LJC alumni surveyed received

college scholarships in math and science, as well as in music. Many have gone on to be highly successful in their professional lives and at the top of their field in jazz performance. Last year LJC received \$99,000 from ID funds and distributed \$104,000 in need-based support. If the ID program were to be eliminated, the heart of LJC would be cut out-helping disadvantaged students to secure a better life.

I would like to give the committee a brief history of the Interdistrict Grant program. Many if not most of you were not engaged in the process in 1993. I was. The Sheff suit which led to the state establishing the ID program when it was won, inspired a very intelligent response from our state government. Understanding that student performance and awareness of diversity had to be improved in the Hartford region, they wisely decided that steps to improve student performance and enhance diversity and awareness of diversity was needed in every city and tiny town in the state of CT. So, the ID program from the beginning endeavored to meet those goals everywhere children were educated in this state. To focus resources only on the Hartford region is to pervert a noble idea. The ID program has spawned many excellent programs and produced measurably excellent results for children everywhere. It has done this with very little money and an extraordinary level of dedication.

Please do not decrease or eliminate the funds for the ID program. The impact of this program is tremendous.

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