

The Connecticut General Assembly Public Hearing
March 3, 2015

Thank you distinguished members of our general assembly, for the opportunity to offer you my testimony today. I am here today as a very concerned parent and have become a member of the Connecticut Coalition of Magnet schools in order to attain sustainable funding from the state of Connecticut for Magnet schools.

The state of Connecticut has invested a large amount of money in magnet schools in order to give more students high-quality, integrated education and we need to sustain the promise of this investment by continuing to support these innovative schools.

My name is Rosemary Costa, I live in the village of Niantic in the town of East Lyme, Connecticut. In August of 2013, when our family won the lottery, well, the magnet school lottery, our daughter Bella was given the opportunity to attend the first established Magnet school in the state of Connecticut, The Regional Multicultural Magnet School in New London. This special school celebrates all children. It is "where uniqueness is treasured." My child is celebrated as an individual, she shines, she feels special at her school, she exudes confidence and is excited to go to school every day. She comes home from school busting at the seams to tell me about her awesome day, every day.

My mother is from southern Spain, Jerez de la Frontera, Espana. My father is first-generation American, descendent from Italian immigrants, my grandparents. I grew up in a small, farming community in Chautauqua county, the village of Brocton in the town of Portland, New York, between Buffalo, New York and Erie, Pennsylvania. I was very poor but so were most of the other children in my community. I am the eldest of 22 grandchildren and was raised by this very large Italian family.

It seems there were prejudices all around me that I wasn't even aware of at the time, until I was a little older. My grandparents told us that they were discriminated against as immigrants when they first arrived to this country. They had a difficult time finding work and getting paid a fair wage. You would've thought that they would've been the first to welcome my mother, who spoke very little English when she arrived at their doorstep with her husband, their son and their infant granddaughter, me.

My mother was constantly corrected and ridiculed for her accent and lack of English proficiency. At times they were so harsh and cruel that it even made her cry, which made me cry. My grandmother forbade us, my siblings and I, as well as, my mother to speak Spanish. She said that the only acceptable language to be spoken in America was English or we would be discriminated against and people would treat us poorly. She even when is far as changing my name from RosaMaria to Rosemary, to make it sound more "American".

I finished high school and I went on to college in Amherst, New York just outside of Buffalo, New York. I found that the prejudice I witnessed became worst and more severe. I didn't understand why people didn't except each other's differences.

As an adult the cases of hate and prejudice in the world that we witness continue to shock me. We have everything from racial profiling to wars that are waged on differences in religion, culture or ethnicity.

I've come to understand that when people do not mix and isolate themselves, they do not understand each other and this sometimes ultimately leads to ignorance, hatred, prejudiced and in extreme cases war.

We are all comfortable with ideas and people that we are familiar with.

An Italian family sits around the dinner table and to an outsider, they appear to be shouting to each other, when this is the normal way, to them, that they converse.

By exposing kids to other kids with different backgrounds we can begin to educate a generation of individuals that embrace diversity and are understanding of other cultures and social economic backgrounds.

The late Lennard Nimoy's, Mr. Spock taught us acceptance is highly logical. Nimoy's signature role taught fans the power of accepting their differences rather than fighting them.

"The Regional Multicultural Magnet School (RMMS) community is committed to respecting cultural diversity, empowering all learners, and developing compassionate people who take responsibility for making positive changes in our society. As part of our commitment to celebrating diversity, RMMS has several programs to offer parents and students." -Mission Statement

"Students from 12 neighboring districts attend RMMS and I am immersed in an environment where they learn to appreciate cultural differences from all over the globe as well as their own and celebrate the diversity of the world communities...The school has been successful in meeting its goal for racial diversity and has achieved to socioeconomic diversity as well."

-RMMS

I am so happy and fortunate to have my daughter at The Regional Multicultural Magnet School. I'm so proud of her and how she relates herself to different cultures that she reads and learns about at school. She sees other children and people without judgment of their ethnic or socioeconomic background. Our Magnet school has changed my child's life. She is learning Spanish. Other programs offered have given her the ability to shine as a unique individual because she is taught to her strengths. An example, she sings and plays piano, she is encouraged to independently compose music in her music class. This has made her very confident in herself and her individual attributes, while teaching her to respect those of her classmates. She is encouraged to express herself through her personal strengths, not only academically but socially and extracurricularly. My daughter is always engaged and interested every day. She is excited to go to school and comes home happy with a great deal to discuss with us.

I was most proud of her late last August, while she sat on our porch having lunch with the neighbor boy one Saturday afternoon. During the winter months both children are very pale skinned. Bella was holding her breath to show Ryan how she could make her face pink. Ryan and her laughed, then, Ryan said "Oh yeah, I can do that too." Bella quickly replied, "No you can't you're a brownskin!" Ryan gave her a perplexed look. Then we all chuckled. I love that my child has the utmost respect and sees all children as the same.

It's Magnet schools like ours that will break the barriers we see currently in our societies and help to build a future world of respect without prejudice.

The Regional Multicultural Magnet school that my daughter attends has not received a cost-of-living increase in five years. Without an increase, this year, our school will have to cut valuable services and staff. This includes programming that brings different cultural experiences to the children of the Regional Multicultural Magnet school, that exposes them to Spanish and other languages spoken throughout the world. Please put the funding formula in place that will sustain my child's school, all of its current programs and staff.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

"Live long and prosper.", Mr Spock

Rosemary G Costa
103 Spring Glen Rd
Niantic, CT 06357