

The Connecticut General Assembly
Education Subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee
Public Hearing
March 3, 2015

Testimony in Support of Sustainable Funding for Magnet Schools

My name is John Nugent and my wife and I live in Waterford and have a third grader at the Regional Multicultural Magnet school in New London. I thank the members of the subcommittee for listening to the stories of magnet school students and parents tonight. These stories are important because, while your job is to arrive at a *number* of the public dollars that will be allocated to a wide range of state programs, the most important things about our childrens' schools *cannot be counted* or fully conveyed with numbers.

When Barack Obama was elected in 2008, we were thrilled that our then-2-year-old daughter would live her life never having to think about whether or not an African American could ever become president. When it came time for her to move from preschool into kindergarten, we hoped to find a school whose environment would reinforce the ever-increasing diversity of our region, state, and country. When we visited the Regional Multicultural Magnet School, we could immediately sense a vibe that felt different from those we'd felt at other schools we were considering. As we've come to know over 4 years at the school, the emphasis on multiculturalism is not an add-on or something that's covered once a week or once a year in social studies. In some way, an acknowledgment and respect for peoples' differences is baked into most every project, assignment, assembly and classroom practice that our daughter does, and we love this.

In addition to these manifestations, it is sometimes hard to put one's finger exactly on the ways it informs everything the school does, but it has to do with the things that are said over and over about how everyone in the school is expected to take care of themselves, to take care of those around them, and to take care of the school. It has to do with the things that are not said, such as what the racial, cultural, and socioeconomic diversity out in the "real world" looks like, since it's present in every classroom. It has to do with the fact that every student is there because a parent or caregiver made an effort to learn about the school, take the tour, apply, and figure out how to get their child to school each day, often from substantial distances away.

Every parent makes sacrifices for their children and their schooling, but magnet school families should not have to make more of a sacrifice in living with the year-to-year uncertainty of whether this will be the year that the failure of the state budget to allocate additional funding so that magnet schools can meet their expenses that continue to rise with inflation each year. We're here tonight to ask that this be the year when you quantify your support with increased dollars for the many unquantifiable acts of generosity, community, and individual growth that happen each day in our magnet schools.

Having said all that, I suppose certain things about why we love our daughter's magnet school can be counted. I can probably count the number of times tears have come to my eyes while inside the school or when hearing about something our daughter has experienced – during one particular all-school morning assembly in which one of the classes honored a classmate with Tourette's Syndrome. Or at any of these assemblies, when 500 students link arms and sway back and forth while singing the school's song. Or at the dinner table one night when hearing the heart-crushing report from our daughter that they'd had a lock-down drill at school that day, only to hear her soul-lifting explanation that they did so, as their extraordinary teacher explained, to be ready "in case a moose comes into the hallway." Or in the post-Sandy Hook meetings of the school's steering committee of administrators, teachers, and parents when the school wrestled together with difficult questions of how to ensure the security of the building and its inhabitants without sacrificing the welcoming openness that's part of why we send our children there.

O.k., so that's four instances I could count. But there are many, many more things about the school that we love and would have much more trouble putting into words or summarizing with a table of numbers. But the magic that happens at this school is very real, and we hope you will take the steps to ensure that it can continue by making long overdue investments in magnet schools that will bring our funding up to the levels enjoyed by other public schools.

Thank you very much.

John Nugent and Tristan Anne Borer
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