

Connecticut General Assembly Appropriations Committee  
Elementary and Secondary Education Subgroup  
Public Hearing: March 3, 2015  
Testimony by Richard Stamatelos of Glastonbury

Good evening everyone – thank you for the opportunity to speak, and I admire your ability to listen.

My name is Richard Stamatelos, I live in Glastonbury.

My son Dominick attends Two Rivers Middle School at the 7<sup>th</sup> grade level.

Dominick was diagnosed with Hi-Functioning Autism in 2008 – in his case, that simply means that his IQ is off-the-charts high, but his social / behavioral skills are at a bit of a deficit.

I'm here today to advocate **for** the continued support & proper funding for all the states' magnet schools.

**The state should continue to fund/support magnet schools for multiple reasons...**

1. It would be morally wrong to shortchange them:
  - a. After all, it was the state that gave birth/adopted these institutions – don't orphan them.
  - b. The **need** that was identified / developed some 20 years ago to create them, is still most certainly there to sustain them.
  - c. These types of schools seem to strike a balance to provide a sound education upholding state core standards and yet still offer a "customized-approach" to reaching the students – each one at their own place - they meet the kids where they're at...
2. The families want them:
  - a. As evidenced by the number of people that freely/willingly/gladly transport their children to support transportation logistics.
  - b. The "theme" concept of the magnet school is very appealing – parents/children have already shaped their preferences and having a school where a child's core values can flourish is money well spent. Kids in fact **do** have a clue as to, "what want to be when they grow up...".
  - c. I find that the staff is very receptive to my requests as a parent – there's a certain energy, level of understanding / involvement / ownership – this comforts me and my wife.
3. The students flourish in them:
  - a. The integrated concept is the right way to teach children of how exactly the world is made.
  - b. We can learn a lot from these kids – they're blessed because they are color-blind, as we all should be. The segregation, cliques and biases to which I was exposed, are neatly and respectfully rolled into their own way of life. The kids see hope – they are free to learn and not be judged.
  - c. There seems to be much less peer pressure - I can sense a level of maturity / mutual respect that prevails among the students.
  - d. There are less distractions – a smaller menu of after school activities suits them well. The students special interests are borne with little fanfare and still achieve the goal.
  - e. Assignments typically cross-pollinate from subject to subject. It's not uncommon to have a social studies assignment evolve into an exercise in math / philosophy. This approach builds maturity – just as in real life, because the answer to a situation is not typically found as the easiest/most apparent. This style of education challenges the kids to think.
  - f. My son, in spite of his Autism, wakes each day and attends with a willingness and pride – maybe it's the uniformed shirt, or the school logo, but he feels that he **belongs**. This level of acceptance is nothing more than a reflection of school's approach to diversity – and that is, "we all matter".

**The other point I want to make has to do with policy, the education of our kids and how IT and the computer world is failing them and their families...**

1. I feel that we are in an “experimental generation” when it comes to educating our children – especially, since textbooks have apparently become a thing of the past. Somehow we’ve gone from G. Bush (No Child Left Behind) to B. Obama (Common Core) and forgot to deploy a plan. A plan that accounts for the training of ALL the users (for the inputs, by teachers and the outputs used by the students & their parents). We seem to be lost in cyber-space... There was a time when doing homework was a bonding experience for the family – now it is anything but that. Until the parents/students can figure out the process (for us to become “literate”, it took about 3 months), it had become a frenzy of 20 questions every night (where’s your homework, when is it due, is it electronic, is it hard copy, etc....) resulting in stress, anxiety and very little education. The quality of the web-postings, references and continuity thus far seem to be a direct reflection of each teachers’ own IT talents – this resulted in many inconsistencies. I think the whole thought of “metrics” scared everyone into a knee jerk reaction, because accountability / incentives were at stake. This is wrong! Who’s in charge of the auditing? It may work in business, but is entirely inappropriate for a child’s education. I see the school system’s becoming just like all the major corporations (i.e., here’s a hyper-link, go to our web-site, dial 1-800-GO FOR IT, etc...). Now it seems, even our treasured school system is guilty of passing the buck. How can a kid possibly learn anything when his computer has got 10 browsers open and he’s cutting and pasting as quick as he can – there’s no learning going on, at that point. I don’t want my kid to get an “A”, just because he’s figured out a “work-around”!
  - a. I believe that the answer lies within the realm of training. I believe that the Open House programs, during the summer, would provide a good opportunity to have parents (with child) sign up for a session before school starts and provide a live demonstration (for Dummies) going through the schools web-sites of exactly how the upcoming school year is going to unfold. Isn’t there a basic model that works? Is each school district “on their own” to figure this all out? After all, if the entire academic curriculum is essentially “scripted” (from Kindergarten through High School), then why can’t it be gathered/collected into one library, one platform? Society has become so accustomed to “pushing back”, with a snappy It response – it must stop with the school system. If it prolongs, I feel that it will take a devastating toll on our children and their families.