

I am writing as an educator from New Britain schools in reference to the SB 942 (the Governor's education proposal). I teach art which is extremely vital to our "at risk" students. The benefits for this type of demographics has been proven to increase test scores (up to an average of 100 points on SATs in math and reading), academic achievement (helping to bridge the achievement gap), attendance rates, graduation rates (5 times more likely), successful completion of college (twice as likely to graduate with a bachelors), community involvement, and local political involvement. In addition, the arts develop problem solving skills and provide emotional and social outlets for our students.

The Arts is just one area that is underfunded in our district. There are many other concerns that need to be addressed that require more student funding. From my understanding, funding for charter and magnet schools has increased 68% while public school funding has only raised 8% in the same amount of time. It is not helping the community to "segregate" our students and pull students who have parents that care enough to put them in charter/magnet schools. It is not a child's fault and we need to break a vicious cycle.

To allow more students to graduate, we have eliminated many of the study halls that were simply a holding tank because of a lack of teachers and class size requirements (our max is supposed to be 32). Currently, I have 40 students enrolled in my 1st period class and the average size of my other classes is 32-35 students. Other teachers are subjected to class sizes this large as well which make it increasingly difficult for teachers to help all of our already at risk students succeed. Our per pupil allotment is below other urban districts (Hartford, Bridgeport, and New Haven). Those who consider New Britain to be a Suburban town are extremely uninformed and need only to drive through our neighborhoods to see what conditions they are living in. It is a far cry from surrounding suburban areas. Almost every student that comes into our school is faced with adult-like situations. Examples of what it is like to be a student in New Britain, just to name a few, are being homeless, dealing with rape and assault, family members lost to murder, teenage pregnancy (twice as high as the state's average), single-parent households, foster children, children raised by aunts/grandparents, and helping parents with illnesses such as AIDs. These are just situations that I know about from my students this year (380 students). I can't imagine what other students who don't speak out are dealing with. I feel that our attendance rates are low as many of them have to walk almost 2 miles to get to school in sub zero temperatures. When it is snowing or extremely cold, almost half of my students are absent. If these examples do not classify New Britain as an urban district in need of extra funding, I don't know what would. I work long hours, sometimes staying until dinner time away from my family, because I feel that my students deserve nothing but the best. How do I help our Governor to understand that our kids matter and that New Britain is not a lost cause?