

March 5, 2015
Testimony for the Education Committee
Public Hearing Regarding Magnet School Funding

Connecticut General Assembly
Good Afternoon.

I am parent of 2 children who are currently attending the Multicultural Magnet School in New London, CT which is a regional magnet school. My husband and I have been very lucky to have such a high-quality regional elementary school so close by. We drive 20 minutes (each way) each day to drop and pick up our children. We are lucky enough to not need to have our child ride the bus, because I work nearby the school in New London. We only live 5 minutes from our local elementary school in Montville, but it did not have full day kindergarten when our children started school so it was not even an option for us to have our children attend there.

In our 6 years at RMMS, we have found that though the school can have many of the same challenges of a local town-run public school, it has many more advantages. The social-emotional curriculum is far superior to that of our local school. The genuine hands-on approach of the administrators, teachers and support personnel is critical to success for our children. Sadly, and for reasons unknown to us, they would not get that same individualized attention at our local school. We know this for a fact, as we toured our local kindergarten and were appalled to be told that “they have special classrooms” for children like mine. Our jaws dropped when this was said to us by the teacher after just mentioning that our daughter is highly anxious and needed a lot more time with transitions than most children. This is just one example of how the paradigm of education is far superior at the magnet school our child attends. They see our children for the children they are, meet them where they are and help them progress. They are not numbers or thought of as “challenging children” before they even walk in the door. They did not even flinch when we said our daughters had high anxiety and needed help with transitions. The response in Montville showed us that it was not the experience we were looking for in a school for our child, so we were delighted to have been selected in the lottery for RMMS where our daughters have been mainstreamed and received the individualized education they needed. Both daughters are “A students” and thriving in RMMS. Their teachers have always told us what delights they are to have in their classes and both are model students. Neither one is considered a special needs student. Both have 504 plans and are doing so well that nobody even can tell that they have high anxiety. The perspective of the school and the educators is what makes them different, and that difference shines through by treasuring the strengths and cultivating the uniqueness that is every child. Every public school could do this, but very few do. I am also a teacher, and have had the opportunity to spend time in most of the elementary schools in our region. I know this first hand. RMMS, like all good schools, looks at all children with this special lens, and the children excel because of it. I think that is what makes our Magnet school special. It is not stuck in the cookie-cutter rut of a failing public school model.

Please do not take the funding away for transportation or town-portion share of the cost of students who chose to go out of district to Magnet Schools. Individualized choice for education is very critical in a system such as the one in CT which for many children is broken. No two

public schools are alike in their ability to provide high quality education. There is an achievement gap because the quality even of individual public schools within the same town aren't even the same quality in terms of teachers, materials, building structure or education. I don't know what needs to be done to fix all those schools, because all children deserve excellent schools, but I do know that taking magnet schools that ARE WORKING and taking their funding away is NOT the answer. Please figure out a better way to fund the system so that all public schools are closing the achievement gap, without taking the funding away from the quality Magnet Schools of this state.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

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Parent

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