

Testimony in Favor of 5465

From Dr. Murphy Sewall, Vice Chair of the Windham Board of Education

The Windham Public Schools dual language instruction program known as *Compañeros* has a 30 year history of national recognition and success. Students in this program have consistently outperformed their local peers on standardized tests. More to the point, a facility in more than one language is increasingly a significant asset both socially and economically in the 21st Century. *Compañeros* not only supports mastery of English in Spanish heritage children, it adds Spanish to the skill set of English heritage children.

Until recently, *Compañeros* has been limited to a K-5 program because the only viable entry was at kindergarten and attrition reduced the size of the cohort to smaller than viable for continuation beyond fifth grade. Windham Public Schools has undertaken the creation of a process to admit qualified students in higher grades and is now able to sustain *Compañeros* through grade 8. As a consequence, the district is committed to bringing the program that currently is offered in three different buildings under one roof regardless of the outcome of our desire to develop the concept as a magnet school

Windham Public Schools seeks magnet status for a pre-K to 8 dual magnet school for two substantial reasons that benefit the State of Connecticut as a whole. First, there is a national shortage of bilingual teachers. This shortage is particularly damaging to Connecticut because of our substantial Hispanic population. Windham Public Schools intends to develop a pre-K to 8 dual language school as a partnership with Eastern Connecticut State University, one of the State's teacher education institutions. The school would serve as a teaching laboratory for ECSU's school of education and become a center of excellence as a source of bilingual educators.

Second, magnet school status would allow Windham Public Schools to offer the established, successful *Compañeros* to 100 students from surrounding communities. In addition to the benefit of dual language education to these students, the result would be a more integrated school population for Windham's participating students. There is ample education research that indicates that all of the students in this proposed program would be better off socially as well as academically in such an environment.