



## CANTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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### *Opening Minds ~ Transforming Lives*

TO: Chairmen McCrory and Sanchez, Ranking Members Berthel and McCarty, and esteemed members of the Education Committee, thank you for allowing me to submit testimony on SB 457, SB 738 and SB 874.

The Canton Board of Education opposes forced regionalization as outlined in SB 738- An Act Concerning the Creation of Regional School Districts, SB 457- An Act Concerning the Size of School Districts, SB 874- An Act Concerning Education Initiatives and Services in Connecticut and HB 7150- Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations Concerning Education. The Canton Board of Education has reviewed the three proposed bills regarding school regionalization and we feel these proposals will directly impact our Town, community and the quality of our schools.

The Canton Board of Education is against state forced regionalization or any legislation that penalizes districts of a specific size for not pursuing regionalization. A town should be able to decide for itself if regionalization makes sense rather than having it forced upon them by State mandate.

As a DRG group C district, Canton has approximately 1,550 students. Governor Lamont's budget says "Small local school districts that choose to have inefficient governance structures and too many expensive superintendents can no longer expect the state to bear the costs of these decisions," This statement is directed at small towns like Canton - a town that has been fiscally responsible for many years.

In response to that statement, I would say our Town and District may be small, but we are efficient with our resources. We live in a community that expects its Board of Education to be responsible with school budgets and regularly holds us accountable for managing the escalating cost of education. Canton has maintained a cost per pupil below state average with high educational outcomes, and it has a cost per pupil lower than 12 existing regional school districts. Canton is able to maintain that lower than average cost per pupil by continually looking for cost efficiencies. Examples of cost efficiencies and shared services that already exist in Canton include:

- Sharing a Director of Food Services with both Region# 10 and Avon, which also includes the ability to share in the management of food inventory between the districts.
- Utilizing cooperative purchasing agreements for the purchase of fuel, environmental testing services, equipment and textbooks.
- Sharing transportation with other districts for special education students that require out-of-district placements.
- Combining the Board of Education and Town of Canton Finance Departments into one Shared Finance Department.
- Pursuing athletic co-op agreements for sports teams.
- Sharing the cost of professional development with neighboring districts.

#### **Our Mission**

Our mission is to prepare independent, productive, respectful and responsible citizens who contribute to an ever changing world. We pursue continuous improvement while honoring our strong educational legacy and traditions. We unite with families and the community to provide challenging educational experiences that promote the intellectual, physical, social and emotional potential of our students.

Having recently combined Finance Departments with the Town, we believe that one of the greatest ways to create cost efficiencies is for schools and town governments to work more closely together to find opportunities to streamline services such as custodial and facilities management, Human Resources and IT departments. The role of the state government should be to remove barriers to shared services and economies of scale rather than force regionalization upon districts as a way create cost savings.

The Canton Board of Education opposes any bill that forces regionalization without considering what is best for students. The state has a financial crisis on its hands. However, balancing the state budget at the expense of our education system is not acceptable. Residents choose to live in small communities for a reason - and one of those reasons is for quality schools where teachers are engaged, student learning can be individualized, and where the community can have input. In Canton, our community regularly provides feedback to the Board of Education - as a Board of Education, we welcome their input. Our community has given input on issues ranging from class sizes to use of educational resources. A larger regionalized school district would make it more difficult for parents and the community to engage in the education process, and it would also make it more difficult to hold a regional board accountable for its actions.

Before any legislation is passed, research should be done on whether a state-wide regionalization of Connecticut schools would in fact reduce costs and improve education. The recent study completed by the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving “K-12 Regionalization in Connecticut: Pros, Cons and Surprises” provides some critical data and analysis you should consider when determining whether to move forward with this legislation.

At a time when school districts are looking for unfunded mandate relief, the proposed bills on regionalization feel like the ultimate unfunded mandate for schools and therefore, the Canton Board of Education urges the State legislators to oppose these bills forcing regionalization upon small towns that have demonstrated efficient use of funds.

Sincerely,

Julie Auseré  
Chair, Canton Board of Education