

Testimony to the Educational Committee on March 1, 2019
Regionalization Proposals (SB-874, HB-7150, SB-738, and SB-457)
Connecticut State Capitol
Submitted by Adam S. Burrows - Part Time Superintendent of Schools
Voluntown, Connecticut

My name is Adam S. Burrows and I have been the Part Time Superintendent of Schools in Voluntown, Connecticut for the past 13 years. My many positive experiences in this small one-school system have far exceeded anything that has ever happened in my now 52-year career as an educator in Connecticut. My previous positions involved leadership roles in Connecticut public school systems with enrollments of 3,600, 4800, 2,400, and 1,600 (a regional school system where I served two terms as the Acting Superintendent of Schools).

I am also the Chair of the CAPSS Part Time Superintendents Committee. This group meets on a regular basis to network, share initiatives, and review common priorities. It is amazing to hear the many positive educational experiences. The current efforts in the state to create regional schools systems, in my opinion, have not truly made an appropriate assessment of the many successful smaller school systems.

In meetings with citizens throughout the state, people are surprised at hearing about a one-school, school system. They ask questions about programs and there is a general feeling that our students might not have the same educational opportunities as larger school systems. I urge the Education Committee to take time to review what is happening. In Voluntown, the following are just a few of our academic and financial successes:

- All three and four year olds in our town are eligible to attend our Pre-School program funded by an excellent School Readiness grant.
- We implemented Full-Day Kindergarten 12 years ago. Students entering First Grade are now in their fourth year at Voluntown Elementary School.
- Our 3rd through 8th graders consistently have scored #1 or #2 in the annual SBAC testing in both Reading and Math. These high academic scores include all Special Education students. Each year we have other school systems asking to visit to observe our programs.
- We do not have a high school. Our 8th graders have a choice of seven different high schools: Norwich Free Academy, Griswold High School, Marine Science Magnet School, QMC at Quinbuag Community College, Ellis Tech, Norwich Tech, and Killingly-Ag. This means that our school system utilizes a regional approach. We pay for high school tuitions and transportation to and from our designated high schools.
- We assess reading and math three times each year to identify the positive academic progress of 1st -8th grade students. Identified students in need of additional support in a Tutorial program to receive SRBI or Scientifically Researched-Based Interventions. Visitors are totally surprised when they hear that we have no students in need of TIER III SRBI services in Mathematics.
- We have a highly structured process for researching, reviewing, implementing, and evaluating our Curriculum. Our decision-making process includes the work of many committees that meet on a regular basis each school year. Teachers play a key role in this process. A Curriculum Steering Committee makes recommendations to the Board of Education. We have school-site governance that allows for the efficient and cost-effective implementation of curriculum, policy, and personnel decisions.

- We utilized the services of EASTCONN, especially with the placement of Special Education students that require specialized programming based on an I.E.P. or Individual Educational Program. EASTCONN is also a valuable curriculum resource for school systems in our region.
- CABE is an excellent resource for updating policies, offering leadership training for members of Boards of Education, and the effective implementation of statutes.
- We own and operate our bus company and have vehicles that are just three years old. Our cost for transportation in 2007-2008 was \$470,013 and in 2018-2019 we have budgeted \$467,552. These totals include the lease-purchase of high quality busses, all salaries and fringe benefits, fuel, and repairs and maintenance. Two bus routes actually turn around in Rhode Island each school day. We share transportation costs with a neighboring school system for a student attending a special education program.
- We own and operate our own food services program that has a positive annual balance. And, we have been in compliance with all state audits.
- We were one of the first school systems that took advantage of the CT Partnership for health insurance. In 2011-2012 we spent \$608,920 for health insurance and in 2018-2019 we have budgeted \$576,677. This is another example of utilizing regional and statewide approaches for significant cost savings.
- The Boards of Selectmen and Education have worked together to maintain our financial health. The town has no debt.
- Our effective administrative faculty includes a 0.40 FTE Part Time Superintendent of Schools for two days a week who also serves as the Business manager, a 0.40 FTE Part Time Director of Student Services for two days a week for processing Special Education programming needs, a 1.0 FTE Full Time Principal of Voluntown Elementary School, and a cost effective Assistant Principal for approximately ten (10) days per year on an as needed basis.

The current 2019-20 Board of Education budget proposal is \$6,819,498. Our greatest financial challenge has been reductions in the ECS or Education Cost Sharing grant from the state. One MIL in Voluntown currently raises about \$120,000. In 2009-2010 the local property taxes paid for 59.08% of the school budget and in 2018-2019 local taxes pay 66.72%. The Governor's budget proposal will give Voluntown a significant ECS cut of \$316,019 in 19-20 and \$263,003 in 20-21. This is one of severest cuts in the state based on the size of our budget.

I am currently an elected official of a local Board of Finance that is part of Regional School System involving two rather wealthy municipalities. The decision-making process regarding educational and budgeting issues is quite different from the smaller school system. There are many more variables that are created in a regional school system that require additional time for communities to review and consider based on varying local needs and philosophy. In Voluntown there are seven members of the Board of Education representing the community.

What authorities and responsibilities currently held by local Boards of Educations would be lost with the implementation of regional school systems?

What happens with the obligation to pay for existing debts?

What happens with cost per pupil when one community will support additional costs due to an uneven allocation of state funding? (*Voluntown has two neighbors receiving increases in ECS fund for 20-21*)

What happens with the character of a local school that is an integral part of the character of a community?

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