

**Testimony before the Education Committee of the General Assembly**  
**Submitted by Heather R. Petit**  
**Hebron, Connecticut**  
**March 1, 2019**

**Re: SB 457, An Act Concerning the Size of School Districts**

**SB 738, An Act Concerning the Creation of Regional School Districts**

**HB 7150, An Act Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations  
Concerning Education**

Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, Vice Chairs, Ranking and other distinguished members of the Education Committee: Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the above referenced bills.

School regionalization has been presented most recently as an effort to achieve cost savings and efficiencies in a time in which the state finds itself in increasing debt. The funding of our children's education, which some have said we can no longer afford. However, I would like to speak to another cost of regionalization; the cost to our children.

The Alliance District program was created by the Connecticut General Assembly as a targeted investment in the state's lowest performing schools. Out of the 33 Alliance School Districts, 27 of them, or 82 % have a student population size of 2,000 or above. These districts receive increased education cost savings (ECS) funding and work closely with the State Department of Education to "increase student outcomes and close achievement gaps through...tiered interventions, foundational reading programs, Wraparound services, and minority teacher/administrator recruitment." These combined efforts have made positive impacts on student outcomes and achievement since the program's inception. However, even with this program in place for several years now, Connecticut continues to have one of the highest achievement gaps in the country.<sup>ii</sup>

Following a model which increases district size, while potentially cutting curriculum experts, school administrators, special education directors, and pupil service directors, among others, simply cannot be in the best interest of our children.

In regard to perceived financial cost savings, a report by the National Education Policy Center on the *Consolidation of Schools and Districts, What the Research Says and What it Means*, findings and recommendations to policymakers were to:

- **Closely question claims about presumed benefits of consolidation in their state.** What reason is there to expect substantial improvements, given that current research suggests that savings for taxpayers, fiscal efficiencies, and curricular improvements are unlikely?
- **Avoid statewide mandates for consolidation and steer clear of minimum sizes for schools and districts.** These always prove arbitrary and often prove unworkable.

- **Consider other measures to improve fiscal efficiency or educational services.**  
Examples include cooperative purchasing agreements among districts...state regulations that take account of the needs of small districts and schools, recruitment and retention of experienced teachers for low-wealth districts...smaller class sizes for young students, and effective professional development programs.
- **Investigate deconsolidation as a means of improving fiscal efficiency and improving learning outcomes.**<sup>iii</sup>

An example of efficiencies and cost savings through cooperative agreements and shared services can be found in the Town of Hebron itself. The Hebron School District achieves a multitude of cost savings each year through the following:

- Hebron Parks and Recreation: provides before and aftercare for students as well as providing in-kind services of turf management, landscaping and plowing for each of the elementary schools;
- AHM Youth and Family Services: operates the family resource center for Hebron and surrounding school districts as well as providing a social worker for the elementary schools;
- EASTCONN: provides food services for students and staff which provides a cost saving to the district;
- Hebron, Marlborough, Andover and AHM created the Region 8 Health Insurance Consortium which allows for thousands of dollars in savings;
- A fuel collaborative with the Town and Regional Middle and High School allows each to lock in the lowest rates possible;
- A shared Board Certified Behavioral Analyst (BCBA) with Marlborough Public Schools; and
- Student transportation savings through shared busing agreements between Hebron and surrounding school districts.

These shared services save the Town of Hebron, Hebron Board of Education, and taxpayers potentially hundreds of thousands of dollars each year. Other communities and districts most likely do the same and shared services are in most cases already occurring.

Each year it seems inevitable that the potential to eliminate or reduce programs and services for our most vulnerable populations are considered given the deficit Connecticut continues to find itself in. Last legislative session, it was Care 4 Kids funding and funding for low-income and disabled Medicare patients that was almost eliminated. This year, it appears to be our children's education that is on the chopping block.

Our children are our most vulnerable population; the population without the ready means to have a voice at the Capitol; a population that needs a legislature who looks out for them and not the bottom line. When considering equal education for all children; let's give them that. Not a consolidated version.

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<sup>i</sup> Connecticut State Department of Education (2019) Alliance Districts. Retrieved from:  
<https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Alliance-Districts/Alliance-Districts>

<sup>ii</sup> Connecticut Council for Education Reform (2019) The Gap In Connecticut. Retrieved from:  
<http://ctedreform.org/cts-gap/>

<sup>iii</sup> National Education Policy Center (2019). Consolidation of School Districts: What the Research Says and What it Means. Retrieved from: <https://nepc.colorado.edu/publication/consolidation-schools-districts>