

**Ref: SB 738, SB 457 and SB 874**

**From:** Dhara Shah & Tushar Shah, Wilton CT.

**Purpose**

We are writing to express dismay and strong opposition to all three bills SB 738, SB 457 and SB 874, the bills that will force some manner of regionalization of Connecticut public schools.

**Reasoning**

- 1) A little over nine years ago we moved to Wilton just prior to our oldest child starting 1st grade. The primary and only reason we moved to Wilton was because of its wonderful schools. Our three children are thriving and excelling at school, sports, music and any other school sponsored community activities. We know all our children's teachers and our children's past teachers still remember us when we visit them.
- 2) When one of our children was in 2nd grade and had a skiing related accident, he would have missed his school concert for which he had practiced for weeks. His music teacher made sure he could still be part of the concert despite him being in a wheelchair.
- 3) We don't see how any of this can be possible with a forced regionalization.
- 4) If cost saving is the goal: this will not save money.
  - a) The cost of combining resources, retrofitting schools, and leveling up salaries, and sorting through legal obligations will offset any savings.<sup>1</sup>
  - b) A 2011 study by the National Education Policy Center found the savings from school consolidation are "vastly overestimated."<sup>2</sup>
  - c) Larger school districts end up hiring more administrators, not fewer.<sup>3</sup>
  - d) Connecticut's own UConn found in 2010 that there is no link between efficiency and academic performance.<sup>4</sup>
- 5) It will eliminate local control:
  - a) We moved to Wilton because of the schools. Stripping local control of schools will irreversibly change the character of our town.
  - b) I know all my children's teachers, past and present. That's what makes Connecticut special.
  - c) Our district attracts the best teachers and administrators who value small districts and personal connections as much as we do. This is true of many smaller school districts.<sup>5</sup>
- 6) It will most certainly impact quality of the education negatively:
  - a) Any consideration of mandatory consolidation of schools must start with education quality and there is no proof that larger schools are better than smaller ones.
  - b) Student and parent engagement decline when schools are expanded.<sup>6</sup>
  - c) School consolidation can mean longer bus rides for students<sup>7</sup> which leads to lower achievement scores, more absenteeism, and health consequences for students.<sup>8</sup>
- 7) If you wanted a real-life example: The state of Vermont has forced consolidation and is failing to achieve its goals.<sup>9</sup>

We don't see how forced consolidation helps in anyway. And what about the education of the students? It is our right to locally manage our schools. Neighboring towns and cities have different people with different goals and

that is okay. We are responsible for our children's' education, not surrounding towns or cities. We are best equipped in Wilton to make our own decisions. Our Schools, Our Choice.

The following paragraph was written by our daughter who is in 7<sup>th</sup> grade. We explained to her what the bills potential intent is and asked her what she thought about it. Below is her response:

Regionalism is a thought, and not one that will result in any foreseeable benefits. Regionalism is the combining of many areas that share something in common. The reason I know this is because I learned it in one of my classes. With combined schools, students might not learn from the teachers who passionately teach and care about the kids learning. The staff count will be lower, and the teachers laden with more work. Even if a teacher is trying his or her best, they will have a significant amount more job stress and the effect will result in the same as the former scenario. Studies have been taken of this point and proven this fact. Additionally, extracurricular activities provided by the school, such as debate, sport, and other clubs, may be limited or eliminated. This will lessen students' exposure to useful skills that they may learn in these clubs that will help them eminently throughout their lives. Instead of using the precious time they have to learn something new, they will spend it in a bus, wasting a valuable two hours each day to merely reach their school. Also, the Wilton Public Schools have a phenomenal music program available to the kids. With the combination of schools, this might not be compatible with the new schedule and will be eliminated as well. This is unfair to the students, as well as that it will not benefit them in the long run but hurt them by taking away from them a chance that could change their lives. There are no benefits to regionalism and it will only detriment the student's education now, and in the long run. Please do not pass these bills.

Thank you.

We sincerely hope and ask that you oppose the bills (SB 738, SB 457 and SB 874) and any other effort to force consolidation of Connecticut public schools.

Sincerely,

Dhara & Tushar Shah

(Parents of Middle and High School going children)

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.aasa.org/SchoolAdministratorArticle.aspx?id=13218>

<sup>2</sup> <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED515900>

<sup>3</sup> <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED515900>

<sup>4</sup> Heffley, Dennis, and Can Bekaroglu. "Getting More From Less, Measuring Efficiency in Connecticut High School Districts." The Connecticut Economy, Winter (2010).

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.aasa.org/SchoolAdministratorArticle.aspx?id=13218>

<sup>6</sup> Zimmer, Timothy, Larry DeBoer, and Marilyn Hirth. "Examining economies of scale in school consolidation: Assessment of Indiana school districts." Journal of Education Finance 35.2 (2009): 103-127.

<sup>7</sup> Abalde, Macarena Ares. "School size policies: A literature review." OECD Education Working Papers 106 (2014): 0\_1.

<sup>8</sup> Voulgaris, Carole Turley, Michael J. Smart, and Brian D. Taylor. "Tired of Commuting? Relationships among Journeys to School, Sleep, and Exercise among American Teenagers." *Journal of Planning Education and Research* (2017): 0739456X17725148.

<sup>9</sup> <https://vtdigger.org/tag/school-district-consolidation/>