

SB 457 and SB 738

I'm writing in strong opposition to SB 457 and SB 738. As a member of the Redding Board of Education I know the challenges and benefits to regionalization, as we are always looking for opportunities to save costs and share services. We currently share a regionalized central office with Easton and the ER9 high school. This structure is not without its hindrances, but the bills currently proposed would be destructive to Redding students. Each of these bills would require that multi-year contracts with teachers, non-certified staff, buses, custodial staff, and the administrators union be renegotiated at great cost to our district, as all salaries would be adjusted to the highest contracted rate.

Redding and Easton have worked hard toward curriculum alignment, looking ahead for our students who will all enter the same high school. Under the bill proposed by Senator Looney our high school would cease to exist, with Redding students being sent to schools in Ridgefield or Bethel, and Easton students to Trumbull or Monroe. Joel Barlow High School would sit empty. This would be devastating to our community, and demoralizing for our students.

We have considered regionalizing our own unique tri-district. This would allow us to offer additional language classes, music and arts classes, as well as share special services with Easton. Even then we are stymied not only by the same contractual discrepancies, but also by the question of which town absorbs the costs to the schools' maintenance. Does Redding take on the debt accrued by Easton when they built a new elementary school, and likewise does Easton share the cost to maintain the older buildings in Redding? Both Redding and Easton have outdated and inefficient middle school buildings. Ideally, Redding and Easton would share one middle school as we share the high school, creating efficiencies and allowing us to consolidate curriculum and share services in a way that benefits both the students and the community. This would, however, require an investment from the state to help with the expense of constructing a new building near Joel Barlow High School. Redding and Easton are geographically too large for students to travel to school between the towns. With rising mandated education costs what they are, it is simply not an expense our towns would or could support.

An appropriate solution to the difficulties surrounding regionalization will provide a financial mechanism and structure to resolve these issues.

There is a necessary conversation to be had about cost savings for our schools and we welcome this process, however bills 457 and 738 are not the solution.

-Heather Whaley

Member, Redding Board of Education