

The Brooklyn Schools

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Dear Co-Chairs Robert Sanchez and Douglas McCrory and Members of the Education Committee,

Re: Proposed Bill No. 738/457, An Act Concerning The Creation Of Regional School Districts - OPPOSED

I would first like to express my appreciation for all that you do. You are making decisions that impact all children and families across the State of Connecticut and our future. What you do is incredibly important and impactful. I appreciate the hard work you do on behalf of our communities and State. I also appreciate the opportunity to speak to you this evening.

You have clearly heard a great deal of feedback about this proposed bill and I wanted to share my story from Brooklyn. One of my Board of Education members had planned to be here with me but had a situation that needed her attention. The Brooklyn Board of Education discussed this on Wednesday evening at our Board meeting. I have also discussed these proposed bills with the Brooklyn Board of Finance.

I have not found anyone who has expressed support of this bill as written.

The Brooklyn Public Schools is a PK-8 school district with 909 students. We have two buildings at one location. We send our 405 high school students to two designated high schools, Ellis Technical High School, two magnet schools, and five other high schools in the area. Students have school choice and the Town of Brooklyn transports students to the designated high schools.

“Brooklyn’s Best” are celebrated on a regular basis in our district. In a small district our students and families build a very strong relationship and work very well together. There are generations of families who grew up in Brooklyn and remain in Brooklyn because of the school district and the relationships that are formed. In speaking with a secretary she describes “her school” as a family. She recalls the staff that work in the school who have had babies together, seen marriages and hardships. Staff come together to support each other, students and the families in Brooklyn. We recently experienced a situation that required our staff to pull together from both schools and support students with no food at home, and another family facing difficult times ahead with a very sick family member. The relationships between students and staff is very strong, creating a comfortable environment where family matters can be shared and supported.

Brooklyn has also engaged in many cost savings measures. A forced regionalization is not needed. We are working diligently to develop ways to save the taxpayers of the town and the State of Connecticut money. Our Board of Education, Board of Selectmen and Board of Education work very collaboratively and are proud of the efforts we have made to share services.

Brooklyn Board of Education and Town Government:

- Shared Business Manager
- Shared Financial Software
- Shared Grounds and Maintenance, reducing need for duplicates in equipment
- Shared Department of Public Works Services: plowing, sanding, use of payloaders
- Shared Badge/Key software
- Resident Trooper is very involved with Schools
- Shared Emergency Notification
- Shared Parks and Recreation use of schools, no cost, benefit from free summer meals
- School/Parks and recreation share school buildings and Town fields for athletics

Next Steps with the Town of Brooklyn Include:

- Shared Payroll Staff
- Shared Accounts Payable/Receivable Staff
- Shared Human Resources Staff
- Shared Hiring and Recruiting Programming

Brooklyn Board of Education and EASTCONN (Regional Education Service Center)

- Cooperative Bids: paper products, food, fuel, technology
- Support Staff: Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, Psychological Assessment Services
- Finance Staff
- Professional Development for teachers, administrators and superintendent
- Collaboration on School Calendar
- Food Services Director
- Special Education Directors Group: CONNCASE
- Curriculum Support: regional curriculum work group
- English Learners: EL group for service providers to share best practices
- Superintendents Group

Brooklyn Board of Education and Other Local School Districts

- Shared transportation services: significant savings on out of district transportation costs
- Shared professional development
- Shared special programming
- Collaborative: Northeast Early Childhood Council (NECC)
 - Shared professional learning
 - Shared parental supports and training
 - Collaborative School Readiness programming, evaluation and program development
- Collaborative bids: fuel, busing

Continued Efforts

- The superintendents who attend EASTCONN are working on reviewing additional benefits to regionalization
- Superintendents in the NE CT area are continuing these conversations

Mission: The Brooklyn Schools will foster a drive for learning within each student to reach his/her greatest potential. To achieve this mission, the school will continually improve its educational programs and services to meet this community's expectations for a quality education for all.

I would strongly encourage you to consider Bill 874, An Act Concerning Education Initiatives and Services in Connecticut, to not only study the effects of regionalization on budgets, but to also consider the impacts on families, students and staff. I have worked in a larger districts. In some larger districts the relationships with the community, families and students is more challenging to be sure you are connecting with every family. As a principal, director and superintendent the students know me and build stronger relationships when you get to know them. When I attend concerts, baseball games, cross country meets as the superintendent, the students and families know me. If I was working in a larger district I would not be able to attend one game for each sport. I would likely be splitting that up with an assistant superintendent or other central office administrators. This direct connection to students and families would be lost.

In Brooklyn I can go to one of our long time staff and ask about a student and they know the family, they know the grandparents or are aware of natural supports in the family or community. I recently was trying to track down a former employee who had moved and not left a forwarding address, one of the school secretaries knew where her daughter worked and I was able to find a correct address in order to reach her. This personal approach is lost in a larger community.

Finally I would like to stress that education is about meeting the unique educational needs of every student and fostering the drive for learning to help children reach their fullest potential. Our student achievement data compared to many of the large school districts is better. Our per pupil costs are lower than many of those same large districts. Our district does not require additional funds to educate students due to low achievement. If students are learning, the district is continuing to grow and progress, it does not need to be forced to change. If the local community was not happy with the outcomes, they would vote to change it. The local tax payers are voting for what they want each year as they vote on their local budgets.

If a commission is formed to study this, I would ask that you require people to go to each of these small districts and learn first hand what efforts are already made to create an excellent learning environment for our students. Please do not make assumptions about a community that you have not visited or spoken to the stakeholders about.

Thank you for your continued work and support of our students, our future.

Sincerely,

Patricia L. Buell

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