

Testimony to the Education Committee (EDtestimony@cga.ct.gov) on Proposed Senate Bills: SB 457, SB 738 and SB 874

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Chairmen McCrory and Sanchez, Ranking Members Berthel and McCarty, and esteemed members of the Education Committee, thank you for allowing me to submit testimony on SB 457, SB 738 and SB 874.

My testimony will bring to light the conditions and qualities of Thomaston Public Schools and other stand-alone districts of like size and will compel you to reject Senate Bills 457, 738 and 874.

Thomaston Public Schools is a stand-alone school district of fewer than 2000 students located in a town of fewer than 40,000 residents. Thomaston's Central Office staff consists of four full-time staff and one part-time staff member, specifically, the Superintendent of Schools, three clerical staff, and one 15 hour per week Business Manager who is shared with another district.

Thomaston's per pupil spending is ranked 138 out of 169 towns (2017 data). This means only 31 towns spend less per pupil than Thomaston. Districts with more than 2000 students and/or having a population of over 40,000 (Waterbury, ranked 130, Torrington, ranked 97, New Haven, ranked 61 and Hartford, ranked 42) spend more per pupil than Thomaston.

With Thomaston's low per pupil expenditure and, even more so, with Thomaston's fewer than 2000 students, the district is able to provide a variety of remediation, enrichment, college credit, and childcare programs and resources (the list below is not exhaustive):

- Reading Intervention (K-6)
- Mathematics Intervention (K-6)
- English Language Learner Instruction (K-12)
- Academies (enrichment courses embedded in the school day for K-6 students)
- Junior Achievement for a Day (K-6)
- One School, One Book (Grades 4-6)
- Connecticut Kid Governor Program (Grade 5)
- Character Counts Initiative (K-6)
- Developmental Guidance Programming (Grades 4-6)
- Afterschool Programs (Grades 4-6)
- PATHS (alternative high school setting for Thomaston and other small districts)
- Certified Nursing Assistant Program (high school)
- Athletics (13 Competitive Teams across Grades 7-12 (three co-oped with other towns or private schools)
- Athletic Trainer (for high school athletes)
- Lunch Monitors (K-12)

- Small Engine Mechanic Program (high school)
- Paralegal Studies with State Licensure and College Credits (high school)
- No-Tuition, Full-Day Preschool (age 4)
- Five (5) UCONN Early College Experience College Credit Courses (high school)
- Principal to President Scholarship (Naugatuck Valley Community College – College Credit Courses) (high school)
- Advanced Placement (AP) Courses (11 courses) (high school)
- Twenty-One (21) Clubs (high school)
- Language Arts Coach (embedded professional development for teachers)
- Mathematics Coach (embedded professional development for teachers)
- Full-Time Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) (K-6)
- Teacher-Authored Curricula

Sixty-two percent (62%) of Thomaston High School students participate in sports and win State championships, even with the school's no-cut policy.

What's more exciting is the number of Advanced Placement (AP) Scholars produced by Thomaston's small schools: 66 students in one year. This is a proud point of information when juxtaposed to our average grade level roster of 62 students.

Thomaston's four-year graduation rate averages 96% (2012-2013: 93.6%, 2013-2014: 93.0%, 2014-2015: 98.4%, 2015-2016: 100.0%, 2016-2017: 95.2%).

The student success realized in our small district is difficult to replicate in a larger one. Economies of scale are useful in a factory model, but we don't teach widgets, we teach children. Frugal, creative, and responsible spending has been and is our example to all.

The cost of educating a student through high school graduation in a small district has been shown to be more efficient (Lawrence 2002). Thomaston's small and student-focused educational program comes at a reasonable price to the State and the local taxpayer.

Long before the recently proposed school district regionalization legislation, Thomaston Public Schools has regularly sought and effectively participated in cost-sharing collaboratives. Thomaston's taxpayers (and students) have reaped the benefits of these efforts to reduce spending with limited impact on student instruction and services. For example (the list below is not exhaustive):

- Thomaston's tri-town school transportation contract and annual oil bidding process are shared with Plymouth and Wolcott Public Schools.
- Wolcott Public Schools shares its Business Manager and Food Service Director with Thomaston Public Schools, initially creating and later continuing to maintain efficiencies while capitalizing on economies of scale for back office services.

- Health benefits costs in Thomaston have been reduced through a shared insurance pool across Thomaston Public Schools, Winchester Public Schools, the Gilbert School, and Regional District 7.
- Thomaston shares the services of its newest school, Positive Alternative to Traditional High School (PATHS), with area districts, first, sharing the much needed counseling and wrap-around services for qualifying students and, second, offering a more cost-effective option to private school outplacement tuition for Thomaston's taxpayers and the taxpayers from other districts. This service even reduces the state's financial support for Thomaston and other districts as the tuition for Thomaston's alternative school is so cost-effective it does not exceed the four and a half times threshold to qualify for excess cost reimbursement.

Therefore, Thomaston Public Schools and other small districts like Thomaston do not require legislation to provide quality education at a reasonable cost to the taxpayer.

More importantly, efficiency without legislative force gives Thomaston's taxpayers greater control over their taxes when compared to that of regional school district taxpayers.

I have and will continue to share information on how Thomaston employs cost-sharing collaboratives. I hope that I shed light on the efficiencies of a small school district and respectfully request that you reject bills 457, 738 and 874.

Thank you again for hearing my testimony. I am happy to answer any questions.