



**Testimony
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Before the Education Committee
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The Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST) strongly ***opposes*** **SB-738, AN ACT CONCERNING THE CREATION OF REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS, which calls for a plan for the massive redistricting of Connecticut's school districts without regard for how this will impact costs or the quality of education.**

Forced, top-down consolidation is unlikely to produce any meaningful costs savings, according to several studies that have analyzed school district consolidation proposals. In fact, some studies suggest that deconsolidating larger school districts into smaller districts is more likely to produce savings.

Several smaller school districts have explored consolidation options and concluded that consolidation would not result in significant cost savings. Instead, consolidation raised concerns regarding whether the quality of education would suffer. Clearly, discussions about improving educational efficiencies must be driven by data-based comparisons of spending levels across categories for all school districts.

Moreover, there are many reasons why consolidating small school districts may not be in the best interest of students, taxpayers and the community. For example, many small school districts are located in rural areas where homes are spread out across a wide geographic area. For these students, forced consolidation may result in less time in the classroom and more time on the bus. In addition, additional transportation costs, including costs associated with fuel, maintenance, bus driver wages, benefits and overtime, bus leasing and/or purchasing, insurance, garage and parking facilities, may wipe out any savings generated from consolidation.

In Connecticut's small towns, schools are often the heart of the community. Residents of all ages attend plays, concerts, and athletic events to come together as a community to support the students and each other. Forcing consolidation by mandating a plan or withholding funding will disrupt communities throughout Connecticut.

Various studies on school consolidation conclude that top-down, forced consolidation simply does not work. Instead, we should work with towns and school districts to encourage them to pursue voluntary regional, shared services approaches that make sense for their community and for their students.

The proposal also fails to enable towns to reduce education costs by eliminating state mandates that drive up costs. For example, under the Minimum Budget Requirement (MBR) mandate, school districts must budget at least the same amount for education as they did in the prior fiscal year, with certain limited exceptions.



The MBR mandate is holding town budgets hostage, imposing a tremendous burden on property taxpayers to fund unnecessary levels of education spending. Towns need more flexibility to ensure that education budgets can be adjusted to reflect declining enrollment and other areas where savings can be achieved. Providing towns with meaningful relief from the MBR mandate will go a long way toward helping towns control the growth of local budgets to ease the burden on property taxpayers.

COST is an advocacy organization committed to giving small towns a strong voice in the legislative process.