

Co-Chairman Senator McCrory and Representative Sanchez, Distinguished Ranking Members Senator Berthel, and Representative McCarthy, and distinguished members of the education committee. My name is Michelle Haggerty. I am opposed to SB 457, 738 and 874 regarding forced school regionalization.

I have been living in Connecticut approximately 20 years, currently living in Wilton, CT. I am mom of three (2 in public schools, 1 to start soon), a self-employed consultant with a long career working in Connecticut in technology, operations, and finance. My college degree included a minor in education. I am an active volunteer in my community. I care about education in Connecticut and have a deep appreciation for what it takes to do it well.

I object to forced regionalization of schools. It will not create a more efficient school system or result in any cost savings or improvement in our education system.

Connecticut towns like ours in Wilton have spent many years refining their education systems to optimize the dollars spent for the benefit and needs of our students. Wilton has implemented efficiencies like having one elementary school that is cost effective, has a reasonable bussing service for a town of our geographic size, provides for an equal opportunity for all students and fosters a sense of community amongst all students. This is a solution that works for Wilton. Other towns may have other priorities and solutions that work well for them.

After reviewing articles written, and talking to concerned residents recently about efforts they are aware of in their towns to pursue some voluntary coordination efforts, it is clear that the concept of voluntary regionalization and shared services sharing is alive and well (for towns large and small) and could be nurtured where appropriate.

- Our First Selectwoman cites this and many examples of voluntary sharing in this article: [“Vanderslice Finds New Threats in Gov.’s Regionalization Bill...”, Lynne Vanderslice, First Selectwoman of Wilton, February 26, 2019, Good Morning Wilton.](#)
- The First Selectman of Easton, Adam Dunsby, also shares examples in [The NewsTimes, February 8, 2019, “Letter to the editor: Regionalization already happens”](#)

This does not need to be forced on everyone to make all towns take advantage of it where appropriate. Any of the proposals also ignore any optimizations to the largest districts in either cost effectiveness or quality and only focus on changes to smaller districts.

It has been described that in forcing regionalization, we can combine some administrative positions and take other supposedly simple steps that will save so much money that it is worth forcing on the entire state.

Most towns would describe the admin savings as having a very minimal effect on their overall budget. For the towns where these positions may represent a larger percentage, the cost of regionalizing those districts and the impact of these administrative savings when spread over the state and large regions is similarly minimal. Ignored are the myriad of complexities that make each of our school districts and the towns in which most districts are based special, unique and what is needed by each town.

Regionalization would require so many changes that the net effect would likely result in a net cost (not savings) in both the short and long term. More structures and overhead will be required to create and maintain these regions and may create an unnecessary layer between our towns, agencies, and state. The impact of regionalizing may be complex even in small towns and districts that are geographically disparate. The effect of bussing, local presence of staff, physical sharing of resources, and negotiation of priorities can negatively impact quality and lead to equal or greater replacement of the cost that was eliminated through consolidation in day-to-day management of schools.

Decision making and accountability are farther away from the schools, which will dilute the effectiveness and quality of education that towns have tailored over time to meet the needs of their communities.

If the goal is to get towns to work together and combine, it seems that very targeted incentives and support to help facilitate towns working together voluntarily only where it may be needed most could be more effective in time, money and results. Forcing everyone in the state into large regional structures could destabilize the entire system while at the same time increasing the overall cost of the system and living here. The risks of doing this with something as important and far reaching as education across the entire state are worth taking pause. I am very concerned for the future of my children and family in such a system.

Here are a few data points and studies to consider on how regionalization will not save money or result in an improved educational system.

- The cost of combining resources, retrofitting schools, and leveling up salaries, and sorting through legal obligations will offset any savings. <http://www.aasa.org/SchoolAdministratorArticle.aspx?id=13218>
- A 2011 study by the National Education Policy Center found the savings from school consolidation are “vastly overestimated.” <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED515900>
- Larger school districts end up hiring more administrators, not fewer. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED515900>
- UConn found in 2010 that there is no link between efficiency and academic performance. (Heffley, Dennis, and Can Bekaroglu. “Getting More From Less, Measuring Efficiency in Connecticut High School Districts.” The Connecticut Economy, Winter (2010).
- Student and parent engagement declines when schools are expanded. (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.)

Please let our towns and districts to do the good work that has earned Connecticut the reputation for overall high quality schools. The schools and these amazing towns are why I moved here, it's why I want to stay here. Improving quality is not mentioned in any of these bills and should be the identified problem and goal of any bill targeting changes in education. Our schools are source of pride for our state, and while there are always areas for improvement, it is not a system to throw out and replace. It is a system to nurture, where incremental improvements can have maximum impact.

I hope you will oppose SB 457, 738 and 874 and any other effort to force consolidation of Connecticut public schools.

Thank you for your time and service to us and the State of Connecticut.

Best,  
Michelle Haggerty  
Wilton, CT  
203-536-0118