



Stafford Public Schools

Office of the Superintendent of Schools

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Steven A. Moccio
Superintendent of Schools

To: CSDE Education Committee
From: Steven A. Moccio, Superintendent of Schools
Date: February 28, 2019
Re: SB 738 – An Act Concerning The Creation of Regional School Districts

The Town of Stafford is a rural community located in the northeast corner of Connecticut and encompasses 58.8 square miles. The Stafford Public School District currently enrolls approximately 1500 students within five schools buildings. The district maintains two primary schools (PreK – Grade 1), one elementary school (Grade 2 – 5), one middle school (Grade 6 – 8), and one high school (Grade 9 – 12). While district enrollment has dropped over the last several years, projections forecast a slight increase in future years.

I write in opposition of this bill as it mandates a one-size fits all legislative solution and fails to provide a detailed approach to meeting the variety of student needs present in today's schools, which vary across districts. The bill rather focuses on an assumption that regionalizing will save money solely based on a reduction of central office positions. This solution of regionalizing schools has not been adequately investigated, fails to include input from educational professionals, and is not focused on who matters the most – students.

Below are a sample of key points that are unanswered:

- How will separate communities retain some sense of local control if a regional Board of Education is required?
- How will financial decisions be made across neighboring communities with varying socio-economics and tax revenues?
- What is the plan for the resulting empty school buildings and their impact on the town in which they are located? Stafford already has three empty school buildings for sale.
- What will be the increased transportation costs associated with a regionalized approach for a district that already has students on buses for almost an hour?
- What has been learned from consolidation efforts in other states that were legislatively mandated?
- How will the associated costs of new systems be funded?
- Who will pay for the resulting legal fees associated with renegotiated bargaining agreements?
- How can districts with historically low funding afford additional costs associated with regionalization?
- Larger districts result in larger variances in climate. Will larger geographic school districts result in a greater number of weather related school closures? Will students from one community not be able to attend school in a neighboring community due to road safety concerns causing a discrepancy between student educational experiences?

Every school district should reflect on current practice in order to find greater efficiencies. Should a statute be implemented, I suggest one that provides incentives, removes barriers, and minimizes unfunded mandates.

The State of Connecticut Net Current Expenditure per Pupil (NCEP) amounts vary from \$12,899.45 to \$42,009.12. It should be noted that of the regional school districts operating in the State of Connecticut, only three (3) operate with a NCEP less than the Stafford Public Schools, with over half operating with a NCEP greater than the State of Connecticut average of \$18,762.

Rather than mandating a one-size fits all approach, I suggest rewriting the mandate to require districts operating a pre-determined percentage above the State of Connecticut NCEP to perform a feasibility study regarding regionalization. Local control would be maintained for those districts that are being fiscally responsible, while others would be required to shift current practice in an effort to reduce overall costs.

Included below are some key points and examples of how Stafford is meeting student need while maintaining a fiscally responsible budget. This is evidenced by Stafford's NCEP amount of \$17,086, which is less than the State of Connecticut NCEP average.

Shared Services

Stafford Public Schools is a model for other districts as it works collaboratively with the Town of Stafford to employ shared staff in three (3) positions. Two of those positions are building maintainers while the third staff member serves as the school district's athletic director, as well as the town's director of parks and recreation. Cooperative arrangements exist for the school district's information technology staff to provide coverage to the town when necessary. An arrangement also exists for the school district to utilize the Town of Stafford's grant writer position.

Stafford Public Schools has a shared service arrangement with EASTCONN for residency/truancy services. The district also allows students from neighboring communities to pay tuition to attend a special education transition services program. Attempts have been made to fill open seats at our high school by revitalizing a previous designated high school arrangement with a neighboring school district.

District Efficiencies

At the January 14, 2019, meeting of the Stafford Board of Education, approval was provided to my office to begin a configuration study, which may result in the consolidation of the district's two primary schools. This information will be used to assist with planning, as the district continually works to improve student achievement and increase opportunities for all learners.

Stafford Public Schools and the Town of Stafford continually explores cooperative purchasing agreements and projects. Recent examples of projects include a geo-thermal heating system and a number of solar arrays which provide nearly 75% of the district's electricity.

The district health insurance is a self-funded program. Through vigilant monitoring and employee education, the program historically outperforms insurance agency projections. Through the district's efforts and vigilance, insurance costs to the Board of Education have not increased in the last few years, while neighboring districts are projecting double-digit increases.

Stafford Public Schools operates a self-supported food service program. The program continues to operate with no additional assistance or Board of Education funds necessary.

Thank you for your time and consideration of the Stafford Public Schools perspective on the consequences of this bill.