

February 28, 2019

To the Members of the Education Committee:

I am writing in opposition to SB 738, SB 457, and SB 874. Connecticut's schools form the heart of our communities and their towns. In addition to educating our children, they are an important part of the social and cultural fabric that creates an identity for our communities. They make our communities a good place to live. Connecticut's long-standing support for local control of education has resulted in an excellent educational system.

SB 738 and SB 457 each attempt to arbitrarily override this local control by forcing our towns to do something "unnatural" – against the local community factors that shape their district. SB 874 puts the decision in the hands of a State-based Commission which, by its nature, cannot possibly understand and reflect the local issues of the State's many LEAs.

The disruption that will result from these Bills to an otherwise excellent system is impossible to predict but is sure to happen. Economic pressures that already exist will guide the towns and local education authorities to do the right thing in a way that preserves the role of our schools at the center of community.

Today, there is already a great deal of cooperation between districts to help control costs and deliver a quality education. Such cooperation is allowed by existing State statute and facilitated by the State's network of Regional Education Service Centers (RESCs).

Regional School District 6 and our neighboring Litchfield Public Schools have a joint standing committee that looks for opportunities for savings. We already cooperate on shared classes in our High Schools, a cooperative theater program, and on numerous opportunities for joint purchasing.

In the area of our regional RESC, EdAdvance, many school districts already regularly collaborate to develop many efficient and cost-effective services. A sample of these efforts would include are:

- An adult education collaborative for mandated programs.
- Special education programs for students with significant needs
- Curriculum review and auditing support
- Regional special education transportation collaborative (sharing cost/route data)
- Cooperative purchasing on technology.
- RESC support for part-time back-office staffing
- RESC school lunch programs that provide saving through an economy of scale for small districts

Rather than force arbitrary, headcount-driven combination of school districts, the State legislature should seek ways in which the State can facilitate greater local cooperation and overcome legal obstacles to taking local action.

Examples include legislation and regulation that would facilitate closing and disposal of school facilities that are no longer required, accommodating contract issues when districts choose to combine, and pathways to deal with regional charters that prevent otherwise sensible action locally.

This path would encourage local action in the face of economic challenges while preserving Connecticut's excellent education system and its role at the core of our towns and communities.

I urge you to NOT vote for PB 738, PB 457, and PB 874.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Sanders". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "C" and "S".

Chris Sanders
Member, Regional School District 6 Board of Education
President, EdAdvance Board of Directors

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