

As a parent of public school students in New Canaan, I strongly oppose SB 738, SB 457, and SB 874 and any other bill that opens the door to forced regionalization of Connecticut Public Schools. I grew up in New Canaan, moved to the New York and eventually back to Norwalk before starting my family. When the time came for us to consider kindergarten we weighed all of our options very heavily. The elementary school we were in the district of did not have very good ratings and moreover we had heard personal stories from our neighbors. My husband is a local business owner in New Canaan and I have fond memories of growing up in this beautiful town. However my husband is part of a family owned grocery store and for us to buy a home in New Canaan was quite a stretch. We looked at many towns. We looked at the thought of investing in private school rather than in moving homes. Ultimately we decided that what made New Canaan the only choice for us was that we wanted our kids to be part of the school system. And this isn't just attributed to the excellent academic scores that New Canaan is recognized for, but for the sense of community that I grew up with. When they say it takes a village, that's what it feels like here. A village of parents who know each other, know the kids and know the teachers. Even among the different schools in town we knew that South School was the perfect fit for us and the teachers adapt and work with our kids for their specific needs. I also have a child with 2 IEPs and a one child with an ongoing 504 case. Because the school is so personal and focused on the relationships we have built they were able to identify issues and address them without ever making my children feel different. This is why we make it paycheck to paycheck in a town which is probably too expensive for us to live in. We made the choice of committing to what would be best for their education. We moved to this town for the quality of their education. That is not just measured in test scores, but in the environment in which we knew they would thrive. We moved here for a sense of town pride and community which grows from knowing your neighbors. We moved here after studying the class sizes and ratios and knowing that some of our kids with particular needs would need a particular fit. If that changed this town and this state may no longer be our fit.

I can say that I hate the term going around "Hands off our Schools". I do believe that all children should be given opportunity and I do care about not just my own children, but about others too. I am a registered democrat and worked hard to help get our delegation elected on both the local and national level with hours of volunteer work. But by trying to make minimal changes to a failing school you could do monumental damage to the ones that are working. I do hope that there are more innovative solutions that can help other districts. While totally opposed to S.B. 738 I could be more comfortable with the other bills if the language was clarified to make sure that LEGALLY the district sizes could not be changed in SB 457 and SB 874.

Thank you for listening,
Julia Stewart
New Canaan, CT