

## SB 738

As a parent of public school students in Canton, I oppose SB 738 that would require regionalization of our schools.

Throughout my children's educational experience, it has been extremely important for me to be able to have access to information. This includes, specifically, Board of Education policies, and how they play out in our schools. It has also been imperative to create meaningful relationships with Board members, administrators, teachers and parents, to ensure that dialogue could be had if a concern arises. A specific example, highlighting these relationships, occurred just this year. My son's kindergarten class has an enrollment outside of Board Policy. Concerned parents wrote letters and made phone calls to express their concerns. In response, our Administration met with Kindergarten teachers, who agreed, considering the needs of this cohort of children, that class size did not support best practice. The budget did not support hiring an additional teacher, but a compromise was presented, and the Board of Education agreed to add full time para educators into each Kindergarten class to increase adult supervision and support. Without these relationships, I question my ability to be able to advocate for my children.

The cost of combining resources, retrofitting schools, and leveling up salaries, and sorting through legal obligations will offset any savings. A 2011 study by the National Education Policy Center found the savings from school consolidation are "vastly overestimated." Larger school districts end up hiring more administrators, not fewer. In our efforts to be fiscally responsible, Canton already shares a Director of Food Services with both Region 10 and Avon. We share the cost of professional development with neighboring districts. We utilize cooperative purchasing agreements for the purchase of fuel, environmental testing services, equipment and textbooks. We share transportation with other districts for special education students that require out-of-district placements. We have also combined the Board of Education and Town of Canton finance departments into one shared Finance Department. In addition, we are pursuing athletic co-op agreements for sports teams. We do not operate in isolation.

**I moved to Canton because of the schools. Stripping local control of schools will irreversibly change the character of our town. I know all my children's' teachers, am active within the PTO's, and attend Board of Education and Finance meetings. Our district attracts the best teachers and administrators who value small districts and personal connections as much as I do. This is true of many smaller school districts.**

**I am convinced, regionalization will harm school quality. Any consideration of mandatory consolidation of schools must start with education quality and there is no proof that larger schools are better than smaller ones. Student and parent engagement declines when schools are expanded. As seen by the declining numbers at PTO and Board of Education meetings locally, regionalization would only worsen parent involvement.**

**Another consideration, school consolidation can mean longer bus rides for students, which leads to lower achievement scores, more absenteeism, and health consequences for students.**

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

**Respectfully,**

**Sarah Ward**