

As a resident and parent to young children in Wilton, I strongly oppose SB 738, SB457, and SB874 and any other bill that supports forced regionalization of Connecticut Public Schools.

We have two children aged 11 months and 3 years. We owned a townhouse in Stamford, but as our family grew we could not ignore the current state of the Stamford school system, in particular the quality of the education and the lack of adequate facilities. Our previous neighbors had daughters who were accepted to the local Magnate school (Toquam) which is supposed to have smaller class sizes and there for slightly superior education, yet their experiences told a different story. The facilities were subpar (classrooms in trailers, dilapidated playgrounds/play fields). As I understand, Stamford had already been part of a regionalization which should be a telling sign that the proposed education bills have little chance of success based on past attempts.

After a lengthy debate over location and affordability, we fell in love with the town of Wilton, its small town pride, and its top tier school system. We moved here in Jan 2018 and have been very happy here. However, we are also a two-income home which was necessary to take on the increased costs of living in Wilton, but we were willing to do this in an effort to provide our children the opportunity for a strong education matched with a grounded small town vibe.

I am of Chinese descent, my wife is Jewish, and we are very proud of our bi-racial marriage and children. We are aware that Wilton (and most of the neighboring towns) are lacking in diversity, and we this was certainly a consideration for us. Thankfully, we have only felt acceptance by fellow residents and have even made very close friendships here. Our hope is that more families like us will move here to increase diversity in the classrooms.

Mandating that our schools should be forced to consolidate with other towns and run the risk of homogenizing an education system we have built up to such a high level, is a disturbing and irrational concept.

It is clear the state wants to assist below-average neighborhoods, and at the same time decrease state costs. While that is admirable, there is no empirical evidence to support regionalization of schools is an effective solution. To the contrary, there are studies suggesting that neither of these two goals will be reached with forced regionalization.

In addition to the aforementioned example of failed regionalization in Stamford, CT, information provided by The Hartford Foundation and reviewed by Rodriguez Data Solutions looking at regionalization in CT, VT, ME, NY yielded the following information:

In at risk communities the smaller the school size the better for optimal achievement for students. So the idea of potentially closing schools or increasing class sizes could lead to a direct result in worsened school performance for at risk students. It also suggests that increased size does not always lead to increased savings. The data goes so far as to suggest that deconsolidation could lead to cost savings.

Furthermore, the study suggests that there is a direct correlation between consolidation and a decrease in student after school participation.

As another broader example of where consolidation has been unsuccessful, look at the imminent collapse of the European Union. This is representative of multiple economies with varying strengths and weaknesses being unified, the expectation being cost savings through simplification. However, what has actually happened in the region is the more developed countries with a superior infrastructure (Germany, France, England) are forced to support the smaller, less efficient economics (Greece, Italy, Spain) and consequently drag down the entire region at once. There is a very good reason why Brexit has become a reality - England has acknowledged that the regionalization experiment has failed.

I have to make clear that although my wife and I identify with the Democratic party on most topics, we both find this issue so divisive that we will vote based on where our state representatives fall on this issue. We will not support this regionalization, nor any representative who supports it, and we will most certainly move out of state to avoid it before our children are of age to enter the public school system.

We are not alone. People move to Wilton and endure the long commute to the city and the high taxes for the community and primarily for the schools. If the state representatives force the towns to change, there will be an exodus of constituents from this state which will most certainly only continue to hurt the State's financial woes. These bills threaten the fabric of the impression of our beautiful town from within, as well as from the outside. As evidence of this, I know two families (one of whom was my Chinese cousin) who were actively looking only in Wilton and have now directed their home hunts to other states and towns.

Please, find other solutions to state financial woes and #HANDSOFFFOURSCHOOLS. Please oppose SB 738, SB 457, and SB874, and any other legislation that opens the door to forced regionalization of Connecticut Public Schools.

Jason Yan

Wilton Resident and father of two soon to be Wilton public school students