

I am writing to you to express my extreme opposition to SB 738, SB 457, and SB 874, or ANY ideas to regionalize CT school districts. I am a parent of 3 children who are currently enrolled in the Wilton Public School District.

Our number 1 reason for moving to Wilton was the school system. My husband, along with our family, have sacrificed as his commute to work has increased. All to allow our children to attend a school district that is consistently top ranked in the state, as well as the nation. My husband and I made the decision to increase his daily commute for our children's education.

Another draw to the Wilton school system was its size. I taught briefly in Florida where school districts are regionalized and found it overwhelming and difficult for parents to have their voices heard. I have friends still teaching in regionalized districts who deal with many parents fighting to get help for their children because they are deemed to meet grade level expectations. These children do not meet special service requirements and therefore receive no help. As we all know, not all children need to be labeled with something to struggle. There are many students that are constantly struggling just to "meet grade level expectations". We were drawn to the small district so that I knew my children would have their voices heard if need be. That situation has occurred with my middle son. FORCING us to regionalize will result in my son becoming "just a number" in the new school system. Therefore he would not receive the close, personal attention he has received thus far from our small, attentive school district.

There are many other reasons as to why I am opposed to this idea.

- It will NOT save money. 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.
- It 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. Here are 2 examples that bigger is NOT better.
 - Of the 24 cities with populations greater than 40,000, only 3 receive an A rating according to many school ranking publications.
 - Of the top 25 top ranked school districts, only 3 have a population of greater than 40,000.
- Student and parent engagement declines when schools are expanded.
- School consolidation can mean longer bus rides for students which leads to lower achievement scores, more absenteeism, and health consequences for students
- Every bill mentioned has a purpose of saving money. Not one states their purpose is for raising the quality of education. Since when is it appropriate for our children's quality of education to come second to closing budget gaps?

In conclusion, I hope you will oppose SB 738, SB 457, and SB 874, or any other effort to FORCE consolidation of Connecticut schools. We must provide our future generations with the best education and I truly feel this will do greater harm than good for our children.

Thank you,
Jennifer Duarte
70 Hickory Hill Road
Wilton, CT