

Dear Sir and Madam,

I am writing to express my vehement opposition to SB 874, SB 738 and SB 457 and any such effort to mandate school consolidation.

I have been deeply impressed, as a parent and an alumnus, by the Connecticut's public school system....and Connecticut's hometowns in general. I moved *back* to CT because I wanted my kids to have the same experience I did of growing up in a school run with great care by our local town. Applying a one-size-fits-all mandate by forcing regionalization will hurt the overall school quality and weaken the very fabric of our town.

Why do we care about removing control of the local schools from local leadership and administration? For many of us, the schools ARE our towns. It's why the hometown pride echoes strongly through the generations. Need proof? Ask a New Canaan graduate to cheer for Darien's formidable Blue Wave....and they will good-naturedly shudder. Not because they dislike Darien, but because the Turkey Bowl is a memory that unites many a NCHS alum across the decades. It is why I am one of at least two dozen alumni from my year *alone* who moved back to CT after school to raise our families and build our businesses. When my child needs help in math, he calls his teacher – who graduated with me. That personal touch lends a sense of “it takes a village” that simply won't exist as control of the schools moves further from the home town.

To me, regionalization means an educational mush, something akin to the nameless, homogeneity of Northern Virginia filled with non-descript counties of no discernible character. Ask a Virginian (as I did when I lived there) where they are from and they say disinterestedly “northern Virginia” with a shrug. Ask a Nutmeg State resident the same question and they proudly declare “Easton, Canton, Stamford, or Danbury, etc.” and then insist on telling you what makes their hometown special. Our towns' quirks and special characteristics make CT strong and make our state community vibrant.... why kill that?

The implications of any state-mandated regionalization cannot be rushed through in a series of short-term task forces and studies on a tight time frame. There's not nearly enough time for serious consideration laid out in these proposals, let alone a consideration of the longer term precedent that state-mandated regionalization would create. A study by the National Education Policy Center in 2011 showed that regionalization does not lead to significant cost savings. And regionalization does not lead to improved academic outcomes across the school populations. In fact regionalization, with its incumbent growth of school populations would in fact have the most profound negative impact on disadvantaged students. (Studies have shown that disadvantaged children thrive in smaller schools.)

Local communities best understand the challenges and needs of their own schools. Sometimes sharing resources across town borders makes sense, but that should come

at the instigation of the local community. Broad, overarching mandates from the state will only tie the hands of local leaders trying to do the best for their students.

We would be foolish to make our state less competitive academically. These bills do just that.

Please oppose SB 874, SB 738, and SB 457 and any other effort that opens the door to the forced consolidation of CT public schools.

Thank you,
Elizabeth DeMuth
New Canaan, CT