

Wolcott Public Schools

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A Letter of Testimony to the Education Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly Regarding School District Efficiencies and Regionalism

March 1, 2019

Distinguished Members of the Education Committee:

The purpose of my testimony today is to provide you with firsthand perspective and knowledge on the currently strong levels of efficiency and effectiveness of Connecticut school districts and to illuminate the ways in which greater size does not correlate with greater effectiveness. As a Connecticut public school superintendent, I am intimately aware and reminded daily of the financial pressures that are currently upon all areas of the public sector in our state.

In preparing my budget proposal for our Board of Education and Town Council, I look for objective, quantitative ways to show that Wolcott residents' hard-earned tax dollars are being used wisely by our school system. One of the ways in which I do this is by calculating a Return on Investment (ROI) statistic. Using publicly available data, I compare each Connecticut town's per-student spending with the percentage of students who are meeting grade-level targets on mandatory state testing for English/Language Arts. Dividing the first statistic by the second gives a general picture of the efficiency with which a school district addresses the needs of its students. In studying this data, you will note that the size of a district or municipality seems to have little bearing on its ROI. In other words, these data reveal that a school district's size has no demonstrable relationship to its efficiency. You will also note that districts with comparable ROI can have very different demographic characteristics.

The five districts with the strongest ROI are shown below. Note that all of these districts would fall below one proposed regionalization threshold of 40,000 residents and most are just above another proposal's threshold of 2,000 students.

School District	Per Pupil Budget	ELA Score %	ROI: \$ / %	ROI Rank	Municipal Population	School Population
Ellington	\$ 13,731.79	70.0	\$ 196.17	1	15,916	2,724
Rocky Hill	\$ 15,223.37	77.5	\$ 196.43	2	20,021	2,839
Wolcott	\$ 14,104.66	71.1	\$ 198.38	3	16,673	2,470
Trumbull	\$ 16,108.32	81.0	\$ 198.87	4	36,628	6,544
North Stonington	\$ 15,711.20	78.2	\$ 200.91	5	5,256	772

Throughout the rest of the ROI ranking, one can readily see multiple occurrences that show that size of a school system does not predict its level of efficiency or effectiveness. Districts with similar ROI can be seen to have very different municipal and school population numbers.

School District	Per Pupil Budget	ELA Score %	ROI: \$ / %	ROI Rank	Municipal Population	School Population
Stratford	\$ 16,025.82	48.7	\$ 329.07	120	52,609	7,091
Scotland	\$ 22,296.33	67.3	\$ 331.30	121	1,686	205
Westbrook	\$ 24,131.41	72.6	\$ 332.39	122	6,902	739

Additionally, the demographic and economic characteristics of a school system do not seem to be reliable predictors of ROI.

School District	Per Pupil Budget	ELA Score %	ROI: \$ / %	ROI Rank	Municipal Population	School Population
Danbury	\$ 12,899.45	46.4	\$ 278.01	85	84,657	11,266
Barkhamsted	\$ 17,887.32	64.1	\$ 279.05	86	3,685	534
Groton	\$ 16,222.21	58.1	\$ 279.21	87	39,692	4,768

Given this evidence showing little-to-no correlation between a school district’s size and its efficiency or effectiveness, I strongly encourage the members of the committee to question the notion that larger school districts are automatically more efficient and to oppose measures in the Governor’s budget that assume so.

Respectfully submitted,
Anthony J. Gasper, Ed.D.
 Superintendent, Wolcott Public Schools

Sources:

- Connecticut EdSight: Interactive Data Portal. <http://edsight.ct.gov/SASPortal/main.do>
- Connecticut State Department of Education: Bureau of Fiscal Statistics
- Connecticut State Department of Education: Division of Finance and Internal Operations