

Hello,

My name is Danielle Michalisin, and I live in the town of Wilton, CT. The reason why I'm writing to you today is to strongly oppose the following bills that call for forced regionalization of CT public schools: SB 738, SB 457, SB 874. As a Wilton resident, my desire is to protect parents, like me, and teachers who want our voices to continue to be heard within our local community. And above all, I want to protect my children from a lower-quality education. These bills must therefore be stopped for the following reasons:

They hurt disadvantaged and special needs students the most

- Just as at-risk students in disadvantaged communities perform better in smaller school districts, so do special needs students. Both groups greatly benefit from more manageable student : teacher ratios that provide them with the personalized attention they so desperately need in order to thrive inside the classroom. Our son has ASD, and therefore has an IEP (Individual Education Plan). For the past three years, he has been fortunate enough to receive speech therapy, occupational therapy and social therapy - all tailored to his specific needs. Due to the exceptional teaching and administrative staff in Wilton's Miller-Driscoll elementary school, our son has progressed emotionally, behaviorally and academically. Not only has his quality of life changed immensely, but so has that of our family. All thanks to the incredible services that he receives throughout each school week. And what makes them incredible? The personal attention that he receives in one-on-one and/or small group sessions both inside and outside the classroom. He also thrives on routine, and to remove him from a school that he now calls home would have a negative effect on him in more ways than one. His longer bus route would deter him from participating in extracurricular activities, he would feel lost in a larger school, and most importantly, he would no longer receive the degree of personalized attention from which he has so greatly benefited. As a Wilton parent, I can provide my input whenever I want or need to regarding both the special education and the general education that our son is receiving. In a larger school with a large number of staff members who don't know my son very well and the challenges he faces, how will my voice be heard? How well can I protect my son?

They will eliminate local control

- The main reason why my husband and I moved to Wilton is because of its top-notch, top-rated school system. Stripping local control of our schools will irreversibly change the character of our town. Our district attracts the best teachers and administrators, all of whom value small communities and personal connections just as much as we do. Not only do we know our children's teachers, but they're extremely accessible. We're able to meet with

them whenever we need to. Each and every day that our children go to school, it's crystal clear that the education they're receiving is of the highest quality, and under no circumstances do we want that to change. Again, that's why we moved here.

They will hurt our communities

- When schools are expanded, student and parent engagement declines. For students, school consolidation can mean longer bus rides, leading to lower achievement scores, more absenteeism, lower participation in extracurricular activities, and health consequences. For parents, it can mean less involvement in PTA-sponsored programs, and less volunteering in general.

The bottom line is this: we're the ones who know what's best for our kids. So please oppose bills SB 738, SB 457 and SB 874, and any other efforts put forth to force regionalization of CT public schools.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Best,
Danielle Michalisin