

Opposition to SB 738, SB 457, and SB 874

I am part of the nearly unanimous opposition to SB 738, SB 457, and SB 874 among Connecticut's public school parents. I strongly oppose these bills on the basis that they forcibly remove local control of our public schools, which will have negative outcomes for our students. None of these bills include even one mention of 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. In fact, research shows that the best overall academic achievements are in elementary schools with fewer than 500 students and high schools with fewer than 1,000. Additionally, at-risk students do better in smaller school districts. The optimal school size for disadvantaged students is elementary schools up to 300 students and high schools up to 600. Regionalization risks throwing them into environments where they are less likely to thrive. These are the students most likely to miss class and ultimately drop out of larger districts. Larger districts are less connected with their local communities. Teachers are less involved. It is that teacher involvement that can make the difference between success and failure for disadvantaged students.

The cost of combining resources, retrofitting schools, and leveling up salaries, and sorting through legal obligations will offset any savings to the state anyway. A 2011 study by the National Education Policy Center found the savings from school consolidation are "vastly overestimated." It is not worth it to sacrifice educational outcomes for our state's students for dubious financial savings.

Local realtors have spoken out that this issue is already preventing people from coming to CT. At a time when our state economy desperately needs to stem the exodus of residents, we cannot afford for public policy to be passed that would send families to nearby states in search of quality public schools. Our local schools have been the main draw for families and new residents for years; we cannot afford to sacrifice this quality!

Jamie Toohill
Wilton, CT