



SENATOR NORM NEEDLEMAN

DEPUTY PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

33RD SENATORIAL DISTRICT

Chair: Energy & Technology

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March 14, 2019

I support Raised Bill No. 7353, "AN ACT CONCERNING VARIOUS ISSUES RELATING TO SPECIAL EDUCATION," and Raised Bill No. 1069, "AN ACT CONCERNING VARIOUS REVISIONS AND ADDITIONS TO THE EDUCATION STATUTES."

My experience with the topics raised in these proposals is built on years of involvement with a regional three-town system, in both budgeting and policy planning, as the First Selectman of Essex. Nothing is more important to families than the quality of their children's education and the costs involved in their children receiving that education.

Legislation that encourages school districts to work together voluntarily gives school districts and taxpayers the flexibility, freedom and creativity to develop strategies that work for their specific needs. Current law puts arbitrary barriers and metrics in place that hamper the efficiency of that very cooperation.

Bill 1069 will require the Department of Education to start thinking about breaking down barriers that have prevented school districts from working together with a report due by the end of the year. And bill 7353 goes further by allowing school districts to pool their resources for the purposes of Special Education.

By allowing school boards and school districts to collaborate in their own ways, we remove complex and costly regulations that can lead to inefficiencies. It may also provide new routes to success. For instance, while Essex, Chester and Deep River operate a regional system, they have five total boards of education due to state requirements. If their report finds combining or collaborating on these efforts would bolster efficiency, they would be free to find the strategy that works best for them. The best advocates for children are the ones working closest with them.

I submitted SB 572 to begin breaking down these barriers and allow towns to have these flexible arrangements recognized as school districts. Both of these bills address that concept and are a step in the right direction. By getting rid of red tape, we free school districts from limitations and give them the power to do what's best for their students. I look forward to seeing how the conversation evolves and hope this legislation bolsters Connecticut's educational system.

State Senator Norm Needleman