

Education Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-874

AN ACT CONCERNING EDUCATION INITIATIVES AND SERVICES IN

Title: CONNECTICUT.

Vote Date: 3/29/2019

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute Change of Reference to Appropriations

PH Date: 3/1/2019

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Senator Martin Looney, 11th District

Senator Bob Duff, 25th District

Representative Joe Aresimowicz, 30th District

Representative Matthew Ritter, 1st District

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill is the Governor's policy proposal independent of his bill implementing his budget proposals.

Substitute Language:

Sections 1-3: Creates a commission to study and develop recommendations for shared school services. Substitute language removes language about plans to redistrict and adds residents from each RESC region to serve on the commission.

Section 4: Requires towns and Boards of Ed to report on current shared services with a cost-benefit analysis.

Section 5: Substitute language removes requirement that small towns share a Superintendent, also removes the ECS penalty for towns that disobey. Also removes provision that towns that do share Superintendents 1) have regular joint board meetings every 3 months, and 2) reduce the total number of individual board meetings as long as 2 are held during the school year.

Section 6: Requires regional Boards of Education to 1) post online monthly current and projected expenditures, and 2) submit copy of expenditures and revenues to the town's

legislative body as opposed to original language which requires an establishment of a regional Finance Board.

Section 17: Substitute language removes homeschooling registration requirement.

Section 16-17: Substitute language removes requirement that SDE review the model curriculum to consider whether to expand it to grades 5-8. It also removes permission for homeschoolers to use the curriculum.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Dianna R. Wentzell, Commissioner, Department of Education: The Department believes it is not feasible to have 200 independently operated small districts and they are supportive of incentivized, not forced regionalization. They are also in support and grateful of Governor Lamont's increase in funding for the Education Cost Sharing Grant as well as the Alliance District grant.

Josh Geballe, Commissioner, Department of Administrative Services (DAS): DAS supports this bill. They look forward to working with the proposed Commission on Shared School Services (COSS). The Department also suggests that technology is an integral tool for this process. They point to The Commission for Educational Technology (CET) which has established the Connecticut Education Network (CEN) which has provided educational resources through technology to every public school district, public library and public college or university in the State. "CEN is both an exemplar of the benefits of shared services and a valuable tool that can be leveraged to create additional synergies". DAS also supports the proposed reforms to school construction grants.

Melissa McCaw, Secretary, Office of Policy and Management: Secretary McCaw testifies that the incentivized and collaborative initiative to regionalize in S.B. 874 is a far better approach than forced regionalization. The Secretary also supports the bills child-centric approach to learning through in-service training on social-emotional learning, trauma-informed instruction and behavior management strategies. The Secretary also supports that this bill enhances transparency by requiring school districts to post their curriculum online. She respectfully requests that the committee further this transparency by requiring school districts to post their current and projected expenditures and revenues publicly each month.

Jonathan A. Harris, Undersecretary, Intergovernmental Policy and Planning, Office of Policy and Management: The Commission on Shared School Services (COSS) is not intended to force any plan, but to study and recommend effective solutions. Undersecretary Harris believes regionalization should be approached in a holistic fashion and not a one size fits all, which is why he supports COSS.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Senator Martin Looney, President Pro Tempore, 11th District: Senator Looney supports this bill as it would rid of duplicative administration in small towns, allowing districts to spend more money directly on the classroom experience. He also supports creating the

Commission on Shared School Services which would develop a plan for regionalization of school services and districts.

Dennis O'Brien, Attorney, Attorneys O'Brien & Johnson: Mr. O'Brien supports this bill as he sees how our State's system of public education has negatively impacted both our economy and urban center children. He speaks to the cyclical nature of poverty and education and the need to address and close the achievement gap in this state. He does state that he sees no need for change in lower Fairfield County, but urges new approaches in our State's urban centers as well as the small, rural and less economically advantaged towns of Northeast Connecticut.

Shannon Marimon, Executive Director, Connecticut Council for Education Reform (CCER): CCER supports this bill, citing achievement gaps and racial gaps in school funding. She cites statistics that over \$2,000 more per pupil is spent in white districts than non-white districts, largely the result of reliance of property taxes to fund schools. She does emphasize that CCER is not in support of penalizing school districts for not consolidating.

Gary Deutsch, Canton Resident: Mr. Deutsch supports this bill because he believes we could improve our education system by sharing resources such as athletic departments, science laboratories, language classes and after-school activities. He points to an example of his daughter who was able to study Latin in High School due to shared services between Canton and Simsbury.

Carolyn Reimers, Killingworth Resident: As a resident of a town which already regionalizes school systems (Haddam-Killingworth) Ms. Reimers has seen both cost saving and high academic achievement. With the success she has witnessed in her town she supports elective regionalization.

Catherine Kenney, Canton Resident: Ms. Kenney supports this bill and speaks to the lack of opportunities offered in Canton, a smaller school, compared to neighboring Simsbury which is significantly larger. Canton offers 2 foreign languages classes and 13 Advanced Placement courses, where Simsbury offers 4 and 26 respectively. She also speaks to the inequality in school largely stemming from over-reliance on local property taxes for school funding. She also suggests further cost sharing by deconsolidating the largest districts in the State.

Paul Calebaugh, East Granby Resident: Mr. Calebaugh strongly supports employing more shared services through regionalization and feels it would reduce costs. He speaks to tax hikes his town has faced to foot the bill for educational resources and how shared facilities would mitigate these costs.

Danielle Morfi, North Haven Resident: Ms. Morfi believes consolidation could be a way to avoid recessive taxes on medicine and groceries. She supports regionalization, specifically in sharing administrative services in small towns. She believes a Commission exploring regionalization is the least we can do to work towards equal education opportunities for all our students.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Senator George S. Logan, 17th District: Senator Logan believes education decisions should be handled at the local level, not forcibly from the State government. He cites examples of districts such as Ansonia and Derby who are working together to share services and believes the State should incentivize communities that regionalize voluntarily, not force it with a heavy hand. Language of forced regionalization was removed in substitute language.

Senator Tony Hwang, 28th District: Senator Hwang opposes forced regionalization. He believes regionalization is best done on a case-by-case basis, decided by the districts themselves. He also opposes penalizing small districts that do not regionalize as it is a heavy handed approach by the State.

Representative Lucy Dathan, 142nd District: Representative Dathan is against forced regionalization or mass regionalization efforts. She does support very small districts regionalization administrative and purchasing functions, but only at an organic and elective basis. She believes regionalization can be beneficial, but should be left to the local systems to make their own decisions.

Representative Nicole Klarides-Ditria, 105th District: Representative Klarides-Ditria opposes all State mandated regionalization, as well as withholding funds from towns who do not comply with regionalization ideas. She supports smaller districts being incentivized to merge with neighboring districts, but not under mandate.

Representative Dave Rutigliano, 123rd District: Representative Rutigliano feels that forced regionalization would negatively affect his district, Trumbull. They have a highly successful school system and seek to retain local control over their school district.

Representative Brenda L. Kupchick, 132nd District: Representative Kupchick opposes forced regionalization of school districts. She believes conversations with smaller districts should happen, but not mandated. She also strongly opposes withholding funding to districts who do not follow a state mandated regionalization.

Representative Gale Mastrofrancesco, 80th District: Representative Mastrofrancesco does not support creating regional school districts as it would lead to Connecticut's school districts moving away from local autonomy. She does not oppose regionalization when it best suits districts, but opposes state mandated consolidation.

Representative Lezlye Zupkus, 89th District: Representative Zupkus opposes section 17 and 18 which impose restrictions on parents who homeschool their children. She believes that parents have the right to homeschool their children and these restrictions would negatively impact the way they teach their children. These provisions were eliminated from the bill in substitute language.

Representative Christie M. Carpino, 32nd District: Representative Carpino speaks to the success of small, neighborhood schools. She believes community stems from a local school district and that a district should be in charge of making their own decisions.

Representative Anne Dauphinas, 44th District: Representative Dauphinas opposes language in this bill that would mandate homeschooled children to be annually registered at

the school district office. She believes it is an unnecessary burden and is intrusive in nature. These provisions were removed in substitute language.

Representative Stephen Harding, 107th District: Representative Harding opposes forced regionalization. He also is opposed to incentivized regionalization as he believes it will strip funding of those districts that do not regionalize.

Fran Rabinowitz, Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS): CAPSS has serious concerns over this bill, particularly section 5 regarding shared superintendents. They feel that superintendent leadership is vital to education and every district needs their own superintendent, regardless of size. Superintendents are responsible to ensure State mandates are met and are of utmost importance, supervising and evaluating teachers, declare learning priorities, and more leadership roles. During the financial challenges we face, CAPSS urges the Committee not to view Superintendents as a school service to be removed.

Katherine Field, Connecticut Education Association (CEA): CEA supports this bill's attempt to integrate social emotional learning (SEL) into our schools. She testifies to the incredible importance of SEL in schools and the difference it can make for students and parents, however CEA does not support an unfunded mandate for in-service training or professional development. CEA also is concerned that this mandate is premature as SEL needs to be implemented and taught to everyone from Superintendents to Custodians. CEA feels this plan is underdeveloped and will not be successful until they can ensure consistency through a more holistic SEL plan for districts.

Rudy Marconi, First Selectman of Ridgefield, President of Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST): COST opposes forced regionalization. They believe this bill is a one-size-fits-all approach that does not guarantee any savings, requires significant upfront costs, undermines the quality of education for many students, disrupts their communities and fails to address issues that are driving up education costs. COST does support a regional board of education creating a regional board of finance to make recommendations on the budget. Language of forced regionalization was removed in substitute language.

Stephen Hudspeth, Wilton Resident: Mr. Hudspeth believes education policy should foremost focus on doing no harm. He is concerned that this proposal does not discern between districts that are performing well and those that are not. He believes it is dangerous to interfere with school districts who are already high performing. He also states that his town of Wilton has seen new families discouraged from moving there due to possible school regionalization. He does not oppose non-mandatory incentives for shared services among districts, or mandatory consolidation for under-performing districts.

Jennie Wong, Wilton Resident: Ms. Wong and her family are very happy with Wilton schools as they are and object to forced regionalization. She is concerned that this bill does not address the quality of education and worries what will come of eliminating local board of education. She is also concerned that COSS will only require 1 out of 14 members be a parent of a public school parent, and that is not a fair representation of those affected. She is a part of "Hands Off Our Schools," a grassroots movement to maintain local control over schools.

Joe Shapiro, Ridgefield Resident: Mr. Shapiro opposes sections 17 and 18 regarding homeschooling. He writes Connecticut resident have long had the right to homeschool their children and the proposed registration is in infringement on that right. He is concerned that an in-person registration will be used as an opportunity to dissuade, criticize and harass homeschool parents. Sections 17 and 18 were struck from substitute language.

Mary Del Re, Homeschool Group Leader, Bethany Resident: Ms. Del Rey opposes the in-person registration of homeschooled children in this bill as it is a means to intimidate parents and is a burden on our State's strained resources. She also opposes section 18 which would make available a curriculum from the Department of Education as they have already have the curricula they need.

The Education Committee received over 1,400 pieces of testimony in opposition to this bill. Concerned parents, teachers, students, Superintendents, Elected Officials and more are worried that forced regionalization will 1) Take local control away from schools, 2) Penalize high achieving districts, and 3) Potentially negatively affect their school systems and property values. Forced regionalization was removed from this bill in substitute language.

The Education Committee received over 150 pieces of testimony in opposition to section 17 and 18 of this bill regarding homeschooling. Parents and students are concerned that these provisions are 1) An infringement on their right to homeschool, 2) A means to harass, intimidate and dissuade homeschooling parents, and 3) An unnecessary expenditure of our state in a financially challenging time. These provisions were removed in substitute language.

Reported by: Garnet McLaughlin

Date: 4/8/2019