



Testimony on Senate Bill 457, Senate Bill 738 and Governor's Bill 874

Submitted by Carol Platt Liebau, President

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Good afternoon/evening. I'm Carol Platt Liebau, President of Yankee Institute. This is Scott Shepard, Yankee's policy director.

We testify today in opposition to **Senate Bills 457** and **738**, and **Governor's Bill 874**.

We at Yankee Institute believe that in some cases, there may be savings that can be realized from school-service centralization, and even school-district consolidation that would – *and this is the essential point* – enhance educational outcomes in some schools and districts, without reducing outcomes in any.

But the bills before us are designed without attention to the significant scholarship on the question of school and district consolidation. Moreover, they ignore the experiences of our neighbors in Vermont in Maine.

Most importantly, these bills make no reference to – take no account of -- the purpose for which public education exists: *to secure the best educational outcomes for Connecticut's children*. Schools do not exist to provide teachers with jobs. Nor do they exist to provide legislators with cost-cutting measures. They exist to provide our children with the best education possible.

We should not ruin high-quality programs, deprive taxpaying parents of control over their children's education, or balance our budget on the backs of schoolchildren because we lack the political will to take on our state's most powerful special interest.

Since the first proposals arose in January, Yankee studied school district consolidation and discovered:

- First, that top-down consolidation drives of the sort contemplated in these bills fail – and fail expensively. What works are locally developed programs that can be incentivized and supported by the state, but not forced from above.
- Second, that most of the cost savings and educational benefit from consolidation come in districts of fewer than 500 students into districts of 500 or more students, particularly in rural areas. Clear returns to quality and cost begin to diminish at about the 2000-student threshold, and are materially gone by the 5000-student threshold.

Because of these bills' structural flaws – along with the fact that the governor's director of OPM is unsure whether the governor's bill would grant the administration power to force consolidation on unwilling districts – we ask that all three bills be withdrawn. Connecticut's children, and their

parents, deserve legislation that enhances educational outcomes – rather than ignoring or undermining them.