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Report: Governor Won't Support Forced School Regionalization; Darien Board of Ed Opposes It

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A proposal from state Senate President Martin Looney to force regionalization on the vast majority of school districts across the state is opposed by the Darien Board of Education and reportedly doesn't have the support of Gov. Ned Lamont, either.

Both the governor (according to a report Tuesday) and the Darien Board of Education are also opposed to a less sweeping proposal, [Senate Bill 457](#), sponsored by state Senate Majority Leader Bob Duff, a Democrat who represents Norwalk and part of Darien, that would force school districts with less than 2,000 students to consolidate with one or more districts. The consolidated districts would have to have at least 2,000 students.

Looney's bill ([S.B. 454](#)) would force consolidation on any school district with less than 40,000 students (that

is, all but 24 school districts in the state, according to [a report](#) on the CT News Junkie website). Looney proposes the creation of a commission to create a consolidation plan.

Lamont: No

Lamont won't support those proposals, NewCanaanite.com [reported today](#), Tuesday, Feb. 12:

- The governor of Connecticut does not support proposed legislation that would force the regionalization of public schools in the state, New Canaan's highest elected official said Tuesday morning.
- Summarizing a meeting with Gov. Ned Lamont held Monday at Town Hall, First Selectman Kevin Moynihan said that the 10 people present "talked a good bit about the two bills that are pending that would have forced regionalization of education of schools satirists."
- "And I think we got a commitment from the governor to issue a public statement that he doesn't support those measures," Moynihan said during a regular meeting of the Board of Selectmen, held at Town Hall. [...]
- Lamont did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Teacher Pension Costs

Another education-related topic that came up in the New Canaan discussion was the idea of making towns pay part of the pension costs for teachers, a cost now picked up entirely by the state. NewCanaanite.com reported:

- Other topics included teacher pension obligations that would come down to the town, "and I think that is going to happen to some extent, so that was bad news from the discussion," Moynihan said [...]

Board of Ed: No, No and No

Darien Board of Education Chair Tara Ochman issued a statement on behalf of the board and addressed to the Legislature's Education Committee, which is considering Duff's proposal (co-sponsored with state Sen. Catherine Osten) and Looney's proposal, along with another proposal by Duff, [S.B. 458](#), to automatically make the top elected official of a town the chair of that town's Board of Education.

The Darien board is opposed to all three measures.

SEE ALSO

- [Regionalization and Consolidation of School Districts Has Towns on Edge](#) (CT News Junkie; Jan. 28)
- [School Regionalization Proposals Causing Big Blowback](#) (WTNH-TV, Jan. 30)
- [Proposals to Force Regionalized School Districts Spark Debate, Distress](#) (CT Mirror, Jan. 28)
- *Sign up to track Connecticut legislative bills [here](#).*

Regarding Duff's proposal on chairmanship of local boards of education, the Darien board's statement implied that mayors or first selectmen could have different political pressures than school board members would have.

The statement said those elected to boards of education "are empowered by the state to act as state agents in implementing the educational interests of the state so that public schools are not inherently subject to changing community tides, or other political motives, when it comes to providing and funding an adequate education for children."

Regarding the school regionalization bills, the board's statement addressed both bills with the same objections — that "while the goal behind each bill is reportedly cost savings, no evidence has been provided to consider those claims." The statement added, "the stated goals have yet to be clearly investigated."

Board of Education Statement

Here's the full text of the statement issued by the Darien Board of Education issued Monday, Feb. 11 to the Connecticut Legislature's Education Committee (in Connecticut state Legislature committees are all joint committees made up of members of the state Senate and House of Representatives):

We, the Darien Board of Education, write you in opposition of bills 454, 457 and 458. We hope you will consider our comments and recognize that as locally elected state agents we are your "boots on the ground" who grapple with the impact of educational policy on local communities, and most importantly with the direct effect on students.

We understand that you are charged with reviewing all proposals, but we would implore you to please reach out to local communities to best understand what these bills would mean to Connecticut.

Regionalization — (SB-454 & SB-457)

The Darien Board of Education is now, and will remain committed to the quality public education of our children, with a locally elected Board of Education acting as state agent.

There are many significant factors within the state that need to be considered as we move to improve Connecticut's fiscal situation, but to begin that process by dismantling school systems, including those districts who have worked hard to manage budgets [and] have seen significant and sustained funding cuts — and yet, still provide children with a quality education, is short sighted and ill informed.

Of significant concern, we believe schools exists for children and neither bill begins to the address the educational issues and direct impact to students that might arise with such consolidations.

Further, while the goal behind each bill is reportedly cost savings, no evidence has been provided to consider those claims. We feel it unwise to mandate regionalization when the stated goals have yet to be clearly investigated and provided for understanding and consideration.

Appointment of the Board Chair by Town Official (SB-458)

We believe this proposal lacks an inherent understanding of the checks and balances of institutions, and why the fundamentals of our government are set up they way they are.

The public school system was set up with a very specific balance such to provide students with an appropriate education while assuring that the necessary funding is provided.

Board members represent the taxpayers and they are by their elections held accountable.

However, they are empowered by the state to act as state agents in implementing the educational interests of the state so that public schools are not inherently subject to changing community tides, or other political motives, when it comes to providing and funding an adequate education for children.

Lastly, it is the superintendent of schools who in Connecticut is designated CEO of the school system. To imply in some way, through this bill, that the highest elected town official of the municipality is also the CEO of the school system goes against the very grain of our commitment to education in Connecticut.

We ask you to oppose these bills based on your belief in the Connecticut public schools system and the core institutional beliefs on which it was built. When change is necessary, it should be brought through thoughtful forward thinking, evidence based ideas, that include the perspective of those who work on these issues daily.

Respectfully submitted,

Tara Ochman, chair

Darien Board of Education