

March 30, 2009

Dear members of the Stamford Board of Representatives:

At the March 16th hearing on the upcoming budget, you heard many voices arguing in support of the Superintendent of Schools' budget unchanged. Many passionate voices spoke of avoiding cuts to teachers and other programs. Several spoke in support of the proposed budget as one that attempts to hold our educational programming, while not "...looking for program enhancements".

The proposed Public School Redistricting is one such "enhancement" that needs to be reconsidered. It's important to note that:

- (1) The Stamford public school redistricting plan was designed without ANY consideration of cost.
- (2) While desirable, redistricting is NOT required in the 2009/2010 year.
- (3) Redistricting will cost an incremental \$500,000/year and \$3,700,000 over the next seven years in buses alone.
- (4) The Superintendent's school budget slashes academic, athletic and extracurricular activities, while charging ahead with its redistricting plan.

I know you don't have direct control over line-items within the school budget, but you do have influence. In light of the unprecedented economic crisis and the cuts already in the school budget, I ask that you exercise that influence by directing the school board to revisit its redistricting plan.

There are several alternative means to deal with this issue.

- (1) Delay implementation. All of our schools fall within the state's +/-25% threshold for diversity. We could leave the plan unchanged, delaying implementation until the fiscal crisis subsides.
- (2) Revisit the plan. The city's stated goal for economic diversity is +/-10%. The current plan targets a +/-5% balance in an attempt to forestall a 'future' redistricting. Unfortunately this 5% target requires displacement of exponentially more children than a 10% target would. Revisiting the plan would require hard work on the Superintendent's part, but it would save real money today and over the next seven years.
- (3) Relax the 10% target. The 10% target was implemented in the early 1970's (almost 40 years ago!) when the Stamford public school system

was 72% White; 23% Black; 5% Hispanic and 1% other minority groups. At that time, we needed balance. Stamford today is dramatically different than it was 40 years ago. Our school district *has no majority* population. Today's mix is 43% White; 24% Black, 27% Hispanic and 6% other minority groups. (note that while this year's redistricting was based on economic diversity, not ethnicity, the ratios are comparable). Instead of rushing ahead with a costly redistricting, consider that Stamford's schools are different today than in the early 1970's.

I attended the March 16th meeting both as a taxpayer and a parent who has been an actively following the School Board redistricting process. My wife and I have 4 children in the Stamford public school system, ranging in ages 5 to 15. Like most parents in Stamford, I support a school district that is well balanced relative to the economic diversity of the city. However, in light of our current budget crisis, the Superintendent has designed a redistricting plan that goes too far.

Why commit to spending a new \$3,700,000 on buses when we're cutting \$55,000 teacher salaries, academic, athletic and extracurricular programs in the face of the greatest economic crisis since the Great Depression?

You have influence. Now, more than ever, you must use that influence.

Thank You,

Mark Engel