

*Testimony of*

**Amber McSparren**

CREC Educator

Before the

**Education Committee**

Re:

**SB 227: AN ACT CONCERNING MAGNET SCHOOL PROGRAM FUNDING.**

March 4, 2022

Good morning, Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty, and members of the Education Committee.

I testify today in support of Senate Bill 227 and an increase in funding to our magnet schools. As a CREC educator, I am proud of the strengths and successes of our schools, but also know what a funding increase would mean to our students, educators, and school communities.

I have been honored to be a CREC educator for the past 6 years and see what the funding and opportunities can do for our students. I am hopeful to continue to get to watch these children flourish as we continue to support funding.

Thank you for addressing this critical issue.

*Testimony of*

**Annalise Febus-Barlow**

CREC Educator

Before the

**Education Committee**

Re:

**SB 227: AN ACT CONCERNING MAGNET SCHOOL PROGRAM FUNDING.**

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*Testimony of*

**Antillana del Valle**

CREC Educator

Before the

**Education Committee**

Re:

**SB 227: AN ACT CONCERNING MAGNET SCHOOL PROGRAM FUNDING.**

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CREC schools provide high quality educational service to our Hartford students. CREC has also invested in training and supporting their vision of creating equitable and sustainable educational opportunities. One of the reasons that I have stayed in CREC is because they offer a vision and professional development on racial and social justice; CREC has a diverse staff; CREC promotes collaboration among teachers; CREC encourages cultural relevant pedagogy and respect to gender identities. If you work here is because you stand up and support all of the issues previously mentioned. Our Hartford students deserve the quality of services we offer, but COVID has brought challenges in the implementation of our vision and inflation will not allow us to keep the same quality or quantity of services or staff. Approve the 8% increase in magnet school funding.

Thank you for addressing this critical issue.

*Testimony of*

**Bobbi Fedeli**

CREC Educator

Before the

**Education Committee**

Re:

**SB 227: AN ACT CONCERNING MAGNET SCHOOL PROGRAM FUNDING.**

March 4, 2022

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I truly am proud to be a CREC educator, but without an increase in funding, providing for our students would be tremendously difficult. I have been truly blessed to not only be a CREC educator, but two of my own children have benefited from the CREC magnet school system. With increased funding, we can continue to provide for our students and families on every level they need (educational, social and emotional). We can continue to guide our students to be successful, independent members of society as they persevere through their educational career at CREC.

Thank you for addressing this critical issue.

*Testimony of*

**Deborah Allen**

CREC Educator

Before the

**Education Committee**

Re:

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I am proud to be a special education teacher at a CREC Elementary Magnet School. There is such a high population of students with reading and math disabilities. Having resources available to teach them to read and solve math equations is essential to their educational growth and confidence. Without funding, these crucial resources will not be available.

Thank you for addressing this critical issue.

*Testimony of*  
**Elizabeth Dillard**  
CREC Educator  
Before the  
**Education Committee**

Re:

**SB 227: AN ACT CONCERNING MAGNET SCHOOL PROGRAM FUNDING.**

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I testify today in support of Senate Bill 227 and an increase in funding to our magnet schools. As a CREC educator, I am proud of the strengths and successes of our schools, but also know what a funding increase would mean to our students, educators, and school communities.

I started working at a CREC School in 2017 and I've been there ever since. This is my 18th year teaching, and I worked in Industry in Computer Science for 18 years before that. In the time that I've been in my school I've built a computer science program in both the Middle School and in the high school.

This year I've written 14 letters of recommendation for students that wish to pursue Computer Science majors in college. Their schools have varied from CCSU to Carnegie Mellon, and they get in to their schools of choice. That's great and my kids are awesome. But it's only a small part of the story. Many of my students come into my class convinced that they can't succeed. I've helped them learn, try, fail and then try again and succeed. They develop self confidence. They develop faith in themselves.

My students are frequently identified as special needs students. My students are frequently identified as 'problem' kids. They all need a chance to belong, to grow and to succeed. I work very hard to give them this chance. You would love to see how they grow and mature. They are beautiful.

Our school is generally a lot smaller than the schools that kids would have gone to in their own towns. We know all of our kids. We really do care about all of our kids. They need us to care. It's a great place to work.

I'm worried. I'm retiring in a few years. I'm worried that my school may not be able to hire a new computer science teacher with experience. Last year we had a position for another computer science teacher and we couldn't fill the position because we would have to offer the teacher less than what they were currently making. This teacher would have come if we could

have matched her salary, she was excited to work at CREC. But she couldn't afford to take a wage cut. So we lost the opportunity to hire a good teacher. We made due, I taught extra classes. I pulled in another teacher to teach a middle school class. But we didn't offer as many classes as we would have.

I'm worried that as we lose staff we won't be able to replace them. I'm worried that we won't be able to find the great teachers that our students desperately need. Our kids have so much potential. They are not always easy to work with. They will do great things if they can have great teachers. We need to give them that chance.

Right now we are in a period of inflation. Towns can adapt quickly to increase wages. State schools can't. Please help us continue to provide the high level of education that our kids really need. Please help us offer wages that will attract strong experienced teachers. Our kids need this.

Thank you for addressing this critical issue.

*Testimony of*

**Elizabeth Smith**

CREC Educator

Before the

**Education Committee**

Re:

**SB 227: AN ACT CONCERNING MAGNET SCHOOL PROGRAM FUNDING.**

March 4, 2022

Good morning, Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty, and members of the Education Committee.

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My daughter is in her 3rd year at a CREC elementary school. I cannot fully articulate how incredible, caring and devoted the staff at her school is. From her classroom teachers and support teachers to the health team and the special ed team, the school has been a priceless dose of normalcy for her during this wild time. If this is what they are able to do with a limited budget, I can only dream of how many students will have their lives enriched by the extra money allocated to CREC.

Thank you for addressing this critical issue.



*Testimony of*

**Evan Katz**

CREC Educator

Before the

**Education Committee**

Re:

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As a lifetime Connecticut resident I have personally experienced the inequities within the education system in our state - inequities that are addressed through the presence of our phenomenal magnet school system. Providing access to a high quality education system without regard for town lines is vitally important.

As a child I grew up in Simsbury. I was fortunate to be born in to a family that lived comfortably and, as a result, I was able to receive a high-quality education during my most formative years. What I did not know was that only a few miles away there were children just like me who were not given the same opportunities I was simply because of where they lived.

As an adult, I can look back and see just how unacceptable this is and how incredibly important it is to address this. There is no hiding the fact that Connecticut is one of the most segregated states in the country but this is not something we have to continue to accept as our reality. Instead, we can acknowledge that is is our reality but we can also try to do something about it.

During my time studying to become a teacher and now as a teacher I have worked in Simsbury, Farmington and now with CREC. From this perspective I can speak directly to the fact that we still have a long way to go and an increase in funding for our magnet schools is incredibly important to help us continue to move forward with providing an equitable education for all Connecticut children, without regard for where they might live.

During my time in both Simsbury and Farmington Public School I experienced the high quality education students in those towns are able to access, but neither one of those public school systems even tried to attempt to do the incredibly important work that CREC does on a daily basis not only for equity but also for social and racial justice. This alone sets CREC apart and

highlights just how important it is that we not only maintain the current funding, but increase it so we can continue to improve the services we provide to help mold the future leaders of our state, our country and our global community.

Thank you for addressing this critical issue.

*Testimony of*

**Hiroe Vestergaard**

CREC Educator

Before the

**Education Committee**

Re:

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I have been teaching at one of the CREC magnet schools for 24 years. I strongly believe that we are delivering instructions which meet a diverse population of students' needs. However, additional funding is crucial to sustain this level of education especially during this pandemic. We need more technology devices such as Chromebooks and iPads. Also, we are in current need for additional academic support for students who lost some learning time due to the pandemic. The additional funding will greatly benefit their academic and social achievement.

Thank you for addressing this critical issue.

*Testimony of*

**Jaime Knowles**

CREC Educator

Before the

**Education Committee**

Re:

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For the ten years in which I have been an educator at CREC I have had the opportunity to witness diverse classrooms turn into community families. I have watched students from around the world and around Connecticut cohesively support one another and work together academically and emotionally. It is a place students are proud to walk into, being an equal to those around them no matter what town they are coming from.

Thank you for addressing this critical issue.

*Testimony of*

**Jennifer Lucian**

CREC Educator

Before the

**Education Committee**

Re:

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CREC provides my child and his peers the opportunity to attend a diverse, quality, and forward-looking school.

Thank you for addressing this critical issue.

*Testimony of*

**Jennifer Pietrasko**

CREC Educator

Before the

**Education Committee**

Re:

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I have been a CREC educator for the last seven years. In that time, I have reached into my own pocket to secure resources for my students so that they can be successful in my classroom learning community. I have also had to reach out through programs like Donors Choose to get funding for materials. Every year, my students become more than just my students, they become my kiddos and are part of my team. I tell them that once a member of Team Pietrasko, always a member of Team Pietrasko. We become a family each year and it continues to grow as the years go on. As any family would, I hate to see my students go without. I easily spend over the \$250 that can be reimbursed through taxes each year. For me, it has never been about the money, but rather making sure that the students have what they need. I will always do what I need to do for my students, but since becoming a new mom it is hard to say, 'yes,' to students needs when it means coming out of my own pocket. Additional funding would allow me to continue to support my students needs at school but also provide for my family.

Thank you for addressing this critical issue.

*Testimony of*

**Karen Adrian**

CREC Educator

Before the

**Education Committee**

Re:

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My magnet school experience began in February 2020 when I took on a teaching position at CREC Academy of Computer Science and Engineering, formerly known as Two Rivers Magnet Middle School. I was hired as a long-term 8th grade ELA substitute teacher after having worked in private schools most of my career.

Teaching at a magnet school was vastly different from teaching at a parochial school. It was diverse, inclusive, and a culture shock. Even though I'd been teaching for nearly 17 years, I learned the value of building relationships to connect with students, become part of a classroom culture of learners, for them and for me, and engage students by making connections. Less than two months later, those relationships were stretched beyond the classroom and into our homes. When a full-time job opportunity opened up at the school for the following school year, I didn't hesitate to apply for the position of 7th grade ELA teacher.

During the 2020-2021 school year, I became a better teacher because of my students. Not only were they culturally diverse, but our personal lives and families were thrust in the forefront of our classroom through distance learning. I found even more ways to connect, to be creative, to bridge the gap between the building and the home. It was both challenging and rewarding! While I've experienced a whole different set of challenges this year, I leaned into the lessons already learned at a magnet school: building relationships, making connections, and establishing a classroom community of learners that includes me. I wouldn't have the same experience had I not been part of the magnet school experience.

In order to continue serving a community of learners who have been historically disenfranchised, we must offer them the same opportunities of relationship-building, a

welcoming and accepting classroom environment, and the best education all children deserve, without limiting their growth because of budget shortages, we must continue to bridge the gap.

Thank you for addressing this critical issue.



*Testimony of*

**Lyndsey Russell**

CREC Educator

Before the

**Education Committee**

Re:

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I am a CREC educator and a CREC parent. CREC schools aim to close the achievement gap and foster culturally/economically/racially diverse classrooms. And increase in per pupil funding is essential to continuing to work towards these goals.

Thank you for addressing this critical issue.

*Testimony of*

**Matthew Wlodarczyk**

CREC Educator

Before the

**Education Committee**

Re:

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Our schools give families and students in the CREC region choice to attend high quality and unique schools as an alternative to their local districts. We celebrate our diversity and continuously work to be more inclusive as the most anti-racist district in the state and across our geographical region.

Thank you for addressing this critical issue.

*Testimony of*

**Melissa Roy**

CREC Educator

Before the

**Education Committee**

Re:

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I work for magnet school and I see first hand the wonderful opportunities that are afforded to our students. Decreased funding would mean that many of these opportunities would be cut and in the end it will hurt student learning. They have already struggled through a pandemic where learning was impeded we can't afford to have more loss learning. Please fund this act.

Thank you for addressing this critical issue.

*Testimony of*

**Patricia Bunk**

CREC Educator

Before the

**Education Committee**

Re:

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I am an IQ teacher for the Individually Quarenteened students. This year I have taught remotely and as a highly successful team we have reached students in their most vulernable hour of need. These positions need to be maintained not slashed. The team is highly successful educators have helped many students K-12 to encourage , support and define higher levels of need and met each and every one. Increase funding for remote students that need help in all academic areas. This team helps in a very personal way connecting to families and being a support system to everyone. Increase funding.

Thank you for addressing this critical issue.

*Testimony of*

**Patrick Jones**

CREC Educator

Before the

**Education Committee**

Re:

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I have the joy of having my daughter attend a CREC magnet school from middle school through high school. This ended up being the most important decision of my daughter's life. Without the magnet school, my daughter would not have been exposed to the the wonderful multicultural experience that she ended up needing in life. The rigor of the curriculum, the close teacher connections and the life long diverse friendships helped form her loving, caring, competent personality she has today. In fact, her experiences in middle school and high school through the magnet schools ended up being more diverse than her college. Fast forward, my daughter is now a teacher at CREC magnet schools, giving back to families all that she learned, making a big difference in children's lives every day.

Thank you for addressing this critical issue.

*Testimony of*

**Rose Higgins**

CREC Educator

Before the

**Education Committee**

Re:

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As a teacher at CREC I fully support the increase in funding so we are better equity to meet the magnitude of needs and supports to best serve our students.

Thank you for addressing this critical issue.

*Testimony of*

**Shana Suarez**

CREC Educator

Before the

**Education Committee**

Re:

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*Testimony of*

**Stacey Pagliaro**

CREC Educator

Before the

**Education Committee**

Re:

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Due to funding, we are able to provide high quality IB education to all of our students grade 6-12. As a result we graduate 99% of our students and 95% attend 2 or 4 year colleges. With funding we are able to provide our students with support services that promote student well being. With funding we are able to provide students with the materials they need to be successful. Most importantly, we are able to provide students with highly qualified educators which would not be possible without adequate funding.

Thank you for addressing this critical issue.



*Testimony of*

**Vanessa Lenha**

CREC Educator

Before the

**Education Committee**

Re:

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Both of my boys attend CREC Academy of Aerospace and Engineer Elementary School. They have both excelled at this school. CREC not only provides them with a quality education it's prepares them for the world by modeling equity and excellence on a daily basis. We live in a town with a solid school system yet chose CREC to provide them with an experience filled with diversity. We chose it because of its STEM focus. We could not be happier with our CREC school experience and we would be devastated to see programs and opportunities not be available to many other learners.

Thank you for addressing this critical issue.

*Testimony of*

**Victoria Miller**

CREC Educator

Before the

**Education Committee**

Re:

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I have been at CREC for the past 5 years. An increase to our budget would mean allowing all students to continue to thrive in a diverse environment. It would mean 22 students instead of an even larger class size, allowing for more differentiation to help our students meet their goals. It would allow us to improve our technology in the classroom many of our smartboards are over 10 years old. They are breaking and they no longer manufacture the parts we need to fix them.

Teaching in 2022 requires up to date technology to help prepare our students for the future. It could mean field trips for students to experience places they have never been able to experience before and using that experience to improve their literacy skills. It could even mean more meaningful professional development to continue to build our teachers toolboxes and allow us to be the best teachers during these every changing times.

But more importantly, we need this increase in budget just to make up for the inflation that is taking place and impacting our daily required supplies like pencils, electricity, paper, toner, etc. Our children and our teachers need this increase to continue to be the a magnet school that brings people from different backgrounds together to teach diversity and empathy and allow us to build the bridge to a more diverse future.

Thank you for addressing this critical issue.

*Testimony of*

**Dr. Janice Mooney-Frank**

CREC Educator

Before the

**Education Committee**

Re:

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The Sheff versus O'Neill ruling has opened a pathway for students to receive an education that is comparable to neighboring suburban communities. I have enjoyed bringing NASA lunar samples into the lives of our 5th graders. They were surprised and pleased to hold these national treasures and learn more about the moon. Two students shared that they want to work for NASA. Big dreams start at the Academy of Aerospace and Engineering Elementary. Please continue to fund CREC and support equity in education.

Thank you for addressing this critical issue.

*Testimony of*

**Jose Feliciano**

CREC Educator

Before the

**Education Committee**

Re:

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I testify today in support of Senate Bill 227 and an increase in funding to our magnet schools. As a CREC educator, I am proud of the strengths and successes of our schools, but also know what a funding increase would mean to our students, educators, and school communities.

CREC schools work to serve 35 member districts over 36 towns in Greater Hartford and provide high quality educational programs and services to approximately 12,000 students each year. One of the reasons I decided to teach at a CREC school is because the schools work to provide students with customized educational programming that help prepare youth for multiple career pathways whether that means trade schools, two-year colleges, four-year colleges, and students pursuing their own visions through entrepreneurial spirit. CREC schools also work within their communities to create partnerships that allow students to work with their communities and to understand the assets that their communities have.

Additionally, CREC schools' vision on equity and its "think tank" approach to work mean that teachers are able to engage in ongoing professional development which serves to support students. This support for teachers allows for the creation of culturally relevant pedagogy that honors who students are as individuals and that also honors the assets that teachers bring to the table as whole people. CREC has moved to develop its vision by creating the opportunity for teachers and students to come together to celebrate racial justice, community action, and celebrating the assets that students, teachers, and administrators bring through their experience through its action weeks; the work of its professional groups; equity teams; and student boards.

The pandemic has deeply underscored in multiple ways that magnet schools are not just a place for the education of students, but truly a cornerstone of community. Through the systems of support that teachers and administrators are able to give, CREC schools serve as a place where students can receive. Students receive counseling services, services which help them in getting jobs to support themselves and their families, and opportunities to prepare for life outside of school. The pandemic also showed us that for many students, schools also serve as a place to

help fill the systemic gaps faced by our students and provide basic needs for students including food during the school year. In the face of 7.5% inflation as of January 2022 increased funding would serve to keep pace with and stay just ahead of rising costs.

Without proper funding magnet schools like CREC cannot continue to provide quality or quantity of services. Without proper funding magnet schools cannot effectively serve, maintain, and retain teachers, paraprofessionals, counselors, and all the other administration and staff that work to serve our students basic needs, educate students, and help develop students' self-actualization so that they may become the successful citizens of tomorrow. I urge you to approve the 8% increase in magnet school funding.

Thank you for addressing this critical issue

*Testimony of*

**Colin Glanovsky**

CREC Educator

Before the

**Education Committee**

Re:

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Good morning, Senator McCrory, Representative Sanchez, Senator Berthel, Representative McCarty, and members of the Education Committee.

I testify today in support of Senate Bill 227 and an increase in funding to our magnet schools. As a CREC educator, I am proud of the strengths and successes of our schools, but also know what a funding increase would mean to our students, educators, and school communities.

I teach a class that includes a Computer Aided Design component where we use 3D printers to fabricate student projects. Students apply their engineering-minds to constructing real-world objects by manipulating geometric solids. They create architectural projects, product designs, 3D character models, musical instruments, custom-designed tools, etc. For the last two years that aspect of my job has been sidelined. In 2020 we left before I could begin printing.

The following year we were teaching in the homeroom class while kids worked on their personal devices. I was looking forward to making sure these kids who've patiently put up with one disappointment after another in their elementary school careers actually got a piece of what 'normal' should be.

This year there was a delay to the ordering and we were not able to order right away. By the time the mix-up with the vendor was resolved I was told there was a freeze on new purchases. By that point I had already made promises to my students that things they were manipulating digitally on a screen were going to be transformed into tangible objects they could keep forever.

It is hard to overstate the importance of that detail: the realness. We do all sorts of things in schools where the activity hinges on a 'now imagine if'-scenario. 'What if our paper airplane was an actual passenger aircraft?', 'what if you were writing your persuasive essay to an actual politician?' But this should have been truly real. I have yet to break it to them that I cannot come through on my promise that I will be able to print their creations, that once again this was all just hypothetical. I want to be done putting out false promises. I want to be able to provide the same experience and opportunities and rewards to all my students.

Thank you for addressing this critical issue.

*Testimony of*

**Joslin Davis**

CREC Educator

Before the

**Education Committee**

Re:

**SB 227: AN ACT CONCERNING MAGNET SCHOOL PROGRAM FUNDING.**

March 4, 2022

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CREC Discovery Academy has provided children with an amazing educational experience that addresses equity, adapting learning to needs of children, and supporting diversity in many everchanging ways.

Thank you for addressing this critical issue.