

EDUCATION COMMITTEE HEARING  
MARCH 19, 2015  
REMARKS SUBMITTED BY MARK MEYER ON S.B. 1096

Members of the Education Committee:

I am Mark Meyer, Head of School for the Hudson Country Montessori in Danbury. I come before you today to ask that you reject the idea of instituting a moratorium on new charter schools, as proposed in SB 1096.

As the head of a private school I may seem like the least likely person to come before you advocating on behalf of public charter schools. My school, the Hudson Country Montessori School, is thriving. We serve families with a range of socio-economic and academic learning needs. Our school is accredited by the American Montessori Society and is therefore true to the progressive methods and philosophy created by Dr. Maria Montessori more than a century ago. And while Montessori in the United States is generally known as education for affluent families, I'd like to point out that Dr. Montessori developed her method by working with mentally disabled children and by providing daycare for the children of factory workers in the poorest neighborhoods of Rome. Thus, Montessori is a philosophy for all children and it is unconscionable that only the children of affluent people should have access to it.

Let me explain why I care about this proposed moratorium. Recently, we at Hudson Country Montessori School have been thinking about ways to expand what we offer to more families.

As you know, the Danbury School District is an Alliance District. More than 10,000 students every day are attending schools in Danbury that are not successful in preparing children for college and the careers beyond.

As an educator, I'm supportive of the ways the Danbury District will work to achieve better results. But I'm also committed to seeing results for children now.

If the public charter school sector is allowed to flourish in Connecticut I will be among those educators coming before the State with a proposal for a new charter school. I am confident the State Board of Education will recognize our ability to help create a school design and structure with a high likelihood of success—with success being defined as real academic progress for children. This will be a team effort, and we will bring a level of talent and dedication that will impress the strictest reviewers.

Our proposed school would serve students in elementary grades, with flexibility for future growth as the school community demands. We would work with the local district to share best practices and help students transition after they graduate.

As a long time community member, I know parents will jump at the chance to sign up for a Montessori school where the inspiration for learning comes from the student's innate curiosity and the student's primary challenge is to explore and discover through project work that interests her. As I mentioned earlier, Montessori began her work developing a method of education and childcare for working families. In keeping with that tradition, it has been our honor to serve working families in Danbury through the School Readiness program for the last 15 years. In that time some 250 low-income children have received the benefit of a Montessori education. And, while we have offered substantial scholarships to a few families so that their children could continue with a Montessori education in our school, the great majority of our School Readiness would like to stay at Hudson. Sadly, neither the families nor Hudson have the resources to give parents the ability to choose. Thus, traditional public education becomes the one-size-fits all choice for all families except those who have the financial resources to make another choice.

If there is a moratorium on charter school growth, think of how many families will have to wait for at least 3 more years for something they want right now. Don't get me wrong, I love Hudson Country Montessori School and we will continue to offer choice to low income families through School Readiness, but I am also passionate about the role Montessori education can play for students who are not well served by traditional education. And so, my next goal is to offer a Montessori program completely free of charge to the students who most need a lifeline. Even a modest tuition is a barrier for some families. And I firmly believe that all families should have the same choice to a great school.

I urge you to avoid this moratorium on new charter school growth. The children of Danbury cannot keep waiting.