

Chris O'Brien

From: Juli Chalifour <juli.chalifour@gmail.com>
Sent: Thursday, May 1, 2025 5:15 PM
To: House Finance Committee
Subject: Testimony

Dear Finance Committee Members,

My name is Julia Chalifour and I live in East Greenwich. My state representative is Justine Caldwell. I'm writing in support of HB 5749, which would add categorical aid for our schools in EG that are struggling significantly with an \$800,000 gap in state funding this year.

I find myself scared to trust the East Greenwich school system with my kindergartner (currently at Frenchtown) and 3rd grader (currently at Eldredge) and their education as they grow. My husband and I are currently trying to figure out how to afford private school.

I volunteer broadly across the schools - I am a room parent, I have volunteered for in-classroom events at both schools throughout the year, and I've spent endless hours volunteering at school play rehearsals and performances, field days, STEM days, and book fairs.

In general, I am concerned that the most enriching programming available is parent-supported and volunteer-driven. This makes it tenuous, variable from year-to-year, creates advantages for the children of parents leading events, and lacks the centralized coordination and integration into the overall educational planning that I would expect from the schools.

The enrichment that is available through in-school programming seems grossly underwhelming and inadequate for what I expected when we chose the EG school system. For example, we spend a lot of time on the Scholastic book fair which is ultimately reinforcing consumerism and supporting a for-profit company. While I appreciate that it reinforces the importance of reading, it's a good example of how we are filling space to make it look like the schools offer rich programming, but there is very little substance behind it.

At Eldredge, we've seen very limited field trips and assemblies for our 3rd grader - their trip to see a URI basketball game was fun, but much more extracurricular and far less educational than I expect from our school system. I can't imagine cutting this back further.

I've seen limitations to what the school can manage, and what my kids can absorb, because of the limited space and run-down state of the buildings. We attempt to do things outside, with teacher and parent volunteer support, but the children aren't comfortable, they can't all hear what's going on, and we're subject to weather disruption and limited seasonally. The children and staff at both schools have severe temperature discomfort in the buildings throughout the year and that impacts their ability to maintain basic physical homeostasis - certainly not a good environment in which to teach/learn. Activities happen in hallways and shared spaces or not at all because of space limitations.

Also, staffing limitations are most apparent to me, as a parent, in the exhaustion caused by over-work of the current staff. They are tired, often splitting time between schools, focusing on meeting the bare minimum rather than getting to know the children, thinking creatively and innovatively. Staff rely on repeating what's been done in the past, and their bandwidth to be innovative, effervescent, and joyful is limited.

Our librarians are so crucial to teaching our children about literacy, technology, and research. I'm truly scared at the thought of making further cuts here - who do we expect to pick-up this slack?

I've experienced first-hand situations where a teacher has a simple, wonderful idea that they would like to implement to reinforce or support a concept that the children are learning, and they try to engage their co-teachers but are met with zero collaboration and support. The other teachers are simply too tired. And, I don't blame them for this. I also see teachers constantly spending their own money on basic classroom materials and equipment. This is wildly unacceptable.

I don't have first-hand experience at Cole, but the above reasons are examples of why I am scared to trust the EG school system as my children grow. I'm worried they are not gaining the foundational study and learning skills they will need to receive a wonderful, successful education.

Sincerely,

Julia Chalifour