

THE REGISTER CITIZEN

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Editorials

Time to face the Gilbert issue

Credit the Winchester Board of Education with good sense in agreeing not to hold tonight's Gilbert School discussion behind closed doors. Credit Winsted community attorney Charlene Lavoie with a strong assist. Her appeal to the state Freedom of Information Commission over the planned executive session clearly prompted the board's leadership to reconsider.

At issue tonight is the proposed restructuring of control over The Gilbert School. The school today remains controlled by a self-perpetuating board of private trustees, even though it serves as the town's public high school and relies on public funds for all but \$100,000 of its \$3.6 million operating budget.

To secure continued state funding of capital projects, the Gilbert trustees have drafted a restructuring which would create a Gilbert School Committee to oversee school operations and budget. Four of the nine members, still a minority, would be public. Five, including the chairman, would be named by the trustees.

Why, in 1990, should voters of Winsted, unlike those of any other Litchfield county town, still lack control of the school run with their money and responsible for educating their young men and women? That's the question being pressed more insistently with each passing year.

Historically, the answer is that private funds created the school and once paid the major share of its costs. Over the years, however, much has changed. Public money has paid for many improvements to the school and taxpayers have assumed nearly all the operating costs.

Granted, the proposed restructuring, with strong minority public representation on a Gilbert School Committee, is a step forward. But it still leaves Winsted residents as second class citizens with regard to their high school.

If advocates of continued private control can't provide rational justification for perpetuating that control, the Winchester Board of Education shouldn't sell out the public by signing on to the proposed restructuring.