



**Achieve Hartford! Public Comments – December 20, 2011**

***Comments by Paul Diego Holzer, Interim Executive Director, Achieve Hartford!  
Regular Meeting of the Hartford Board of Education***

Distinguished Members of the Hartford Board of Education and Superintendent Kishimoto:  
Good evening.

Tonight, I want to raise a very practical, even urgent matter: School Choice applications. To begin, I want to share three direct quotations “from the field,” so to speak:

1. From an 8<sup>th</sup> grade student:  
**“I already know where I’m going to school. I’m going to Hartford Public High School.”**
2. From a parent of an elementary school student:  
**“I don’t have to fill out the Hartford choice application; I already filled out the magnet one.”**
3. And finally, from one principal who said:  
**“Our school should be fine. We’ve already sent notices out to parents about the deadline.”**

Obviously, even in Year 5 of school choice, there are always going to be some students throughout the city that don’t fully understand the process for choosing their next school; there are always some parents who need to understand that they have to fill out the HPS application; and there are still some principals who don’t understand that families need a lot more than a notice to successfully fill out an application on time.

So why am I worried about this? Because a successful school choice process is so critical to the overall reform, and because today both the HPS and Regional School Choice Offices find that applications are down from where they were last year, eight weeks in to the process. And, with the holidays, we have at most four weeks before the January 31<sup>st</sup> deadline to educate families with transitional students on choice and ensure they submit applications on time.

So what’s needed from our perspective? We recommend three things in the short term:

- Sending out to all school staff – principals, teachers, counselors, etc., up-to-the-minute data on their transitional families so they know exactly where they are, vis a vis the 100 percent goal; and, somehow holding principals accountable for reaching that 100% goal;
- Encouraging schools that are far short of the goal to reach out to Achieve Hartford! and others in the community because, working together, we can make the all-important connections with parents happen; and
- Like cities that run a three- or four-week choice process, creating a huge sense of urgency throughout the entire city during a very short time period next month.

This is what we will need to ensure that Year 5 provides Hartford families with the best experience to date with school choice.

Some schools always have 100 percent of their parents submitting applications early – like Wish, reaching almost 100 percent within the first 4-8 weeks, usually. But at other schools, where only a handful of families have completed their applications by December 16<sup>th</sup>, it's time to step up.

We still have time . . . but it's going to run short very soon.

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(On a personal note)

Though tonight's meeting is not the last one for this Board, it's getting pretty close, with the Mayor considering the five appointments he is to make next month. It is a good time to stop and take stock of your list of accomplishments. Even though you don't agree on every issue – which is a good thing – as a group, you have shown how a Board can come together and support students on the ground.

As you consider this service, please know that we not only recognize it ... we respect it and we want to say, "thank you" for it.

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Happy holidays!