



Crucial Council Vote Tonight: *Impact of Confirmation Will Be Lasting*



Did You Miss The Bus? *Choice Process for Transitional Students Comes to a Close*



The \$\$\$ Barrier: *College Goal Sunday is Only the First Step, but an Important One*



Crucial Council Vote Tonight

Impact of Confirmation Will Be Lasting

With the City Council's public hearing last Thursday on Mayor Pedro Segarra's five Hartford Board of Education appointees – and the vote tonight – Hartford is headed for a new era in education governance. The question is: Will this be a good thing for schools and students?

In addition to City Council enlarging its role in education through last week's public interview process, the Mayor's appointment of himself and his Cabinet member, Dr. José Colón-Rivas, signal an increased role that his office will play in overseeing the school system.

While this level of priority and the attention paid to education by both the Mayor's office and City Council is exactly what many residents would like to see from their city leaders, it's the relationship between these institutions and the School District that must be the focal point.

With capable leadership at the District and a track record of effective district management under the previous Board's level of oversight, the Mayor, City Council, and the new Board of Education must be committed to creating and maintaining the optimum level of oversight in their relationship to the District, and avoid micro-managing at all costs.

This commitment is one of six attributes – listed below – that Achieve Hartford! has been advocating since last fall. These are what we expect from all nine board members once confirmations are made.

- ▶ A clear understanding of the role that a high-performing Board of Education plays in supporting school improvement;
- ▶ High expectations for what our schools and students can achieve;
- ▶ Willingness to make tough decisions and support long-term change in the face of short-term demands;
- ▶ Support for the District's current reform strategy and direction;
- ▶ Unbiased support of what works, based on data; and
- ▶ Ability to understand and utilize data in ways that drive accountability.

During last Thursday's public hearing at City Council, we listened for alignment with these attributes in the testimony delivered by each appointee, and summarized that testimony in this week's [Public Insight](#) document. While, disappointingly, none of the current appointees are parents of HPS students and most live downtown, we place responsibility for knowledge of the schools and the community in the hands of the School District, which must engage community members as real partners in school improvement efforts in order to sustain progress.

That being said, no consideration in this transition will be more important than the high-quality orientation and training that will be so essential for the five new appointees, especially with the clean-slate approach that has been taken to Board transition. With all that has been accomplished over the past 5 years, Board members must be brought up to speed on exactly how certain reform strategies interplay with one another and drive results.

In our state – and across the country – boards of education too often have a track record of frustrating, rather than advancing, the progress of reform. The test of the Mayor's appointments will be whether they work to improve – or impede – effective management of the schools, which the Superintendent was hired to do.

We look forward to providing more insight into Hartford's new Board of Education, once the confirmation vote takes place tonight.

2 Did You Miss the Bus?

Choice Process for Transitional Students Comes to a Close

No matter how you slice it, there is a lot of insight to be gained from the data on Hartford's application process for children transitioning from the highest grade at their present schools to new schools of their choice next fall.

Now that the January 31st deadline has passed, we are seeking data from the District on the number of applications submitted, with the goal of examining how they broke out in terms of percentages from Pre-K centers and schools.

Estimates say some 3,800 transitional students needed to fill out a choice application, including roughly 1,800 students transitioning from elementary to middle and/or high school, 1,500 Pre-K students, and another 500 Pre-K students not currently enrolled in a formal pre-school, and thus much harder to reach.

It is clear from our past experience that City and HPS Pre-K centers must take it upon themselves to inform parents of their responsibility, and that the District schools must take it upon themselves to inform their parents; the data will shed some light on where these efforts had the most and least impact. In our second year of the [Choice Education Program](#), we were happy to lend our support to schools and Pre-K centers to supplement their outreach efforts and assistance to families.

In the 5th year of school choice within the Hartford Public Schools, the reality is that parent involvement remains a significant issue at many schools that don't have the up-to-date information needed to reach out to families – as well as at those schools that have the data, but still struggle to get families in the door. We look forward to sharing data with the public as it becomes available, and to conducting a thorough evaluation of our Choice Education Program, with recommendations for how to improve choice education in Hartford.

3 The \$\$\$ Barrier

College Goal Sunday Is Only the First Step, but an Important One

More than 100 families – predominantly from Hartford – attended the College Goal Sunday program hosted by the University of Hartford this past weekend to receive assistance in filling out – and understanding – financial aid forms.

University of Hartford Director of Student Financial Assistance Jennifer Fuhrmann has a bit of advice for high school seniors who met yesterday's Free Application for Federal Student Aid ([FAFSA](#)) deadline: Don't stop now. [Go after those scholarships](#).

Federal student aid – in the form of [Pell Grants](#), [Perkins Loans](#), the Federal [Supplementary Educational Opportunity Grant](#), and [Work Study assistance](#) – as well as state and university scholarships, should be on every college-going senior's radar screen.

In addition to the University of Hartford, [College Goal Sunday](#) took place at 11 other locations throughout the state, and according to Director Fuhrmann, a good strategy for students now is to stay in touch with financial aid offices at schools of interest.



Upcoming EVENTS



- **Connecticut's Achievement Gap: How Housing Policy Can Help Close It**, Thursday, February 16, 2012, 8:30 a.m. coffee, pastry, 9 a.m. to 12 p.m. program at The Lyceum, 227 Lawrence Street; a free IForum sponsored by the [Partnership for Strong Communities](#).
- Family Day with Achieve Hartford!: University of Hartford Women's Basketball, vs. Boston University, Saturday, February 25, 2012 at 4 p.m., Chase Arena, Free Tickets for Students, \$5 tickets for adults and friends; call 860-768-4295 or email tickets@hartford.edu.
- **2012 Yale Education Leadership Conference**, Friday March 23, 2012, Omni Hotel, 155 Temple Street, New Haven. [Agenda](#) topics include the Teacher Talent Pipeline, The Future of School Choice, and Mandatory Pre-K; [click here to register](#).



News Articles of Interest



[AP-CT, Early Education, 123](#), Kathleen Megan, Courant, February 2, 2012
[Streamlining Teacher Certification and Linking it to Teacher Evaluations](#),
Jacqueline Rabe Thomas, CT Mirror, February 2, 2012
[Hartford Board of Education Nominees Should be Confirmed by Separate Vote](#),
Council President Says, Jenna Carlesso, Courant, January 31, 2012
[Unions Balk at Teacher Certification Changes](#), Kathleen Megan, Courant, January
31, 2012
[Choice Of Hartford District To Run Magnet School At MCC Inflames Turf War
Between Community College And CREC](#), Vanessa de la Torre, Courant, January 31,
2012

[Malloy: Cut the Red Tape that Burdens Schools](#), Kathleen Megan, Courant, January 31, 2012

[Do Education Grants Work? State Rarely Checks](#), Jacqueline Rabe Thomas, CT Mirror, January 26, 2012



Best Bookmarks



- “The Invisible Student,” a report from the [CT Pushout Research and Organizing Project](#), looking at statewide statistics that indicate a "secret pipeline," into which students are counseled, coerced, or involuntarily placed – and pushed out of school.
- [Quality Counts 2012](#), Education Week, January 12, 2012
The Global Challenge: Education in a Competitive World
- [The School Principal As Leader](#), Wallace Foundation, January 2012
Guiding Schools to Better Teaching and Learning