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Achieve Hartford! Comments for 5.17.11 – Board of Education Public Hearing

Good evening, Board members, Dr. Adamowski and Dr. Kishimoto I am Paul Diego Holzer, Education Programs Director of Achieve Hartford! at 221 Main Street.

As you know, Achieve Hartford! is an independent, nonprofit organization in its third year of monitoring and supporting education reform and community involvement in the Hartford Public Schools.

We'd like to provide very brief commentary on tonight's agenda and also bring you and the community up to date on a continuing series of reports that Achieve Hartford! will release this summer.

First, congratulations to the winners of the District's academic competition. We were honored to be a judge for this competition, and were blown away by the academic prowess of Hartford students, as usual.

On the agenda tonight, you will be discussing the appointment of four new principals, one of whom was selected from the first cohort of Principals in Residency within the Travelers' Leadership Academy. It is our understanding that the entire school community was very much involved in the selection of these four principals, and we hope you will inform us all of the positive community engagement practices utilized – especially how the School Governance Councils played a role.

Also on the agenda tonight is the release of the 2009-2010 District School Profile. It is our understanding that this information was to be released officially by the state last fall, and while we are excited to receive this data now, we need to find ways to make this information available much sooner, after the close of the school year. Timely data is so crucial for stakeholders being able to fully understand the issues that impact education and address them with a sense of urgency.

Next month, Achieve Hartford! will be releasing the first of 2 reports to come out this summer. The first report concerns our Choice Education program, in which our staff and a team of Parent Choice Advisers:

- Conducted more than 80 visits to pre-K centers and schools
- Trained more than 50 pre-K staff on the tools and strategies, and
- Helped empower more than 800 families between January and the March 31 deadline.

In the report, we will examine the impact of the program on parents' knowledge and comfort level, and suggest best practice models from within our district for how to effectively reach parents on choice. We also will have recommendations to share on how to improve the HPS Choice process for parents in Hartford.

Our second report will be an evaluation of Year 2 implementation of School Governance Councils, where we assess the effectiveness of SGCs based on their compliance with Board Policy, their ability to involve parents, and their ability to function well as a team. We will also highlight best practice models for SGCs from within the District, as well as challenges that still linger, of course with recommendations moving forward.

Our role, as an independent driver of reform, is to raise awareness around education issues in Hartford; hold the school district, city and community leadership accountable for school improvement; and engage parents and community members to participate in education improvement at higher levels.

We look forward to continuing this work with you and the community as our partners.

Thank you.