



221 Main Street, Third Floor
Hartford, CT 06106
www.achievehartford.org

Main: 860-244-3333
Toll Free: 866-440-2333
Fax: 860-525-0436

Achieve Hartford! Comments Delivered 8.24.10 – Board of Education Regular Meeting

Good Evening Madame Chair, Board members and Dr. Adamowski. My name is Jim Starr and I am the Executive Director of Achieve Hartford! at 221 Main St. in downtown Hartford.

I wanted to address three topics with you tonight, all key items on your agenda.

First, given that this is the first regularly scheduled meeting since the performance results have come out, Achieve Hartford! would like to extend our formal congratulations to you, the district staff, teachers, principals, parents and students on the performance achieved in Hartford this past school year. I know that teachers and staff worked incredibly hard, and that their effort was matched by parents and students. This third year of gains confirms a trend of performance that all should be proud. With a 20% improvement in student performance over 2007 and significantly improved schools, Hartford's achievement gap is beginning to close. We encourage all tonight to appreciate how the reform work is undoubtedly beginning to make a key difference in the lives of Hartford's youngsters. We are particularly pleased with the performance of the redesigned schools and the Community schools, which tells us that reform initiatives put in place are indeed working. All redesigned schools showed solid gains from their baseline year, with several having very meaningful gains such as Culinary, Bulkeley Lower, Sand, Achievement First and the Nursing academy. All but one redesigned school exceeded Hartford's overall average. The five community schools – a key strategy to address the barriers of poverty in Hartford – showed gains that were twice that of the district overall.

For those interested, Achieve Hartford! has made available tonight copies of our publication that summarizes and provides perspective on this past year's CMT and CAPT results. A handout can be picked up outside of the room. Once again, congratulations to the Board on the policies you have adopted and implemented to achieve the progress.

Secondly, as we have previously commented on, we are supportive of the succession planning policy that is receiving its second reading tonight. Planning for leadership change well in advance makes great sense and demonstrates a best practice for any organization. It shows structure and vision for the long term – components that are absolutely what is needed to continue to keep Hartford's progress on track to close the achievement gap. Leadership matters, and long term sustained improvement cannot occur without vision, operational expertise, and a strong community presence from all leaders of the school District. We look forward to the Board's next steps in implementing this leadership and talent development policy.

Lastly, I'd like to take a moment to express support for the revised Parent and Community Involvement Policy that will be read tonight. Achieve Hartford's Theory of Reform emphasizes the importance of family engagement to sustaining reform, and revisions made to the policy represent a strong collaborative effort to strengthen the partnership between schools and parents. We believe that by engaging families more fully as partners, we will reap the benefits of improved student achievement and protect the momentum that has been build over the last four years. However, given our strong view on the importance of parental involvement and family engagement, there are aspects that may not go far enough. Achieve Hartford! looks forward to working with members of the Parent Policy Committee and others prior to the second reading to help ensure that the policy reflects that family engagement is a greater driver in the overall reform efforts.

Thank you.