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## **Achieve Hartford! Public Comments Delivered 6.15.10 – Board of Education Regular Meeting**

Good Evening Madame Chair, Mayor Perez, Dr. Adamowski, and board members. My name is Jim Starr and I am the Executive Director of Achieve Hartford! at 221 Main St. in downtown Hartford. I'm speaking briefly on a handful of topics being addressed tonight.

First, I'd like to address the report being presented tonight on Choice and Magnet Enrollment. Choice, and its underpinnings, is a key aspect of the District's reform agenda.

As Choice brings increased expectations on parents to engage with the District, so too comes increased expectations of the District to engage with parents. School choice is a fundamental component of Achieve Hartford!'s theory of effective reform as well, and we have spent considerable time and energy this past year, along with ConnCAN and others, ensuring that a large number of parents throughout the city become informed on how to fill out applications as well as access tools that helped with their decision and meet the established choice application deadlines. That work contributed greatly to the 49% increase in applications received by the district over last year. This improvement, along with the importance of Choice to the Strategic Operating Plan, has left us eagerly awaiting the presentation tonight on enrollment numbers.

However, given the importance and the very personal nature of the choice information to each parent, we are hopeful that next year such choice information can be made available much sooner. If there are obstacles that prevent an earlier release of the information, then we are also hopeful such reasons can be aggressively – and immediately - communicated. Choice is where Hartford's ongoing positive changes touch the end consumers – students and parents - and timely availability of information, or its status, is key to maintaining community buy-in to this very important reform component.

Second, Achieve Hartford! was pleased to see the Board's Parent and Community Involvement Policy being revisited last week by the policy committee. Achieve Hartford! believes that involving parents at every level of school operation is key to sustaining reform in Hartford. In fact, we are currently designing programs to support this effort.

We applaud the greater voice parents have created for themselves over the last year and the impact they have had in positive school change. HPOC and others have made a difference, and we look forward to more impact in years to come. Updating the policy to gear it to even more effective parental involvement is a great opportunity to further positively impact the District and individual schools. Such involvement should be viewed as a wonderful opportunity to further enhance Hartford's reform initiatives.

Lastly, we at Achieve Hartford! would like to commend the District for focusing on its Strategic Operating Plan Goal #9, strategy 1 and creating a Policy on Leadership Succession. Planning and addressing the cultivation of talent at all levels of the District is paramount to successful long term reform.

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 – attributes that are absolutely what is needed to continue to keep Hartford's progress on track to close the achievement gap.

Effective reform takes vision, planning and persistence; it will take time, but Hartford's students – and the City - will be rewarded.

Thank you.