



Mayoral Control Asserted: *School Board Takes Shape*



Focusing Parent Power: *HPOC, CT Parents Union Point the Way*



Achievement First: *Proven School Model to Be Expanded*

1 Mayoral Control Asserted

School Board Takes Shape

With his slate of five new appointments to the Board of Education yesterday, Mayor Pedro Segarra has opted to assert a high level of control over the future of the Hartford Public School District. Not only has he appointed himself, but he has also appointed Jose Colon-Rivas, his top administrator in the Office of Families, Children, Youth and Recreation. The question is whether this new Board will work in ways that slow, maintain or advance school improvement efforts (please see the [Courant coverage here](#)).

With split voting common on Hartford Board of Education decisions over the past few years, how the newly appointed Board members vote on key issues each month will be critically important – and monitored. The five new appointments are:

- **Mayor Segarra;**
- **CEO Matthew Poland** of the Hartford Public Library;
- **City Director of Families, Children, Youth, and Recreation Dr. Jose Colon-Rivas;**

- Law Partner **Richard Wareing** of McElroy, Deutsch, Mulvaney, & Carpenter LLP; and
- ESPN Director of Executive Learning and Development **Dr. Cherita L. McIntye**.

If approved by the City Council Monday, the appointees, in addition to the Mayor, would begin their four-year terms February 1st, filling out the nine-member Board. The four elected members are Robert Cotto, Jr., Lori Hudson, Luis Rodríguez-Dávila, and Elizabeth Brad Noel, each serving a term that expires in 2013. The members whose terms expire at the end of the month are Israel Flores, David MacDonald, Ada Miranda, Sharon Patterson-Stallings, and Pamela Richmond, who we thank for their committed service during the past four years.

As a constructive friend to both the District and to the Mayor, we offer three observations about this major transitional moment:

- **Continuity.** While we had hoped the new Board complement would carry forward some continuity, we understand the need for Mayor Segarra to act in accordance with what he thinks will create a strong working relationship between the Board of Education and School District – something integral to the long term sustainability of school improvement in Hartford. We stress the need for early and thorough training of new Board members to ensure efficacy in the key governance roles they play in support of schools.
- **Transparency.** In addition to how the Board representation stacks up with respect to race/ethnicity and gender, it is important to illuminate the new Board Members' political affiliations; first-hand experience with the Hartford Public Schools, including their (and their family members') enrollment in Hartford schools; and their tie-lines to Hartford neighborhoods and community organizations. On the surface, the appointees seem strong, but we would like to know specifics, so that Hartford residents can appreciate fully why they were selected – and what they bring to the table. We look forward to reaching out to each new member after Monday's confirmation to learn more and inform others.
- **Momentum.** As the appointed majority of the Board of Education, the five new members wield tremendous power over the rate of improvement we see in Hartford schools. At this important moment in the history of our city, it is vital to remember the importance of maintaining the momentum of this work. In order to continue providing better outcomes for our children, a

large transition at the Board level cannot be allowed to slow down the aggressive pace of the Hartford Public Schools' reform efforts. We must keep faith with families desperate for the delivery of higher quality education to their children.

We believe the Mayor's willingness to serve as a Board Member exponentially increases accountability – for reform, among all Board Members, for the District, and for him personally. We look forward to reporting on the progress of the new Board and to illuminating the backgrounds of the newly appointed Board members.

Focusing Parent Power

HPOC, CT Parents Union Point the Way

This was an important week for parent empowerment. The Hartford Parent Organization Council (HPOC) held its annual retreat this past weekend. It was hailed by many as a great achievement, moving parent empowerment forward. Then the Connecticut Parents Union followed up Wednesday with a press conference on what the legislature ought to do on behalf of students - now.

The HPOC retreat focused attention on a variety of ways parents can jump-start children's learning, for example, by "giving up baby talk" early, since children lip-read. Instead, reading picture books and reciting nursery rhymes produces young readers, District Director of Elementary Literacy Dr. Beryl Bailey told the attendees. In a variation on "the family that prays together stays together," she said, "the family that reads together grows together."

Also on the HPOC program were Superintendent Dr. Christina Kishimoto, Mega-Education Executive Director Sammy Vega, and CT Parent Union President Gwen Samuel.

Ms. Samuel, joined by Rep. Douglas McCrory, also held a press conference Wednesday to urge legislative reforms benefiting parents, including revamping school choice and teacher tenure. "When schools are not performing, you have to give us a measure of choice," she said.

McCrorry said his concern about the achievement gap is tempered by the fact that Governor Malloy and Commissioner Stefan Pryor are engaging the Black and Latino caucus of the legislature as the next session is about to begin.

“Nothing can be done without engaging our parents and students who are at the bottom of the well,” McCrorry said. This is a winner-take-all, folks. We need to get it done now.”

3 Achievement First Hartford Academy

Approved for High School Expansion

The Hartford Board of Education this week expanded high school options through the Achievement First (AF) model, which has seen real success as Hartford’s highest performing neighborhood school. So why were 100 parents and their children snapping their fingers Tuesday night?

The answer is tradition. When AF students wish to express agreement or voice support, the custom at the school is to snap your fingers, so as to not be disruptive but still show affirmation, Principal Claire Shin says. So the snapping of fingers filled the room Tuesday night when parent Jane Cravedia spoke for her 100 fellow parents – and when Superintendent Christina Kishimoto noted that 3rd and 7th grade test scores at Achievement First Hartford were 20 points higher than the District average – and among the highest in the state.

The 6-2 vote in favor of expanding Achievement First to a high school came over the opposition of Board Members Luis Rodríguez-Dávila and Robert Cotto, Jr., who worried that the gradual expansion of Achievement First in the North End of Hartford would diminish the viability of Weaver High School as it undergoes redesign and renovation in the next few years. Elizabeth Brad-Noel and Lori Hudson both expressed hesitancy with their vote, saying that while expansion of AF Hartford Academy is good for the parents and students in the room, it may come at the expense of other families in the city. See our [January 17, 2012 public comments](#) here.

The Board approval set efforts in motion for AF to begin expansion this fall with a 9th Grade, in what Dr. Kishimoto termed one of the “innovative and bold” actions on the Board agenda this week.

Another was the approval for the District to move forward in negotiations with Manchester Community College on a District contract to operate the Great Path Academy on that college's campus. The District successfully bid on the project as part of its efforts to create a diverse portfolio of school options for Hartford parents. We will have more details to come regarding this bold effort to add a 13th magnet school that sits across the river in Manchester, CT.



Upcoming EVENTS



- **Leading up to the January 31, 2011 Hartford School Choice Deadline:** Please [click here for the application as well as information](#) on when to obtain assistance at schools.
- **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](#).
- **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



- [Solving the Way Schools Are Funded Without Pouring In New Dollars](#), Jacqueline Rabe Thomas, CT Mirror, January 18, 2012
- [Mayor Nominates Five New Members to Hartford's School Board – Including Himself](#), Vanessa de la Torre, Courant, January 18, 2012
- [Pryor Gets Okay to Revamp Education Department](#), Kathleen Megan, Courant, January 18, 2012
- [CT Parents Union Urges Teacher Tenure Reform](#), Kathleen Megan, Courant, January 18, 2012
- [Hartford School Board Approves Expanding Achievement First Charter School to Grades 9-12](#), Vanessa de la Torre, Courant, January 18, 2012
- [Wikipedia Absence is Noted, But As a Brief Inconvenience](#), [Includes Internet Censorship Discussion at Pathways], Noam Cohen, New York Times, January 18, 2012
- [CCM Wants Reform Now, Even If Dollars Follow Later](#), Keith Phaneuf, CT Mirror, January 17, 2012
- [Seven Views: So How Do We Fix Our Schools](#), Courant-Opinion, January 15, 2012



Best Bookmarks



- [The Long-Term Impacts of Teachers: Teacher Value-Added and Student Outcomes in Adulthood](#), Raj Chetty, Harvard University and NBER, John N. Friedman, Harvard University and NBER, Jonah E. Rocko, Columbia University and NBER, December 2011
- [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