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January 26, 2012 Issue – Full Text



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Rare Council Hearing Tonight

Public Interviews Slated for Board Appointees

No one quite knows what to expect tonight as the five new Board of Education appointees – including the Mayor – sit down for a second round of job interviews, this time with the City Council. Given the Council’s deeper level of involvement with the Mayor’s appointments, questions naturally are cropping up. We’re about to learn more.

Based on our attendance at Board meetings in recent years and what best-practices research says about effective boards, [we offered a set of questions](#) to City Council earlier today, in response to their request for public input.

Mirroring what we proposed the Mayor focus on during his selection process, we encouraged Council to generate questions that assess what is most critical to advancing student success: (1) high expectations for student achievement, (2) support for the District’s overall reform strategy, (3) unbiased support for what works, and (4) a clear understanding of the role that a high-performing Board of Education does (and does not) play in driving school improvement.

Most analysts regard the period from 2006-2011 as a generally successful, if not remarkable, first phase of Hartford school reform. Contributions by the five Mayorally-appointed members and overall high performance by the entire nine-member Board will be instrumental throughout the next five-year phase in determining whether Hartford children’s – and the city and regional economic – futures are realized.

The five new appointments made by Mayor Segarra on January 18th 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**.

We appreciate the [City Council's posting of the new appointees' bios](#) and look forward to getting to know these appointees better tonight. While the confirmation will not take place until next Thursday night with a vote, we will continue to provide details about this very important reconstitution of education governance in Hartford.

2 Real Reform, Now

Major Advances in Statewide Education Reform

Released early today at the Legislative Office Building in Hartford, the legislative agenda of the [Connecticut Council for Education Reform](#) (CCER) included five priorities: **Great Teachers and Leaders, Universal Pre-K for three and four year-olds, Academic Intervention, Turnaround Schools, and a Common Chart of Accounts among all school districts in CT, so that state government and others can accurately analyze and compare how money is being spent district by district.**

These priorities are being championed by both the Governor and Commissioner Stefan Pryor, who was on hand this morning to support CCER and to highlight an impressive accomplishment made only yesterday by [PEAC](#). This statewide panel of teachers, superintendents, teacher union representatives, and others is charged with creating a new teacher evaluation process for districts to follow in CT – and for legislators to contemplate in February.

The landmark framework recommends that 45 percent of a teacher's evaluation be based on student performance, 40 percent on classroom observations, 10 percent on peer and parent surveys, and the remaining 5 percent on whole school improvement. Read more from [the Courant](#) and [CT Mirror](#).

In his comments, Commissioner Pryor referred to the new framework as a “model for the country,” if realized, and highlighted this as proof that “There is more in common than there is in dispute when it comes to education reform in CT, and that “we can agree enough to make substantial change.” He reiterated that turning the proposed teacher evaluation system into policy would not be without contentious debate.

3 January 31: Turning Point

Post-Deadline Choice Work Complex

Most people think that running a [Choice process](#) comprises merely a marketing campaign and pressing a button on the computer to run a lottery system placing students at one or another school. The truth is, so much of the work starts after the choice application deadline.

Below is a simplified breakdown of all that has to happen at the District central office between the application deadline and final student assignments:

1. Finalize school capacity projections, by estimating the number of students who will be retained in a grade, determining where class size can expand, and seeing where class size needs to shrink;
2. Clean the application data, making sure that students' ID numbers are correct and that their home addresses match the correct zone;
3. Run the lottery, which requires assigning the correct weights to applications related to siblings who are in a certain school, who come from a certain zone, or whose locations reflect a particular distance from the schools they've sought;
4. Mail out placement letters, providing parents two-plus weeks to respond via mail to accept placement; and
5. Record the school assignments, which will then be useful in the budgeting process.

In the two months following the deadline, the District will work to handle applications on behalf of students who seek to transfer, even though they have not reached the highest grade in their school. All the while, the District also must create a system to handle the influx of late applications, none of which will receive preference over the applications submitted on time. Typically, the latecomers encompass a few hundred students whose families did not know about the process, did not think they needed to follow it, or simply chose not to do so. Many students apply without any parent support.

In addition, hundreds of families with children entering the system later in the year or who have arrived during the summer (including immigrants), right up to the start of the school year in the fall, must be accommodated.

The process is complex – and made even more so with the prevalence of inaccurate data on family addresses and phone numbers. Good execution is key, and we look forward to reporting on the process going forward, which many families are excited about. In addition, we look forward to bringing you the final data on the percentage of students in transitional grades whose applications were completed on time, broken down by school.



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.
- **Innovations in Education: Preparing Teachers, Inspiring Students, Engaging Families,** a breakfast reception and interactive program hosted by Lt. Governor Nancy Wyman, Thursday, February 2, 2012, 8:30 to 11:30 a.m., CT Science Center, 250 Columbus Blvd.; space is limited and RSVP is required – please email reservations@CTScienceCenter.org or call 860-520-2150.
- **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



- [Breakthrough on Teacher Evaluations](#), Kathleen Megan, Courant, January 25, 2012
- [Coming Soon: Teacher Report Cards Based on Student Performance](#), Jacqueline Rabe Thomas, CT Mirror, January 25, 2012
- [ConnCan: Education Funding Report Falls Short](#), Kathleen Megan, Courant, January 24, 2012
- [Some States Prodding Students to Graduate Early](#), Caralee Adams, Education Week, January 24, 2012
- [Council to Interview School Board Candidates Thursday](#), Jenna Carlesso, Courant, January 23, 2012
- [Hartford Adult Ed Program Adopts 'Life Is So Good,'](#) Hartford Guardian, January 24, 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.
- [The School Principal As Leader](#), Wallace Foundation, January 2012
Guiding Schools to Better Teaching and Learning