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Achieve Hartford! Comments for 2.15.11 – Board of Education Regular Meeting

Good evening, Board members and Dr. Adamowski ... and congratulations to the new officers elected tonight. As you know, I am Jim Starr, Executive Director of Achieve Hartford! at 221 Main Street in downtown Hartford.

To all of the members on the Board, your commitment to Hartford students should be congratulated.

We have a long way to go ... but we have made a very good start in the first stage of reform.

Over the past several months, Achieve Hartford! has been very clear in its message that sustaining the reform is essential for the success of both Hartford children and the city's economy in the long term.

Towards that end, we have championed three crucial commitments:

- One, to advance and build upon the reforms already made;
- Two, to provide strong, reform-minded leadership; and
- Three, to build greater and lasting support for reform strategies among all education stakeholders.

While so much of the recent focus has been on the next superintendent, we believe it is equally important that the Board of Education show great leadership.

We challenge you to drive those three commitments in your efforts – and in the administration of the next superintendent – with an unyielding focus on the needs of children.

These needs, and how they are addressed, deserve everyone's full attention – and collaboration.

In fact, the next stage of reform presents even greater challenge than what we have seen thus far, and lasting improvement requires that all concerned work together.

This Board, and the administration as it transitions to the next phase of reform, needs to further build strong school-community partnerships, earn community trust, and cultivate support throughout all parts of the community.

To get everyone on board, effective, purposeful communication will be essential. It must be directed at and involve the community, educators, and parents – and if it does, we can succeed in the next phase of reform.

People in Hartford – particularly parents and students - must know that reform is necessary, understand what is working and what is not, and believe that positive change can take place. That responsibility needs to be driven by this Board.

We cannot afford to go backwards.

On a separate note: Before you tonight are four redesign plans. Based on presentations at earlier Board meetings, the anticipated benefits have been discussed and Hartford students will be well served. Given the financial challenges before us, it is very important that the Board and administration understand both the intended academic impact of these new programs and the allocations used to fund them. Whether dollars are reallocated based on student-based budgeting, or additional funds are found to satisfy the design spec's, it is important that all such information be considered in your dialogue.

Thank you.