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Achieve Hartford! Comments for 10.19.10 – Board of Education Regular Meeting

Good Evening Madame Chair, Board members and Dr. Adamowski. As you know, I am Jim Starr, Executive Director of Achieve Hartford! at 221 Main Street in downtown Hartford.

The past few weeks – as well as tonight and the next few weeks to come – are truly an action-packed time for education – at all levels, from Washington, D.C. to the 50 states, and to our own capital city. It is a pivotal time for moving from words to actions in improving the school experiences for our children.

This week, the movie “Waiting for Superman” is capturing the emotions of millions of Americans. As we all know, it is common for people to overlook the challenges that students, parents, and teachers face, especially in urban areas and especially during a very tough economy. While not everyone agrees with all aspects of the movie, it is serving as a wake-up call to many who had given very little thought to the achievement gap that plagues so many schools.

In another key development, today the Governor’s Commission on Educational Achievement issued its report containing recommendations to systemically improve education for all students here in Connecticut, especially low-income students. Achieve Hartford! supports many of these initiatives – many of which are already under way in Hartford

A third event, the Connecticut Forum on November 11th, will help all of us bring into further focus why we need to address the achievement gap – with perspectives from Joel Klein, Chancellor of the New York City Public Schools, Davis Guggenheim, Director of the film, “Waiting for Superman,” John Schnur, CEO and Co-founder of New Leaders for New Schools and a key architect of President Obama’s Race to the Top initiative, as well as Deborah Gist, Commissioner of Education in Rhode Island.

Much of what these 3 events touch upon and remind us of goals we all share. Ours are spelled out in Achieve Hartford!’s Theory of Reform, which include:

- A Culture of High Expectations in our Schools and in our Community
- Effective Teachers in Every Classroom
- Strong Leaders directing Every School
- Family & Community Responsibility for Education
- Strategies to Address Barriers Created by Poverty
- A Commitment to School Choice

But, there is a 4th event I'd like to highlight. Your agenda tonight features the succession planning policy that will steer the hiring of the next superintendent. This policy is crucial to Hartford as it will guide the Board in its selection and help ensure that momentum is not lost during the leadership transition, and be a formal step in the Board's process to plan for the next five years of educating our children.

While all of these major events highlight the tremendous challenge we all face to improving education for our children, we must not forget that here at home, we have proven that change is possible, that systemic change is possible, and that we can create high quality schools for our children. Indeed, the District and Board of Education have a formula that is showing results here, and we must not forget this. We must look for further innovation, but also continue those ideas that are working. Here, as Achieve Hartford has pointed out and will continue to monitor, the District has made great strides in creating models for success where student achievement is improving and that the state has already used as a model. That said, we still have a long way to go.

As we see so many current events and activities dramatically increasing the attention now being paid to educational outcomes, it is very important to keep our eye on the ball in Hartford. With new and strengthened partnerships with all the players in our City – the business and civic community, teachers, parents, the District and the Board - we can look forward not only to sustaining, but possibly accelerating school improvement in the future.

Thank you.