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## **Hartford's School Governance Councils Show Promising Start**

**Achieve Hartford! releases evaluation on first year performance**

**HARTFORD, CT (July 13, 2010)** – In a report issued this week, Achieve Hartford! summarized the results of its year-long independent evaluation of School Governance Councils (SGCs) implemented by the Hartford Public Schools. The report notes that, during this first policy year, SGCs operated in 28 schools and the majority represented strong decision-making bodies, each made up of parents, school staff, community members and the principal all working together to improve their school.

SGCs are a key element of the Hartford Public Schools' Strategic Operating Plan and its reform efforts. The councils represent an effort by the Hartford Public School District to strengthen parent and community involvement in the governance of its higher performing, autonomous schools. SGCs are intended to be the local decision-making body of a school charge with focusing on the analysis of student achievement and the development of improvement plans, the approval of budgets, and the review of operational changes that improve the quality of a school.

The evaluation included quantitative and qualitative measure that assessed the ability of SGCs to maintain Board policy compliance as well as function effectively as a governing body for their schools. Areas of strength in this first year included high levels of task completion, positive team dynamics, and a high rate of meeting attendance. Areas for improvement going forward include more content specific training on the school budget, more regular meetings during the year, increased efforts to reach and recruit parents, and increased empowerment of members in decision making.

Paul Holzer, Education Programs Director for Achieve Hartford oversaw the evaluation. He noted, "Based on our research, the initial goal of a full launch of SGCs in this first year was ambitious, as implementation in other cities operating with similar school-based councils has occurred over several years. While not perfect, compliance and performance results indicate a strong start here in Hartford."

Specific highlights of Achieve Hartford!'s evaluation include:

- A total of 28 out of 40 eligible schools operated governance councils in 2009-2010, 27 of which operated under the provisions of the Board's SGC Policy.
- Most SGCs accomplished the primary tasks of:
  - 1) Finalizing a School Compact (24 of 27)
  - 2) Approving and submitting a school budget on time (27 of 27)
  - 3) Addressing at some level their school's accountability plan (20 of 27)
- Survey results noted that council members felt generally well-prepared, operated with a high focus on student achievement, and worked well as a team. However, survey results also suggested that members felt minimally empowered on certain budget issues and that greater engagement of parents is needed.
- Training for SGCs was provided by Leadership Greater Hartford and proved largely beneficial. More targeted, content specific training is being designed for year two.
- The average attendance rate for all SGCs over the initial four training sessions was 72%.
- The average attendance rate for all SGCs over their regular meetings increased to 79%.
- Only 20 out of 27 SGCs, or 74%, held the minimum of 6 meetings over year one.
- Only 52% of newly formed SGCs achieved the 50% parent membership level stipulated in Board policy.

The evaluation also contained a number of recommendations for the District to consider for SGC implementation in year two and beyond.

"Taking into account the expected room for improvement for any initiative of this scope and size, the first year implementation success demonstrates a strong commitment to the SGC concept", said Jim Starr, Executive Director of Achieve Hartford. "We encourage the district to address areas for improvement highlighted in our report in order to expand on the promising results seen during this first year," he added.

A full copy of the report may be accessed at our website at [www.achievehartford.org](http://www.achievehartford.org).

*Achieve Hartford!* is an independent, nonprofit organization of business and community leaders that focuses on student achievement and supporting effective and sustained school reform in the Hartford Public Schools. For more information on school reform and Achieve Hartford! please visit [www.AchieveHartford.org](http://www.AchieveHartford.org).

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