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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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***SmartChoices* Project Has Demonstrated Impact**

HARTFORD, CT (July 8, 2010) – Based on a report released this past spring, *SmartChoices*, an informative digital tool that helps parents navigate the maze of public school options in Hartford, demonstrated that access to relevant and timely information can have a positive impact on parents in Hartford’s complex school choice process.

With a near tripling of visits to the *SmartChoices* website (www.SmartChoicesHartford.org), overall hits and distinct searches jumped from 1,221 in 2009 to 3,385 in 2010. Based on this increase, parents were able to access much more information about schools and school performance in the Hartford region. Moreover, as highlighted in the report, in a sample of parents who used *SmartChoices*, two-thirds changed or clarified their initial school choices based on information they accessed while on the *SmartChoices* website.

“Choice is such an important aspect of Hartford’s reform efforts, and the findings in the report clearly support that access to current and updated school information is very helpful to parents – and needed,” said Jim Starr, Executive Director of Achieve Hartford! “We are pleased to be able to assist in making *SmartChoices* available to the Hartford community,” he added.

SmartChoices is a partnership between Achieve Hartford! , Trinity College, and the Connecticut Coalition for Achievement Now (ConnCAN). Originally designed in 2008, *SmartChoices* covers over 200 public schools and programs in the city of Hartford and 17 suburban districts. The research and report, funded by Achieve Hartford!, was led by Dr. Jack Dougherty, Associate Professor of Educational Studies and coordinator of the Cities, Suburbs, and Schools Project at Trinity College. The full report may be accessed at www.achievehartford.org.

Available in both English and Spanish, parents can type in their child’s address and grade level and *SmartChoices* will show all district and interdistrict public schools on a map for which their child is eligible with the ability to sort and compare by distance from home, racial balance and test scores. Additional links take parents directly to individual school websites, application forms and transportation links. *SmartChoices* is the only comprehensive website that brings together all of this information for “one-stop shopping.”

“All agree that families need access to reliable information to make informed decisions about public schools. Some information flows through parents’ social networks: the opinions of trusted relatives and neighbors, conversations with principals and teachers and personal visits to schools. But other sources of information -- such as student achievement, racial balance, distance from home, and program offerings -- are more readily available on the Internet. In this digital realm, *SmartChoices* has positioned itself as the ‘Consumer Reports’ of public school choice in the Hartford region,” said Dr. Dougherty.

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.

The Connecticut Coalition for Achievement Now (ConnCAN) is an advocacy organization building a new movement of concerned Connecticut citizens working to create fundamental change in our education system. To learn more, visit: www.conncan.org.

Founded in Hartford, CT, in 1823, *Trinity College* (www.trincoll.edu) is an independent nonsectarian liberal arts college with more than 2,200 students from 43 states and 41 countries. The faculty and alumni include recipients of the Pulitzer Prize, the MacArthur Award, Guggenheims, Rockefeller and other national academic awards.

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