

# Education Matters!

July 7, 2011

Vol 3, Issue 27



## This Week ... A Special Edition

### Considering the Impact of Dr. Steven Adamowski

[Past editions of Education Matters are online.](#)

## Viewing Superintendent Adamowski's Contribution



Ada Miranda recognizes Dr. Steven Adamowski at his recent [retirement](#).

Dr. Steven Adamowski retired as superintendent of the Hartford Public Schools July 1 - and sat down with us last week to discuss his work since arriving here in November 2006.

It is a significant record; he has been a force for change. At his send-off last week, Dr. Adamowski was termed "the best public executive I have ever been blessed to meet," by Bushnell Chairman of the Board Bob Patricelli and recognized as an educator who taught his cabinet leaders "a tremendous amount," in the words of his successor, Dr. Christina Kishimoto.

While the 2011 state testing data won't be out until later this month - and the complete data on Dr. Adamowski's tenure won't be fully known for years - it is nonetheless an apt time to consider the impact of his leadership.

### *Adamant about Expectations*

What Dr. Adamowski has brought to Hartford includes:

- a **commitment to raise the bar for every student** - and the expectation that *every* child must have the opportunity to be successful, no exceptions;
- a firm and passionate **appreciation that the business community and its leaders can contribute** to creating

## Direct Links

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*Education Matters!* is a weekly electronic publication from [Achieve Hartford!](#) that keeps the community, policy makers, educators, parents, supporters and all Hartford education stakeholders informed on issues that impact the Hartford Public School District and its reform efforts.

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## Links & Articles

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### ARTICLES OF INTEREST

[Hartford's Departing Superintendent to Supervise Windham Schools](#), Vanessa de la Torre, Courant, July 7, 2011

[Ex-Hartford School Chief Will Oversee Windham School District](#), Francesca Fefalis, Norwich Bulletin, July 5, 2011

[Takeover is about More than Bridgeport](#), Rick Green, Courant, July 7, 2011

[Political Theater, Hartford Style](#), Helen Ubiñas, Courant, July 3, 2011

[Superintendent's Contract: Potential 58 Days Off](#), Vanessa de la Torre, Courant, July 1, 2011

[State Board Votes 5-4 to Take Over Bridgeport Schools](#), Courant, July 6, 2011

[Graduates of The Academy of Engineering and Green Technology Receive Special Awards](#), Courant, Courant, Reader-Submitted Article by Nancy Andrews

[With Budgets Tight, Some Districts Chafe at Special Ed Spending](#),

- long-term student achievement and systemic change;
- an insistence upon **halting the dynamic of what had been constant up-and-down cycles of stagnation and fits and starts of reform** that the Hartford Schools and the city for so many years had grown accustomed to; and
- **instilling pride in Hartford**, in part through the growing recognition of the success of the District's reform efforts, with best practices here highlighted in the media and studied by researchers.

He also brought the raw insistence that we must look at the reality and then fix it: Schools were underperforming and it was tolerated. Graduation rates were shockingly low - and still are. Our students were getting shortchanged.

In our observation, the most outstanding aspect of Dr. Adamowski's leadership has been his emphasis on improving the lives and opportunities for students through an unyielding commitment to what is in their best interest. The work under way to improve schools by enhancing teacher effectiveness and strengthening the leadership at each building is his life's work - and he has approached it with the belief that the achievement gap is the civil rights issue of our time.

Even when his demands for excellence made people uneasy, and several leaders in Hartford were not necessarily in agreement with his methodology, he kept a tone of professionalism, sincerely listening to parents, responding to their concerns, and incorporating their voice into the change process - all the while making it clear that there would be no settling for mediocrity.

The results have included a 20 percent improvement in student performance, a markedly increased graduation rate, redesign of chronically low-performing schools, trimming of the central office staff by more than half at the same time Choice and Talent offices and intervention functions were established, and some \$30 million in grants and contributions to the District since 2007.

The reform in Hartford has taken root because it is anchored in his and his colleagues' vision for long-term change.



**Dr. Steven Adamowski and his successor, Dr. Christina Kishimoto.**

Jacqueline Rabe, CT Mirror, July 5, 2011

[Adamowski Praised for Achievements in Hartford School District](#), Vanessa de la Torre, Courant, June 29, 2011

*Education Portals and Other Insights*

[Teachers Across the Country Face Layoffs](#), Robert Siegel, NPR All Things Considered, July 1, 2011

[Updated: NEA Delegates Take Swipe at Teach for America](#), Stephen Sawchuk, Education Week, July 5, 2011

[More States Defiant on NCLB Compliance](#), Michele McNeil, Education Week, July 6, 2011

[State Investigation Reveals Widespread Cheating in Atlanta Schools](#), Christina Samuels, Education Week, July 6, 2011

[NEA Passes Teacher-Evaluation Policy with a Catch-22 on Test Scores](#), Stephen Sawchuk, Education Week, July 4, 2011

*(Continued)*

One of the most challenging aspects of any school administration is parental involvement. In Hartford, there clearly has been an increase through, among other things, the establishment of School Governance Councils to engage parents in school-level Boards of Directors.

As well, the K-12 curriculum redesign, to exceed State of Connecticut standards, and the strengthening of institutional alliances with partners including Trinity College, the University of Hartford, UConn, Capital Community College, and others, have reshaped and strengthened critical community support for the city's schools.

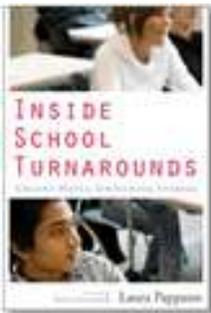
Surely, much communications work remains to be done to welcome and secure community and parental engagement on an ongoing basis. Given the complexities and pace of reform, effective outreach has been, at times, a struggle. What is inarguable, however, is that Hartford is a very different school district today than it was five years ago.



### ***Changes . . . at the Learning Level***

The all-choice system of schools Dr. Adamowski pressed for in Hartford not only has allowed interested parents a greater say about their educational alternatives - it has delegated power to principals, who have been given the autonomy to make decisions in the best interest of students at the learning level.

When Superintendent Adamowski first arrived, he says, he found a system layered with initiatives that died on the vine as [superintendents regularly came and went](#). He considers his main contribution to be systemic change, with a smaller central office focused on children's issues and an emerging portfolio of high-performing schools.



Hartford today is part of a 16-district network of portfolio school districts, prominently and regularly featured in the national news and in such analyses as the recent book, *Inside School Turnarounds*, [written by Laura Pappano and published by Harvard University Press](#).

On the subject of [portfolio school districts](#), Dr. Adamowski cites data indicating that schools performing at the 30<sup>th</sup> percentile produce students who are candidates to be dropouts and live lives of poverty, unemployment, or incarceration. On the other hand, students going to schools performing at the 60<sup>th</sup> percentile are apt to graduate and go on to college, he says.

The lack of self-esteem he found when he arrived in Hartford was incredible, Dr. Adamowski recalls; there was a tolerance for dropout factories and a feeling that good schools would follow only when entrenched social ills were addressed; that you had to wait for poverty to be eradicated, low-income housing woes to be solved, etc.

But Dr. Adamowski sees Hartford as a demonstration that, in a city with more than 95 percent of children receiving free and reduced lunches (a measure of poverty), it is nonetheless possible to have high-performing schools: They just have to be different. A school can succeed, he believes, with increased instructional time and a research-based approach to pedagogy, methodology (whether Montessori, Expeditionary Learning, or otherwise), and content, when led by an entrepreneurial principal and energized by a teaching staff that *wants to be there* - all part of a culture that is structured toward high expectations and discipline.

We agree. There is still a long way to go to realize the full scope of change needed in Hartford, but promising plans are under way. We are grateful for Dr. Adamowski's leadership; as a result of his unfailing commitment, many lives have been improved ... and the foundation of reform is firmly in place.

## Question of the Week



### **Who is Mara Garcia and what message has she sent about overcoming challenges?**

Mara Garcia is a newly graduated senior who is heading to UConn from University High School of Science and Engineering. She has studied voice with Gail Lumpkin for many years. In a stirring performance last week at the Bushnell, she dedicated the English folksong, "The Water is Wide," to retiring Hartford School Superintendent Dr. Steven Adamowski. The song dates from 1724 and has many versions. Mara's rendition of "the water is wide" suggested an impossible challenge: "I cannot get over, nor have I wings with which to fly," and ended with, "Oh, give me a boat ... we both shall row, my friends and I."



The "teamwork" metaphor certainly applies to the past five years; it will be even more important in the next five.

Recognizing how important it is for the community to be part of this "all hands on deck" mentality, Achieve Hartford! will be working to help increase the involvement of neighborhoods and families in school improvement.

## Upcoming Events

**Participation in the July 8, 2011, flight of Space Shuttle Atlantis - the final NASA shuttle flight - by the Annie Fisher STEM Magnet School, in partnership with Hamilton Sundstrand and Connecticut Space Grant Consortium.** Annie Fisher STEM Magnet School is honored to be one of 12 schools from across the nation participating.

Second grade student Janiel Sanchez's Mission Patch (at right) will fly onboard, as will the experiment by 8th grade students Ramone Clahar, David Jackson, Justice Dawkins, and Alonzo Clarke, on Microgravity's Effect on Tomato Growth.



**Mayoral Candidate Forum, Thursday, July 28 at 6 p.m. (on the theme of "Quality of Life," including programs for youth), Hartford Public Library, 500 Main Street, sponsored by the [Hartford Votes ~ Hartford Vota Coalition](#).**

**The September 13 primary and November 8 general elections are open to 17-year-old young people who turn 18 by election day.** Please see [the announcement](#) from Hartford's Registrar of Voters, or call (860) 757-9830 for further information. .

**Hartford Board of Education Meeting Regular Meeting, Tuesday, August 30, 2011 at 5:30 p.m., McDonough School, 111 Hillside Avenue.**

**[Achieve Hartford!](#)** is an independent, nonprofit organization established to monitor, support and be a catalyst for education reform and community involvement in the Hartford Public School District.

Please contact us at any time to [share an idea](#), to utilize our [online resources](#) for reform, or to [support our work](#) on behalf of school improvement.

We appreciate all involvement, big and small, because every partnership helps us to stay focused on progress.

Sincerely,

**[James L. Starr](#)**  
Achieve Hartford!