



# Connecticut Alliance for Great Schools

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## Expanding Charter Schools to Close the Gap

### The Problem:

### America's Largest Achievement Gap

Every state has an achievement gap, but Connecticut is home to the largest gap in America.

According to the 2005 National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP):

- In the fourth grade, Connecticut's low-income students are **3.3 grade levels behind** non-poor students in reading, the largest of all 50 states, and gap in math is second only to Illinois.
- In the eighth grade, Connecticut had **the largest gap between poor and non-poor** students on the math test (a 3.7 grade level gap) and was tied with Pennsylvania for the largest gap on the reading test (a 2.9 grade level gap).
- By the time they reach the eighth grade Connecticut's Latino students are **3.9 grade levels behind** white students in math, the worst gap in the nation.
- On the fourth grade math test, Connecticut's African American students were found to be 3.0 grade levels behind white students. By eighth grade, this gap climbed to 4.4 grade levels, meaning that **the average African American eighth-grader in Connecticut had the math skills of a white student halfway through the third grade.**

This gap translates into **real consequences for real people**. Studies show that on average high school dropouts earn just 37 cents for every dollar earned by high school graduates; high school graduates live 9.2 years longer than high school dropouts; and a 10 percent increase in high school graduation would reduce auto thefts by 13 percent and murder and assault arrests by 20 percent.

Considering the strong correlation between low levels of educational attainment and a wide range of social and economic problems, it is not surprising that Connecticut—home to America's largest achievement gap—has the **lowest long-term job growth** in the nation; the **second highest juvenile incarceration rate** for Hispanic males and the third-highest for African American males; and experienced the county's **largest increase in income inequality** since 1988.

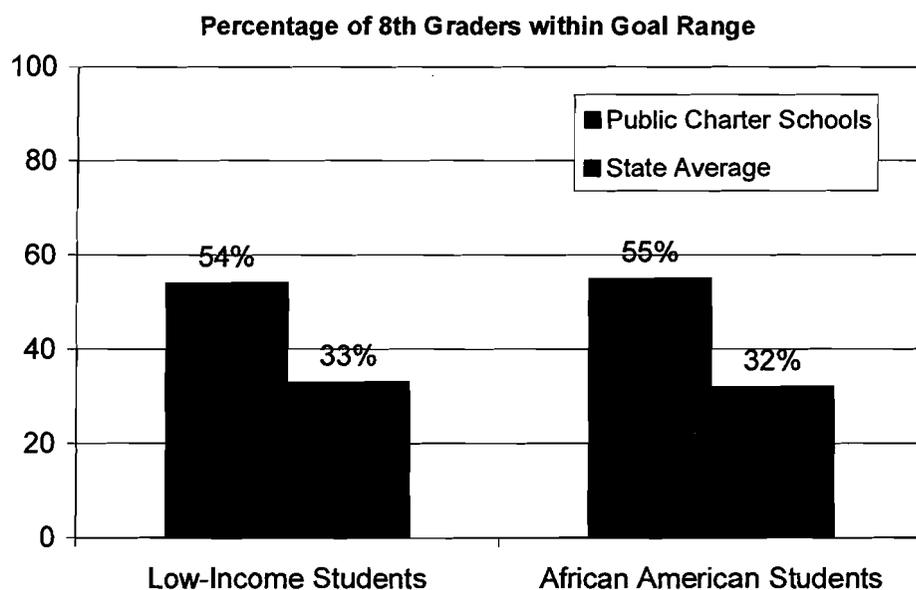
## **Public Charter Schools are Closing the Gap and Changing the Conversation**

Public charter schools are helping to close Connecticut's achievement gap by **increasing the performance** of the students who attend charter schools, **pioneering innovative approaches** to raising achievement that can be applied by schools across the state, and **raising expectations** about the gains that are possible within public schools.

### ***Top Student Performance***

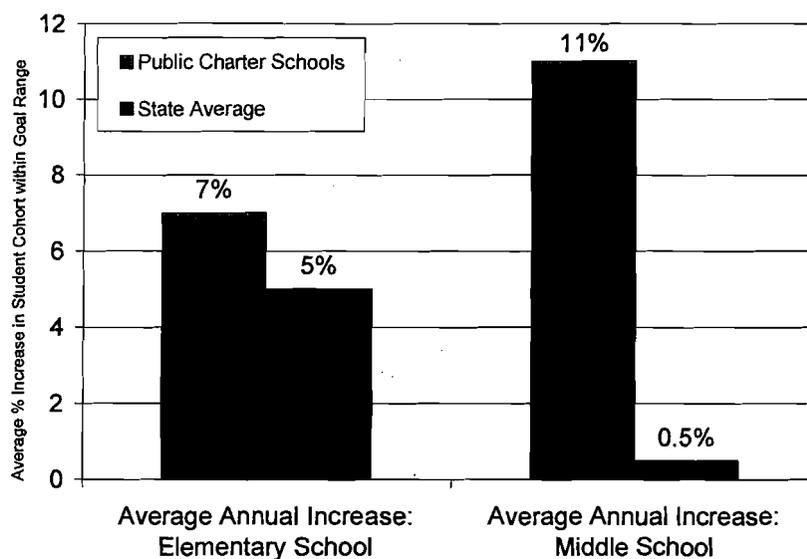
As part of its comprehensive School Report Card project, which assessed the performance of 1,000 Connecticut public schools, the independent education research and advocacy group ConnCAN identified the top schools in the state across five performance categories. While public charter schools represent only 1 percent of Connecticut public schools ConnCAN found that **they hold 20 percent of the top 1 or 2 spots in each of these five performance categories**—20 times more than their numbers would suggest.

On average, charter middle schools have more than half of their low-income and African American students scoring within goal range on the 2006 CMT—compared to one-third of low-income and African American students across the state. **If every school in Connecticut performed at this level, our achievement gap would be one-third the size it is today.**



### ***Catching Kids Up***

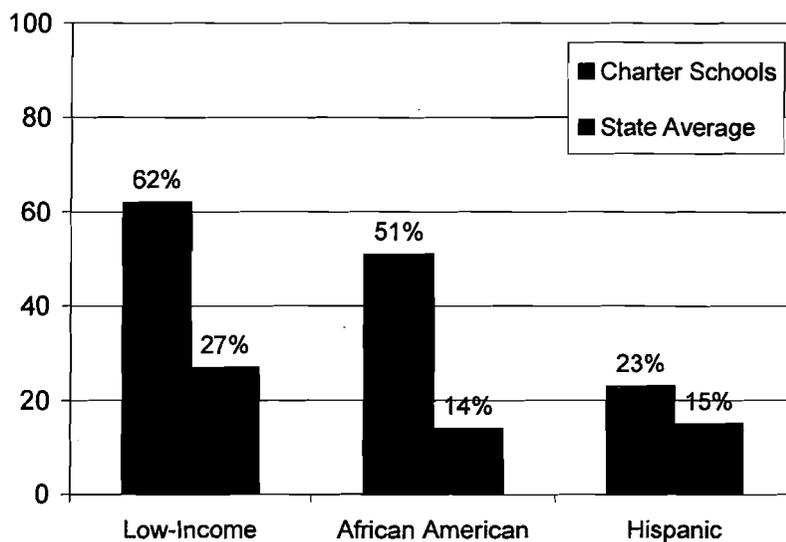
Charter schools have proven particularly effective at catching students up who have fallen behind. For example, **Connecticut's charter middle schools achieved an 11 point increase** in the percentage of students within goal range between their 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> grades, compared to 1 point increase for traditional schools.



As illustrated in the table on page 6 of this memo, **9 of the 10** elementary and middle charter schools in Connecticut had a higher percentage of students within proficient and goal range on the 2006 CMT than their host district. Further, **7 out of the 7** elementary and middle charter schools where annual cohort increases could be calculated made greater gains with their students than their host district.

### *Student Demographics*

While there are many high-performing schools across our state, the high performance of Connecticut's public charter schools is particularly relevant because, on average, they have a **more diverse student body** than their host districts and a far more diverse student body than the state average.



## *Changing the Conversation*

“A public school that enrolls mostly well-off white kids has a 1 in 4 chance of earning consistently high test scores, Harris found; a school with mostly poor minority kids has a 1 in 300 chance. Despite those long odds, the last decade — and especially the last few years — have seen the creation of dozens, even hundreds, of schools across the country dedicated to precisely that mission: delivering consistently high results with a population that generally achieves consistently low results. **The schools that have taken on this mission most aggressively tend to be charter schools** ... The evidence is now overwhelming that if you take an average low-income child and put him into an average American public school, he will almost certainly come out poorly educated. **What the small but growing number of successful schools demonstrate is that the public-school system accomplishes that result because we have built it that way.** We could also decide to create a different system, one that educates most (if not all) poor minority students to high levels of achievement.”

- Paul Tough, “Still Left Behind: What it Takes to Make a Student,” *The New York Times Magazine*, November 26, 2006.

The recent cover story by Paul Tough profiling the success of three charter school management organizations (KIPP, Uncommon Schools, and Achievement First) is just **one of many articles that have reexamined what is possible by looking at the tremendous results that high-performing charter schools have achieved.** In fact, Connecticut’s charter schools have been the subject of over 40 news reports in 2006. For example, on the same day as Tough’s NYT magazine story, the *Republican-American* ran a cover story of its own on the achievement gap. Entitled “Charting Better Education,” it opened:

Its fourth-grade math scores beat Greenwich, Litchfield and West Hartford last year. Daily attendance is nearly 100 percent. And taxpayers pay less per student than in virtually any other school.

It might be easy to envision **Jumoke Academy** nestled in one of Connecticut’s privileged suburbs, educating classrooms full of fortunate children. Not, in other words, as a place for 325 mostly poor, entirely minority students in one of Hartford’s rough-edged neighborhoods.

“Poverty is absolutely no excuse for not learning,” said Michael M. Sharpe, Jumoke’s chief executive officer. “We’ve said to our teachers, ‘every kid in your class is going to learn.’”

While the most immediate impact of Connecticut’s public charter schools is on the lives of their own students, by **changing the conversation about what is possible** they are providing a critical element in the larger effort to raise the performance of all of our public schools. At the same time, the innovative practices they are pioneering—including extra time on core subjects, data-driven decision-making, and interventions to help students who are falling behind—**provide educators and school leaders in other Connecticut schools and districts with a roadmap for replicating these results.**

**Investing in Success:**  
**Leveraging Connecticut's Charter Schools to Close the Gap**

Connecticut's public charter schools have been built through years of hard work by teachers, staff, school leaders, and community supporters. But for too long, **they have labored under an unfair system of funding that has severely limited their impact.**

To take full advantage of this proven model for improving student outcomes and raising expectations about what is possible in our public schools, Connecticut's public charter schools must be provided with the seats they need to grow, given funding parity, and provided with facilities support.

***The Seats Needed for Growth***

Many of Connecticut's charter schools are in the midst of a natural process of growth whereby their size must increase to fill out the grades approved in their charter.

As can be seen in the chart that follows, this requires an increase in the number of seats funded from 3,611 in FY 2006-07, to 4,186 in FY 2007-08 and 4,606 in FY 2008-09.

***Funding Parity: Why \$8,000 is \$3,000 Too Little***

Whether you compare public charter schools to Connecticut's technical high schools—which, like charters, are completely reliant on state funding—or their district counterparts, **the conclusion is the same: charters are significantly underfunded.**

While Connecticut's state government provides technical high schools with \$11,056 per pupil, public charter schools receive only \$8,000—a **\$3,056 gap.**

Similarly, if you take the FY 2004-05 statewide net current expenditure per pupil of \$10,672 and add in a two-year compounding increase of 4 percent you get an \$11,543 estimate for the FY 2006-07 school year. When you add in the average charter school facility cost of \$860 and subtract the average special education district contribution of \$1,126, the “apples-to-apples” fair level of funding for charters is found to be \$11,277—a **\$3,277 gap.**

Accounting for an estimated annual 4% increase in per pupil funding based off of the lowest of these two estimates (the technical high school FY 2006-07 funding of \$11,056), this would suggest a parity funding rate of at least \$11,498 in FY 2007-08 and \$11,958 in FY 2008-09.

***What It Will Take***

Providing for the new seats needed by Connecticut's public charter schools and ensuring that these high-performing schools are receiving funding on par with their traditional school counterparts will require **\$48.1 million for charter schools in FY 2007-08 and \$55.1 million in FY 2008-09.**

CHARTER SCHOOL	Grades & Baseline FY 06-07 Enrollment	Projected FY 07-08 Enrollment (Above FY 06-07)	Projected FY 08-09 Enrollment (Above FY 07-08)	<u>PERFORMANCE</u>	<u>PERFORMANCE</u>	<u>PERFORMANCE GAINS</u>	
				<i>Percentage at or above <u>Goal</u> vs. <u>Host District</u></i>	<i>Percentage at or above <u>Proficient</u> vs. <u>Host District</u></i>	<i><u>Annual Change</u> in % of <u>Students'</u> at or above <u>Goal</u> (<u>School</u> vs. <u>Host District</u>)</i>	
Highville	PK-8: 300	360 (60) Adding PK	420 (60) Adding PK	3 <sup>rd</sup> : 31% higher	3 <sup>rd</sup> : 25% higher	N/A – too small	
Jumoke Academy	K-7: 325	350 (25) Adding 8 <sup>th</sup>	350 (0)	4 <sup>th</sup> : 39% higher	4 <sup>th</sup> : 40% higher	<u>School</u> Up 26%	<u>District</u> Up 2%
New Beginnings	K-6: 300	340 (40) Adding 7 <sup>th</sup>	380 (40) Adding 8 <sup>th</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup> : 16% higher	4 <sup>th</sup> : 6% higher	<u>School</u> Up 3%	<u>District</u> Up 2%
Elm City	K-12: 372	472 (100) Add 4 <sup>th</sup> , 8 <sup>th</sup>	522 (50) Add 9 <sup>th</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup> : 38% higher	6 <sup>th</sup> : 31% higher	N/A – too new	
Amistad Academy	K-12: 415	562 (147) Add 1 <sup>st</sup> , 10 <sup>th</sup>	702 (140) Add 2 <sup>nd</sup> , 11 <sup>th</sup>	8 <sup>th</sup> : 31% higher	8 <sup>th</sup> : 31% higher	<u>School</u> Up 19%	<u>District</u> Up 1%
Integrated Day	PK-8: 319	330 (11) Expand PK	330 (0)	8 <sup>th</sup> : 16% higher	8 <sup>th</sup> : 3% higher	<u>School</u> Up 13%	<u>District</u> Down 2%
ISSAC	6-8: 180	200 (20) Fill grades	200 (0)	8 <sup>th</sup> : 16% higher	8 <sup>th</sup> : 16% higher	<u>School</u> Down 3%	<u>District</u> Down 5%
Odyssey	4-8: 175	177 (2) Fill grades	177 (0)	8 <sup>th</sup> : 16% higher	8 <sup>th</sup> : 18% higher	<u>School</u> Up 6%	<u>District</u> Down 5%
Side by Side	PK-8: 236	236 (0)	236 (0)	8 <sup>th</sup> : 14% higher	8 <sup>th</sup> : 23% higher	<u>School</u> Up 12%	<u>District</u> Up 4%
Trailblazers Academy*	6-8: 150	150 (0)	150 (0)	8 <sup>th</sup> : 24% lower*	8 <sup>th</sup> : 23% lower*	<u>School</u> No change	
Bridge Academy	7-12: 250	275 (25) Adding 8 <sup>th</sup>	275 (0)	10 <sup>th</sup> : same %	10 <sup>th</sup> : 19% higher	N/A – high school	
Common Ground	9-12: 145	150 (5) Fill grades	150 (0)	10 <sup>th</sup> : 12% lower	10 <sup>th</sup> : 25% lower	N/A – high school	
Explorations	10-12: 83	90 (7) Fill grades	90 (0)	N/A – too small	N/A – too small	N/A – high school	
Stamford Academy*	9-12: 130	130 (0)	130 (0)	10 <sup>th</sup> : 34% lower*	10 <sup>th</sup> : 58% lower*	N/A – high school	
<b>NEW:</b> Cross Cultural	5-6: 55	166 (54) Fill grades	274 (108) Fill grades	N/A – too new	N/A – too new	N/A – too new	
<b>NEW:</b> Park City Prep	6-8: 176	198 (22) Fill grades	220 (22) Fill grades	N/A – too new	N/A – too new	N/A – too new	

**Note:** Performance measured against host district based on highest grade for elementary (4<sup>th</sup>), middle (8<sup>th</sup>) or high school (10<sup>th</sup>). Where CMT data for these grades is not available, the next highest grade is utilized. \* = by design, serves significantly more disadvantaged student population than district.