

Testimony to the Education Committee
Public Hearing March 10, 2008
Mike McGuire, Stamford Academy Charter School

Members of the education committee I wish to thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak on behalf of the community, families, and students we serve at Stamford Academy and Trailblazers Academy. My name is Mike McGuire I am the Director of Stamford Academy. I am sure I need not remind you that we serve the most disenfranchised students in the city of Stamford. Our students come to our school with a myriad of issues, social and emotional problems, as well as bleak academic profiles. Our high school students read at the 5th grade level upon entry and our middle school students, at the 3rd grade level. Further, most of our high school students have been adjudicated and either come from dysfunctional familial situations, or are wards of the state. Over 70% have been involved with the Department of Children and Families. Our mission is daunting to say the least.

All of that said, we hold our students to the highest standards and expect that they will achieve the same as the more fortunate. We offer intensive academic programs and require that our struggling students take extra literacy courses, and register for after-school tutorials and other supplemental services. In fact, at our middle school 70% of our students go to school from 7:30 to 5:30, Monday through Thursday.

Our staff spends an inordinate amount of time on literacy as that is the focus and backdrop of our curriculum. In the middle school, for instance, we employ 3 reading specialists to augment the language arts and humanities curriculum. We boast many successes, the most of notable of which are those of our middle school. Trailblazers has made significant CMT gains, including reaching Safe Harbor, just a year ago, with students we were told would never have a chance and we have graduated over 95% of our high schoolers.

The items for consideration by the education committee will truly impact our school. We hope you will vote against prohibiting board members from holding seats on multiple boards. As well, we hope you will allow us to hold board meetings in other cities. We need to hold joint Board meetings in order to collaborate and employ best practices in both schools. Further, we intend to take the respective boards on retreats and will be unable to do so if the bill prohibiting these practices is passed. I do not think the spirit of the bill is to limit the creativity of our schools and that of other charters, but I am afraid the rules and regulations will act as impediments and I strongly urge you to vote against such measures.

Lastly I appreciate all that you have done for charter schools and ask that you continue to support our diverse and sometimes unique efforts. We would appreciate an increase in the per pupil expenditure and hope that you too believe that parity in spending is the way to go. Thank you for your time.