

AMISTAD ACADEMY—ELM CITY HIGH SCHOOL

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Education Committee Public Hearing, March 16, 2009 Testimony of Jeff Sudmyer, Principal, Amistad Academy High School

Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischman and Honorable Members of the Committee:

My name is Jeff Sudmyer, and I am the principal of Amistad Academy High School in New Haven. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today in support of the passage of HB 6658, An Act Concerning Charter Schools.

I came to Amistad Academy four years ago after teaching high school in California and Massachusetts. I was drawn to Amistad Academy by its record of success and groundbreaking innovation at the middle school level, its compelling mission of closing the achievement gap, and the opportunity to help design and run a high school that helps to complete that mission – a high school that ensures our urban students will gain admission to and graduate from top tier colleges.

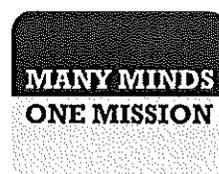
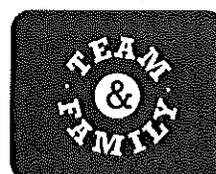
Amistad Academy High School opened in the fall of 2006 and currently serves 125 students in grades 9-11. While the work has not been easy and without obstacles, we have experienced some great initial successes. Last year, 100% of our tenth grade scholars achieved proficiency on the CAPT reading, writing, and science exams. 92% of our students earned proficiency in math. When looking at the high mastery standard – level 4 on the CAPT, 71% of scholars scored at mastery on all CAPT sections combined, compared with 20 percent of students in urban districts and 47 percent of students across the state. These results position Amistad's New Haven students as number one in our region for reading and number two for writing, outperforming students in both Madison and Guilford.

Our vision is to create a "public-prep school" that provides scholars with the opportunities and support that are critical for college success and yet are not consistently available to low-income, minority students. All of our students are required to take at minimum of 2 advanced placement courses. We embed SAT preparation into the curriculum and require that all scholars take the SAT a minimum of three times. (100% of our juniors took the SAT this past Saturday, and 100% of them will sit for the AP Biology and AP History exams in May).

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REACH!



We now want the same opportunity for the students at Elm City College Prep, our sister Achievement First charter school in New Haven. This year, the State Education Department approved a limited, one-year co-location agreement to allow the first group of 9th grades students from Elm City to operate alongside Amistad High in the same building.

While we greatly appreciate SDE's flexibility in approving this co-location, both SDE and we recognize that the current arrangement – simultaneously operating two separate high schools each serving a very small number of students – is not a tenable long-term solution and results in a great deal of inefficiencies. For example,

- We've had to set and maintain separate accounts with vendors, and place separate orders for items like books, school supplies, and food.
- We have to break up the school's budget and run separate reports in the accounting systems for each school and then export them and combine them back together again.
- Our IT team spent significant time creating two separate tracking systems for attendance, grades, and discipline in our student information software and on-line system.
- We've had to place staff on separate payrolls, creating additional administrative and certification challenges.

Our experience this year is that the terms of the co-location agreement require us to double our paper trails and bookkeeping efforts and to divert resources from teaching and learning to administrative processes. We have had to hire an additional person just to keep the bookkeeping straight.

Thankfully, there is a simple solution to this problem. House Bill no. 6658 will allow charter schools to enter into cooperative arrangements to run schools jointly, just like local and regional boards of education. This would allow Amistad High to be able to effectively operate as one school with students from both Amistad and Elm City middle schools. While both Elm City and Amistad would still retain their separate charters and we will still provide a full set of safeguards for all public funds, a joint school operating agreement for the high school their students share would allow Amistad High to grow and flourish.

In the current economic climate, with charter schools and many other government-sponsored programs facing flat funding, we need to make every effort to wring out inefficiencies and to stretch our dollars further. This is a straightforward, no cost, legislative fix that will allow Amistad-Elm City High to ensure that we are able to deliver all our students to the doors of college. In the world of traditional school

districts, it is common practice for two or more middle schools to feed into one high school. House Bill no. 6658 would bring the charter system in line with this standard practice and I urge members of the Committee to support its passage.

Thank you for time and attention,
Jeff Sudmyer, Principal

