Tuesday, February 21, 2012

Testimonial from Matthew Nittoly; Executive Director Side by Side Charter School in Norwalk, CT

On behalf of the Side by Side Charter School community of students, staff and parents I eagerly support Governor Malloy's proposal to increase the CT Charter School funding to $11,000 per pupil. While I am grateful for this proposed action, and for the opportunity to speak in support of it, I view this proposal as a long overdue recognition of a need for equity in CT public education

It is time that public school "choice" and Charter Schools in particular are no longer thought of as new or gimmicky attempts to educate children. Side by Side, along with many other public charter schools have been successfully proving themselves for over 15 years. All of us in the charter community agree that charter schools are not the sole answer to the problems we are faced with in public education. Yet we are certain that they are an integral, necessary and proven piece of the solution.

Since our inception, we have been asked to prove our worth through student performance, articulation of best practices in the classroom, and in making ourselves accessible to a diverse range of learners. We have demonstrated consistency in meeting these requirements, including our taking part in a comprehensive renewal process every 5 years. We have worked with less and accomplished more, but time and our ability to creatively meet new fiscal and accountability demands are running out.

We are all in the process of an educational shift across the state and country. The 21st century of education is no longer a prediction of the future but rather a requirement of the present. Like all other public schools we are faced with a need for increased technology in our classrooms, for specialization and individualization in our curriculum and for highly trained quality teachers in all areas. Simply put—the current position of financial support for charter school does not make it possible to sustain meeting these needs for much longer. Like all public school districts the cost of meeting these demands along with the necessity to support quality teachers with competitive compensation and benefits continues to rise. Yet our revenues continue to remain stagnant and far below what our traditional counterparts are operating with.

At Side by Side this much needed increase in funding will result in immediate and necessary changes. The required transition to the Common Core State Standards requires specialization in skills and knowledge for students and teachers alike. This needed increase in funding will help support this transition and greatly increase the chances of its success. Equitable funding will enable quality professional development for our current staff and the potential to expand our personnel to include specialists in the areas of math, reading and writing. Additionally, our facilities, teaching resources, and technological hardware and software will receive the necessary upgrades and maintenance that have long been neglected.

There has been much in the press recently, some of it reflective of public perception, that charter schools pick and choose the students they wish to teach. At Side By Side, our demographics tell a far different story. We teach students from diverse cultural backgrounds, with diverse socio-economic realities, and diverse learning needs. We welcome every child that walks through our doors with a smile, a belief that every child can be successful, and a learning philosophy that reflects this diversity. Each of these children has a voice; this is our mission. Increasingly, however, the needs of a diverse

student population requiring individualized approaches to instruction create fiscal responsibilities that are difficult to meet given the current inequities in funding. These inequities have continued to exist despite increased bureaucratic requirement of charters, requirements that utilize financial and manpower resources. Our kids deserve more.

The need for increased funding for CT Charter Schools is a simple call for equity. Our students, families and teachers are faced with the same challenges as other public school models. Likewise, we are responsible to identical measures of accountability for teaching, learning and curriculum reform. Therefore, it goes without reason that the funding to support our schools should be nothing short of equal as well.