

**2012 Testimony of Dr. Michael Sharpe
Connecticut Charter School Network
Jumoke Academy Charter Schools**

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Michael Sharpe, I'm the President of the Connecticut Charter School Network and CEO of Jumoke Academy Charter Schools in Hartford. I come before you to testify in favor of Governor Malloy's proposal to increase funding to public charter schools by \$2,600. You will hear from many tonight who will benefit, so I will leave the details to their testimony. I'd like to address a broad view of where charters fit into public education and the implications this has for funding.

Our vision for the future is to be part of a cooperative portfolio of public schools whose powers combined can meet the diverse needs of all of our children and families. Not all children will thrive in the same school, and a student's zip code is not always the best determiner of where they ought to go to school.

Let's be clear on two things: 1. Charter schools in Connecticut have done amazing things for their kids and are closing the achievement gap; 2. So are other schools. There is no single solution or one type of school that can face down the challenges of public education. Likewise, no type of school hits the ball out of the park on every front 100% of the time, and there is extreme variation within all school types – especially independent, highly individualized schools like charters. Connecticut's mere 17 public charter schools range from urban to rural, and vary in size from 88 to XXX. Collectively they serve 80 towns. Some draw students from 15 or 20 towns, while other schools serve only certain neighborhoods through agreement with their city. Some schools except their incoming class as 4-year-olds, some except them as 14-year-olds. Some have themes and some do not. And for every one there is a rhyme and reason. You will hear from many of these schools tonight.

The important distinction is not between charters, magnets, traditional schools, vo-tech schools, CommPACT, and vo-ag. The distinction is whether a school is serving the children in it. Too much debate is focused on comparing and contrasting different school models, and deciding which to favor. Instead we should be adopting policy that welcomes all models, offers a variety of schools to meet the diverse needs of children and families, and allows effective schools to flourish while addressing underperforming ones.

Once differences in governance stop being overemphasized, debates about how much municipalities can afford to spend on charter schools are also debates on how to accommodate student mobility generally, and how to fund the type of school organization that best serves students. Debates about whether charter schools reflect certain demographics are also debates about how and how much to control distribution of students in a system that includes choice.

Let's be clear about two more things: 1. Connecticut's public charter schools are committed partners in striving to educate all students in the public school system, including Special Education Students and English Language Learners. Where the blind lottery system has failed to sufficiently reach certain student populations, charter schools and CCSN pledge to address this discrepancy through

more active, targeted recruitment. 2. Charter schools in Connecticut have by and large been a tremendous success, and I must insist that point be acknowledged. No one's perfect, and are more than willing to discuss the details. But it is disheartening to work so hard and achieve such great results for fifteen years, only to have your success picked apart. During that same fifteen years, we have pleaded for equitable and sustainable fun

In order to fund the dynamic portfolio of schools our kids deserve, Connecticut needs policies that provide all of them with equitable and sustainable resources. The Governor's landmark proposal is a substantial move toward reversing years of inequity and constricted growth for charters, allowing these schools to become more effective partners in public education.