

Jack Bryant
President of the Stamford NAACP
Appropriations Committee Hearing on the Education Budget
February 21, 2013

Good Evening Senator Harp, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Jack Bryant, I am the President of the Stamford NAACP, and I am here to testify in support of the Governor's Education Budget Proposal, particularly the expansion of charter schools.

I will be blunt: In Stamford, if you are an African-American or Latino student, odds are you are not getting the education you deserve. The truth is, we have an education system that is failing to provide our youth with the tools they need to succeed.

Last year's education reform law (Public Act 12-116) was a great step toward improving public schools in our state. But we must continue making progress toward ensuring that every child, regardless of where they grow up, has access to a quality public education.

We need to continue identifying what works and what doesn't for our kids – building upon what works, and fixing what is broken. Public charter schools – 80 percent of which outperform traditional public schools in their districts – are proving to be a strong public school option, and we need more.

We need to spend more time on models that work, such as public charter schools, and less time on models that are failing our kids. That's why I have issued a proposal to build the Dr. Joyce Yerwood Academy of Technology Charter School, which will help prepare 150 young people – pre-kindergarten through 3rd grade – to succeed in school and, later, a global economy.

I've partnered with Eugene Campbell of the Yerwood Center and other community members, but we're not the only ones. More than 25 other people submitted proposals for communities across the state, each proposal a statement that we need to enhance public education options.

I know that you have a weight bearing down on your shoulders this legislative session — you have some very difficult decisions to make regarding the budget. But we have to sustain and continue building upon last year's gains for our kids. If we don't, we're telling our children that we will keep them in a system that's unwilling to change to meet their needs.

We're telling them that we don't care if 80 percent of them can't read on grade level, according to the 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress. We're telling our kids that we don't care whether or not they can get a job and take care of their families. We're putting a dollar sign on our students' futures and saying they're not worth the investment.

Yes, you have some hard choices, but in this regard, your choice is clear — provide the funding to create more high-quality public school options for those students who need it most. We need you to allow us to create more public charter schools.

Thank you.