

Testimony of Achievement First
Parents

February 15th 2013

- Parent #1: My name is Florence Brown and my child attends AF Amistad Academy.
- Parent #2: My name is Elizabeth Smith, and my child attends AF Hartford Academy.
- Parent #3: My name is Tanya Walker and my child attends AF Hartford Academy.
- Parent #4: My name is Karl Hardwicke and my child attends AF Hartford Academy.
- As a parent, there is nothing more important than ensuring your child has a quality education that provides for their individual needs.
- Our Charter School has provided that kind of focus for our kids.
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Parent #1: Florence Brown

- Over the past few years, charter schools in this state are doing what many other public schools have not been able to do: help students achieve academically. I can see that our charter school students are competing with their peers in the surrounding suburbs, and outperforming their city based peers. I personally have five children. Because the public schools in New Haven are not up to acceptable standards, three of my kids attend private schools and the other two go to charter schools. I think it's necessary to point out that I am a nurse and my husband is a doctor. We could afford to send all of our children to private school but we do not need to, we are very pleased with the education our children receive at the charters they attend.

- Every year, I see my tax dollars used in my city's public schools, but never at the schools

best serving my children. These are schools that need full support. Why should you support our schools? A simple reason: I look at my school, and I know that its writing scores are higher than those of private school students and public school students in Darien, Westport, and Madison.

- In tandem with huge increases in funding for traditional public schools, the Governor's budget—though it doesn't equalize our funding—does fund us at a number that is closer: \$10,500 for next year. We ask you to support this figure, and help making funding fair for all of Connecticut's children.

Parent #2: Elizabeth Smith

- Tonight, though, we're here not just to ask for your support in ensuring fair funding, but also to respond to common criticisms we've heard of our schools. In particular, we've heard countless times that our children don't deserve fair funding because they're different, because they've been "creamed." We want to assure you that is not true. Charter school students are admitted by random lottery, and many of the families here tonight—including me—have children with special needs.

- My child has an IEP, and has struggled throughout his educational career in school. For a

short time, he was in a magnet school, and while they tried hard, his needs were not met. The ONLY school I've found that can adequately support his special needs is his charter school. Instead of his reading level dropping, it's skyrocketing.

Parent #3: Tanya Walker

- We are not just parents, we are taxpayers, and we have been concerned that under the current funding mechanisms, the public school my child attends is funded at a lesser rate than the traditional public schools in towns across the state. I see my tax dollars used every year for other public schools, but not for the one I've chosen for my son. The

one that is giving him the best—and maybe only—chance to succeed in college and in his professional life.

- All week, my son has been home doing extra work while we were snowed in. He is learning every day, and will be successful because of the support he gets each day at school. The students at our charter schools are taught from the beginning that they can and WILL climb the mountain to college.

- But these schools need MORE support from us. When my son gets out of school at the end of the day, there is no bus to take him to a safe after school activity. So as a state, and a community we need to do whatever it takes to make sure our schools are better schools for our kids. My child's education is depending on your support!

- Thank you.

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Parent #4: Karl Hardwicke

- Let us close by saying that charters are creating an educated workforce that will move our state forward, but it's clearly the case that they must grow to do this for even more students. We need to provide our public charter schools with the funding they need to expand and provide more students with a quality education, not continue to cripple them. This has gone on for too long.

- Our neighborhoods need these schools. Every day when I'm at work in our community, in our jails, I can see that there is more to be done. There is a direct correlation between education and the amount of crime happening on our streets. The children we do not educate effectively are the ones who risk incarceration down the road. If we are going to make a direct contribution to changing crime rates in our community, we must educate our kids. And the difference in charter schools is simply this: a good education puts our kids on the path to success.

- I have neighbors and family members who are desperate to attend a great public charter school. If we are going to change our community parents must have options to ensure their children are educated. I know that fixing the inequitable funding situation is their only chance to do so.

- Thank you for your support.