



Testimony of Jeremiah Grace
Connecticut State Director, Northeast Charter Schools Network
834 Asylum Avenue, Hartford, CT 06105
Connecticut General Assembly, Appropriations Committee
February 13, 2014 Public Hearing

Chairpersons Walker and Bye, and respected members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I'm Jeremiah Grace, Connecticut State Director for the Northeast Charter Schools Network. We are the statewide membership association for public charter schools in Connecticut and New York.

Our primary message for today is "thank you." The state's charter school students, parents, teachers and administrators are grateful to Governor Malloy and the General Assembly for the investments you made in public schools of choice as part of the landmark education reform bill of 2012 and the biennial budget adopted in 2013. We were heartened to see that these investments were not disturbed in Governor Malloy's most recent proposal. We hope that the General Assembly takes a similar approach and we are committed to working together on these issues.

Fairer Funding for Public Charter School Students

Public charter schools students in Connecticut receive far less funding than their friends and neighbors that attend district schools. In some cities, the disparity is as great as several thousand dollars per student. Connecticut's landmark education reform bill of 2012 attempted to make progress toward closing that gap by increasing the per-pupil funding for public charter school students. After a mid-year \$1 million cut to charter funding due to state budget deficit mitigation efforts, last year's biennial budget restored many of these funding increases. We remain very thankful for those efforts.

These investments are starting to make an impact. Per pupil funding for state charter school students rose by \$300 per student for the current 2013-14 school year to \$10,500 per pupil, and will go up another \$500 per student for 2014-15 to reach \$11,000 per pupil. Our member schools have already started putting those funds to work for their students by investing in their programs and preparing for the transition to new state standards and tests.

We hope that the General Assembly will protect these investments again this year.

But work still remains for 2015. The 2012 education reform bill promised charter students an increase to \$11,500 per pupil, but this was delayed in the biennial budget adopted last year. It is our hope that in 2015 the state's lawmakers will return to that original promise in the education reform bill, and get charter funding closer to the ECS foundation amount of \$11,754 per student.

Funding for New Public Charter Schools and Enrollment Growth

We cannot underestimate the impact of the biennial budget's investments in the growth of high quality public charter schools. There are currently 4,273 names on public charter school waitlists, most of which are in the state's lowest performing school districts. Parents are demanding more options and charters want to be a part of the solution. The biennial budget's funding for 1,000 more seats in existing charter schools and four new state charter schools over two years was a sound investment.

The impact is already being felt by Connecticut families. Three new charter schools were approved last summer (two state, one local) and this past September, Waterbury's first public charter school, Brass City Charter School, opened its doors to 114 students in Pre-K through First Grade. Two more new charters will open in Windham and New Haven this fall, and funding for two additional new state charter schools remains.

Existing schools like Highville Charter School, Achievement First, and Park City Prep have also begun to grow to serve even more families with the funding committed in last year's biennial budget.

We support Governor Malloy's proposal to maintain those investments and are committed to working with the General Assembly on this issue.

Here too, it's important to keep up the momentum. Several groups of accomplished educators have applied to open new charter schools this fall and in future years. If Connecticut is ever to meet the needs of those 4,273 names on charter school wait lists, maintaining these investments in new school creation for 2015 and beyond will be vital.

Access to School Security Funding

We support Governor Malloy's proposal to include public charter schools and other public schools of choice in the next round of funding for school security improvements. Charter school students, teacher and administrators have the same need for a safe learning environment as anyone else, yet, they were denied access to this funding opportunity last fall. This, despite the fact that Connecticut law says charters should be eligible for grants on equal footing with district schools. Governor Malloy's proposal would rectify this oversight and our schools are grateful for the support.

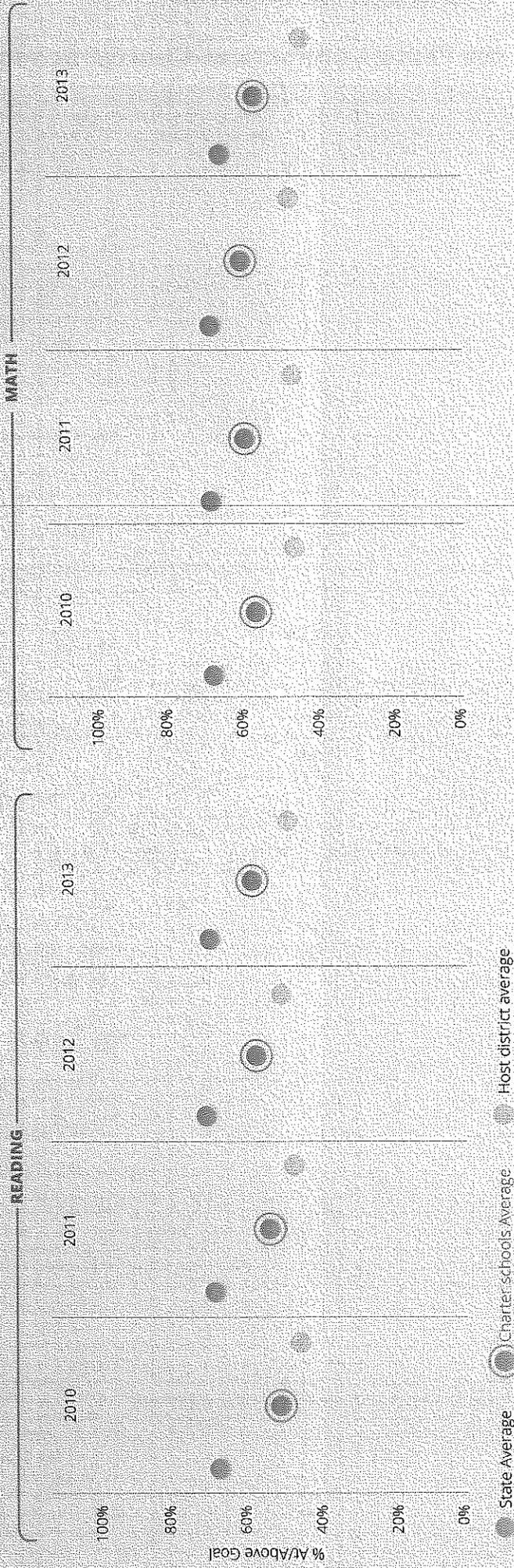
Conclusion

We thank Governor Malloy and the General Assembly for their continued support and want you to know that the general public supports your efforts. A recent public opinion poll by Benenson Strategy Group and ConnCAN found that a strong majority of Connecticut voters have a favorable opinion of public charter schools (62%), and even more support the 2012 education reforms (73%). Keeping up this momentum is essential if we are to give more children the opportunity to attend a great school and build a bright future.

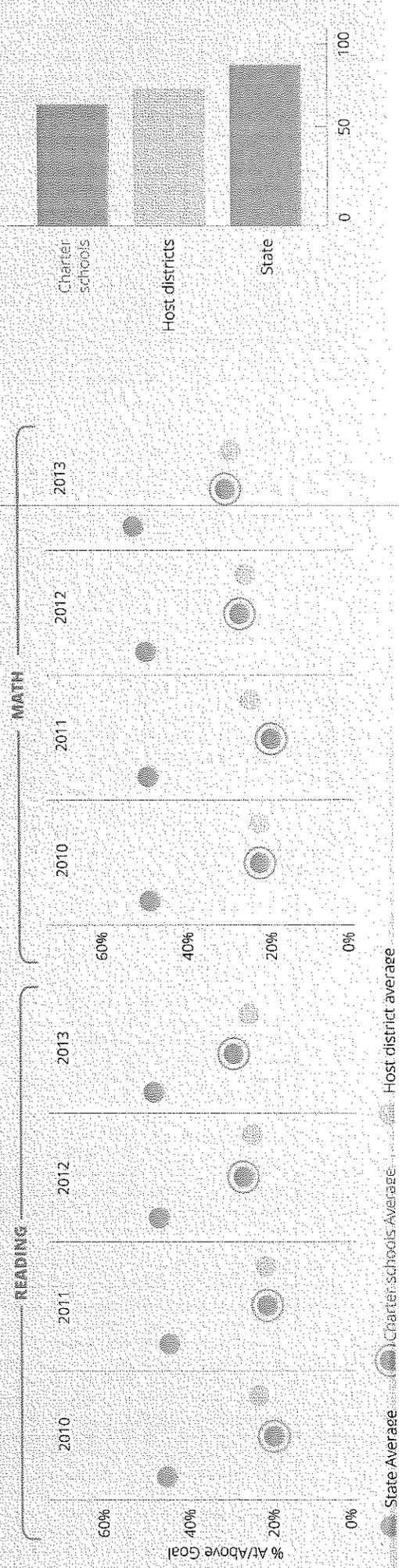
Focus on the Facts: Connecticut Charter Schools

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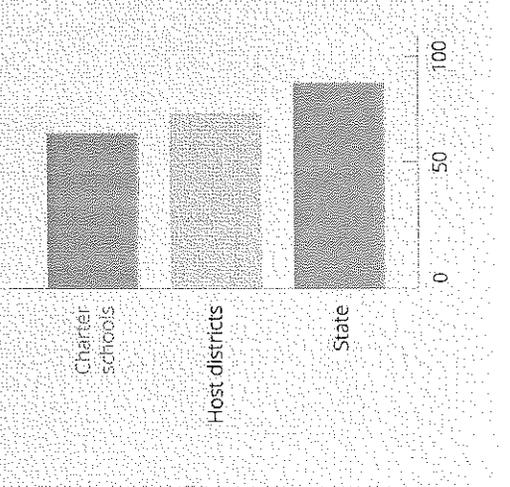
Grades 3-8 CMT Reading and Math Comparison Over Time



High School CAPT Reading and Math Comparison Over Time



2012 Graduation Rates





FAST CHARTER FACTS

28

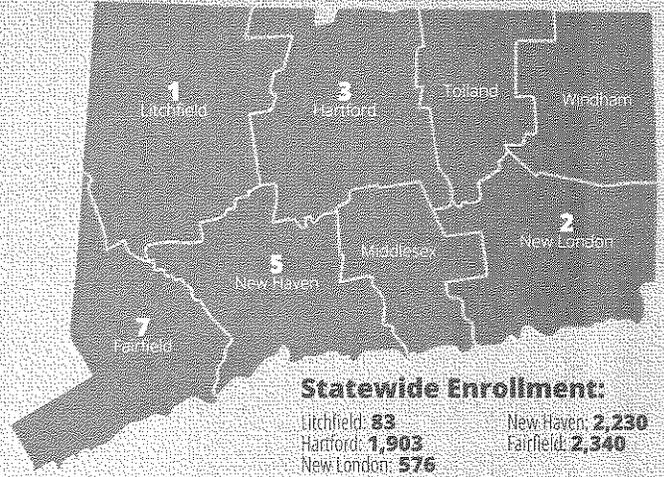
Approved charters to date

8

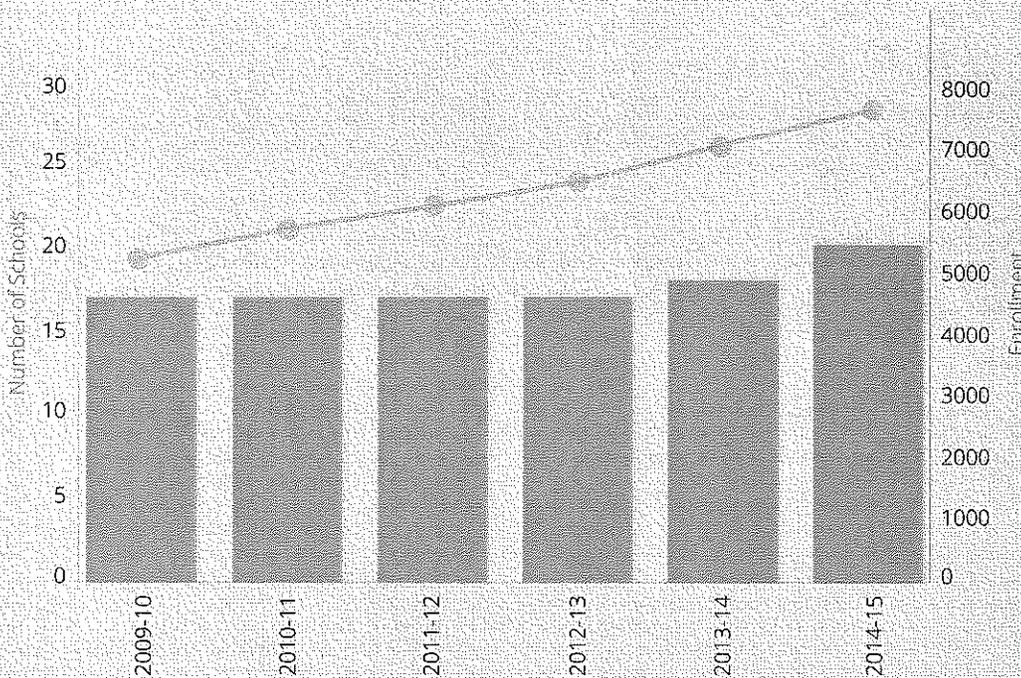
Closed charters to date

2

District Schools have converted



Number of Connecticut Schools and Charter School Enrollment Over Time



18

Charter schools open statewide

Enrollment 2012-13

6,518

Est. enrollment 2013-14

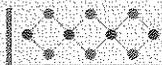
7,132

In 2014-15

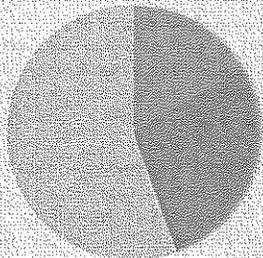
2

new charter schools currently chartered to open

*There is no chartered enrollment data currently available for: 1997-2001



2013 Charter School Affiliation



5 Affiliated with a charter management organization

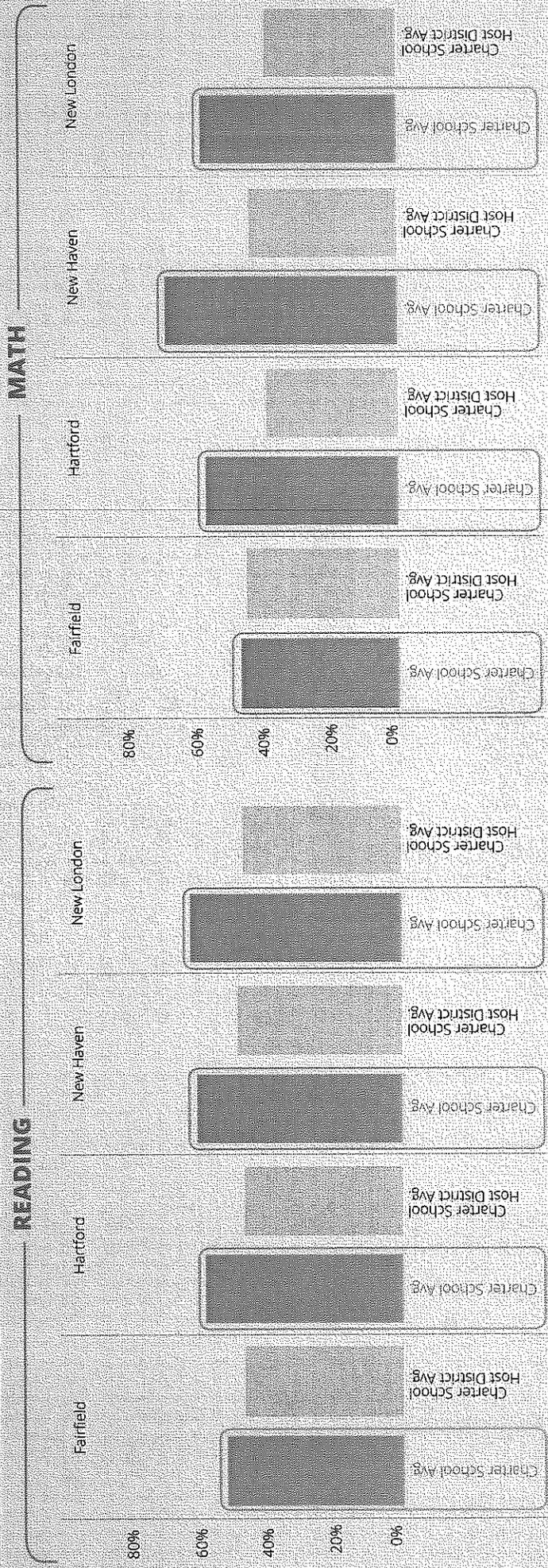
3 Affiliated with a partner organization

10 Are independent

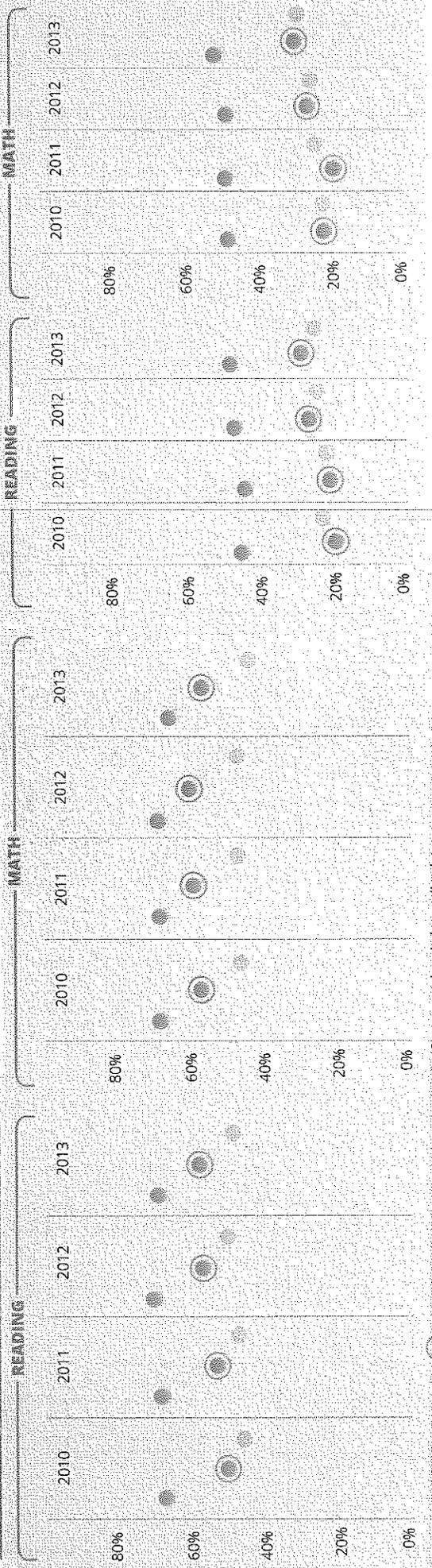
17% of charter schools have a union



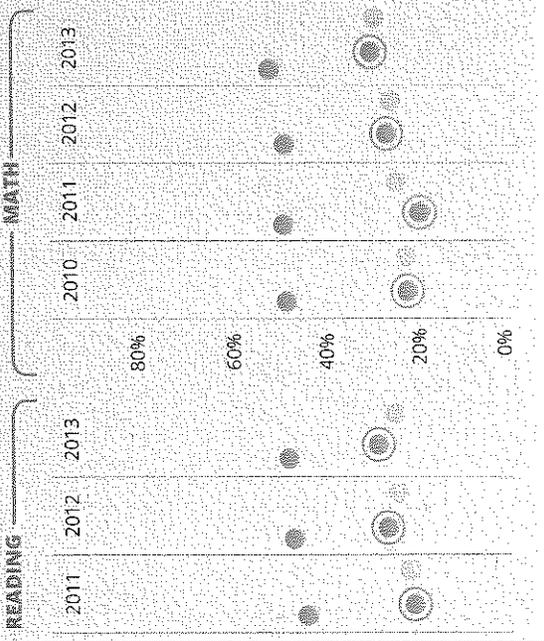
2013 Grades 3-8 CMT Scores by NECSN Region



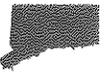
Grades 3-8 CMT Scores Over Time



High School CAPT Scores Over Time



*CMT scores include Stamford Academy that serves an overage under-oversee student body.



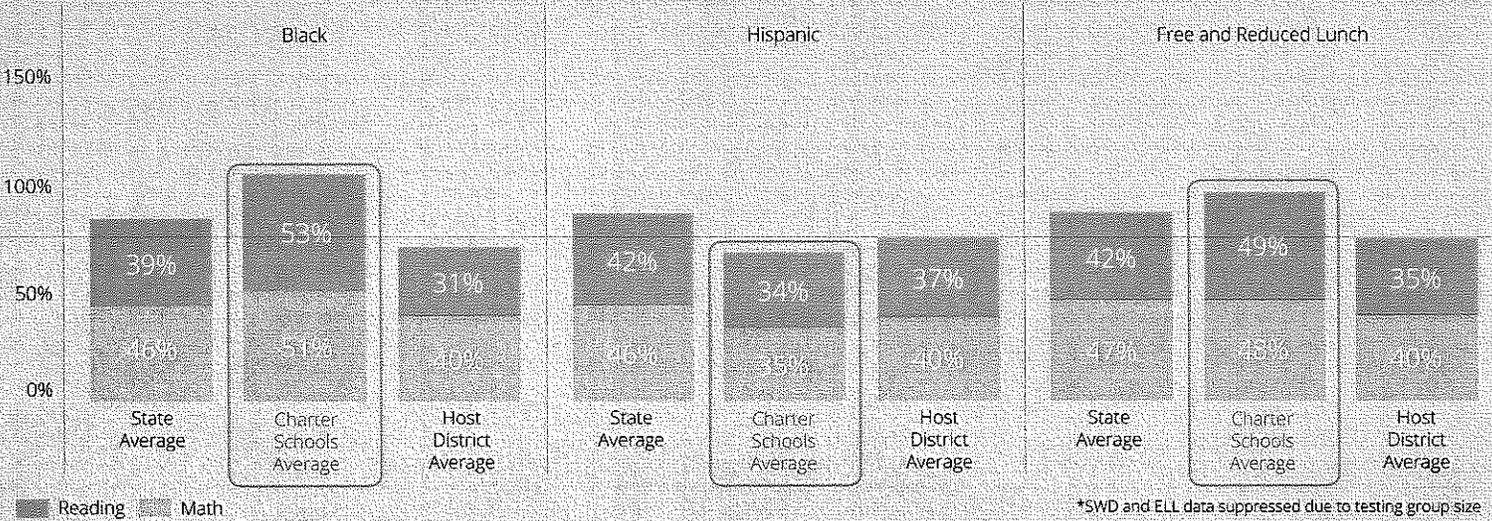
High-Need Students Performing Well in CT Charters

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2013 Grades 3-8 CMT Scores by Demographics

CMT Testing Results of At-Risk Students

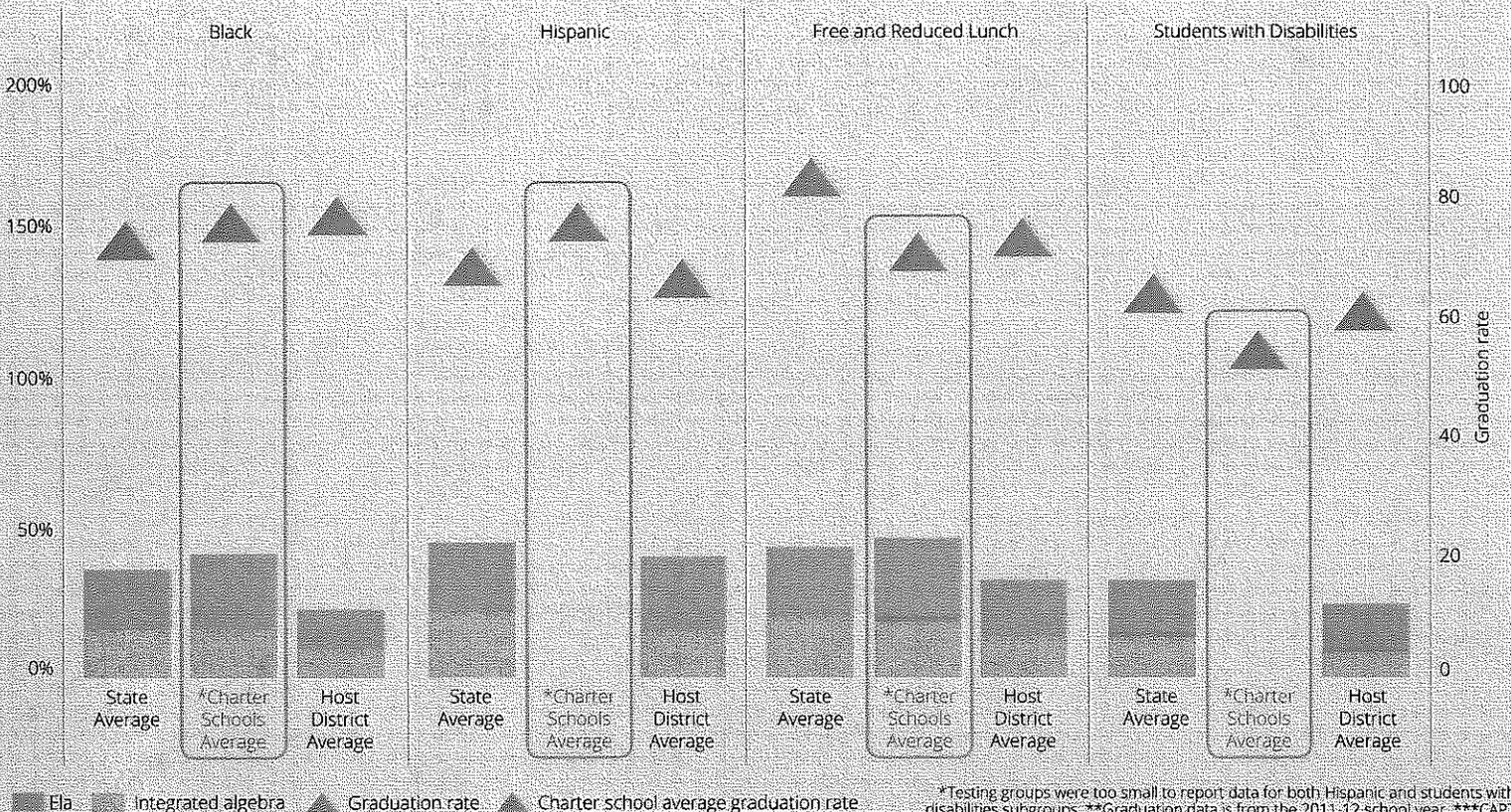
Charter schools outperform Connecticut and Host District averages in **2** out of the **3** high-need demographics in both subjects. Charter schools have an average goal rate **4** percentage points higher than the state in reading across the below high-need demographics. Charter schools have an average goal rate **5** percentage points higher than the host district average in reading and **11** percentage points in math across the below high-need demographics.

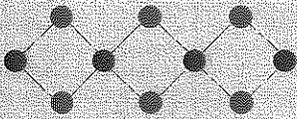


2013 High School CAPT Scores and Grad Rate by Demographics

CAPT Testing and Graduation Results of At-Risk Students

Charter schools have an average goal rate **10** percentage points higher than the host district average in math and **6** percentage points in reading across the below high-need demographics.





THANK YOU

The Connecticut public charter school community thanks Governor Malloy and the General Assembly for the recent investments to increase the number of public school options in the state.

CHARTER SCHOOL FACTS

Public charter schools are free, open-enrollment schools that admit students via a blind lottery.

7,132
students enrolled in Connecticut charter schools

87%
are black or Latino.

18
public charter schools.

71 of 169
Connecticut towns send kids to public charter schools.

4,273
names are on public charter school wait lists.

81%
of Connecticut public charter schools are performing better than the district schools in their town.

2/3
of charter students come from low-income families;

PER PUPIL FUNDING IS STRONG STEP IN RIGHT DIRECTION

\$300 more per pupil in 2013-14, and **\$500** more in 2014-15

- Per pupil funding increases for public charter school students are an important step toward fairer funding.
- **We thank the Governor and General Assembly** for keeping their promises.
- Schools have already begun putting these much-needed funds to work.
- But there's still work to do, because charter students still receive far less funding than their friends and neighbors that attend district schools in the same town.

NEW GRADES AND NEW SCHOOLS ARE LIFELINE TO KIDS ON WAIT LISTS

New students for existing schools and **4 new state charter schools**

- Funding for enrollment increases and new schools is vital because there are over **4,000** names on charter school wait lists.
- The **first new charter schools in five years** were approved last summer, and Waterbury's Brass City Charter School opened its doors in September.
- Still more educators are applying to open new schools for next school year and beyond.

SCHOOL SECURITY IS IMPORTANT TO CHARTER SCHOOLS

Charter schools **eligible for school security grants** under Malloy proposal

- Charter school students and teachers have the same need for a safe learning environment as students and teachers in any other public school.
- We support the Governor's proposal to include charter schools in the school security grant program for next year.



FAST CHARTER FACTS

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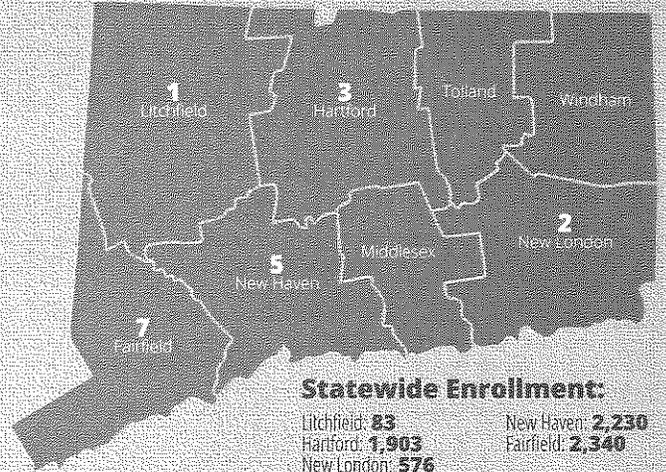
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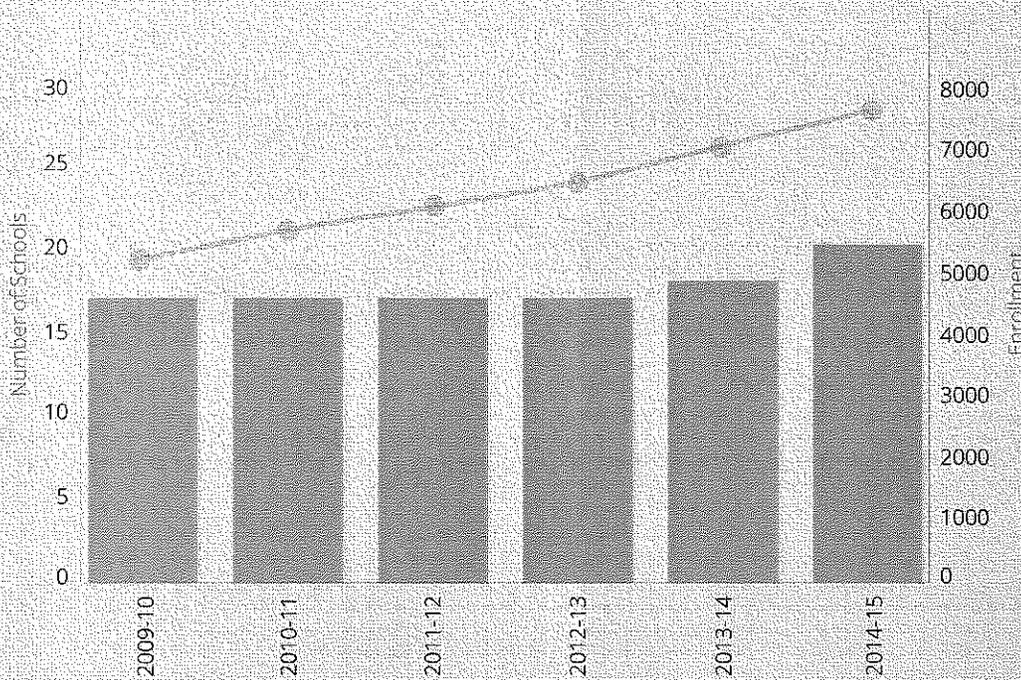
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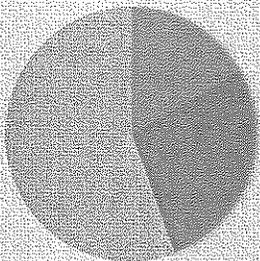
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