

Testimony of Kadejah Gamble
Student, Achievement First Hartford High
Before the Connecticut General Assembly Appropriations Committee
March 3, 2015

Chairwoman Walker, Chairwoman Bye and respected members of the General Assembly Appropriations Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak about Governor Malloy's proposed budget and how it impacts me and my school, Achievement First Hartford High School.

I am an eleventh grader at Achievement First Hartford High. I am not exaggerating when I say that this school has changed my life and my future. Before I came to Achievement First in the fifth grade, I was not a student who wanted to learn. At my old school I wasn't reading on grade level with my classmates, but was still pushed through from grade to grade. Even at a young age, I would skip class or hang out in the back of class. I disrespected teachers. Bottom line, I just didn't care much about school or learning. That's what my life was like.

When I came to Achievement First Hartford Academy, there was a huge change. I grew academically. I became an enthusiastic learner. I reflected on my character and changed how I treated other people. And when I struggled during the transition, everyone was there to help pick me up. If I got an answer wrong, no one laughed at me—rather, my fellow students helped me understand how to get the right answer. By the time I finished fifth-grade, I was reading fluently and doing well in math.

Today I'm an honors student at AF Hartford High. I'm the vice president of my eleventh grade class. I'm active in community service and help tutor younger students with their studies. I also know I have a bright future ahead of me. I am interested in attending Connecticut College and then going on to become a psychologist who helps children and teenagers, so that I can use what I have learned to help others in the community.

As an eleventh grader, I am currently in the oldest grade in my school. My school has been growing grade-by-grade each year. Next year, I'll be in twelfth grade and I am so excited to be a member of AF Hartford High's first graduating class. However, that may not happen. If the charter grade growth funding in the state budget is not approved, we won't have a twelfth grade. If that happens, I don't know what I will do. I want to continue on with my AF Hartford classmates—to be a senior who takes AP classes, who goes to a senior prom, who walks across the graduation stage, and who enrolls at a great college.

I also think it is very important that our students, who attend a public charter school, get the same state funding as other students, who attend a regular public school. AF Hartford High is not "less than" any other public school and its students are not "less than" another other public school students. AF is helping every student -- no matter what economic class, race or background they come from -- succeed in school and in life. Help our school reach more kids like me by giving it the financial funding it deserves.

Hartford can be a hard place to live. We don't always have the best educational options, the best environment, or the best influences. I'm lucky that I got to attend Achievement First Hartford Academy. My school has shown me that doors can open and that college can be a reality. My classmates and I are depending on you to make sure that the state funding exists so that we'll have a twelfth grade next year.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak and for your support of Achievement First Hartford High.