



Testimony of
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Education Committee Hearing
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SB 943 An Act Concerning Charter School Modernization and Reform

Good afternoon Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee. My name is David Cicarella and I am the President of New Haven Federation of Teachers.

To truly strengthen the quality and improve the public trust of charter schools we need to be sure that all students have equal access to all educational opportunities. SB 943 would be vastly improved if it required charter schools to do the following:

1. Accept an appropriate share of Special Education and ELL students.
2. Stop closing their doors on October 1st, denying access to students throughout the school year. In New Haven, as in all public schools, students enter throughout the year. We must accept them. That is our role as a public school taking tax dollars in Connecticut. No school should deny access to our students on any arbitrary date.
3. Stop returning students “that do not fit in” throughout the school year.
4. Stop the negative, divisive dialogue. (calling our public schools “drop-out factories” , stating that “students are trapped in failing schools”, etc)

Students who are returned to us are among the most highly disruptive students. The claim that the “parents withdrew the students” is only technically true as the parent must sign the withdrawal slip. However, parents and students have told us over and over that they were often presented with draconian options that no parent would accept so they “voluntarily” withdrew their child(ren). Our administrator interns that trained in Achievement First Schools have confirmed these tactics upon returning to the New Haven Public Schools.

Negative rhetoric has no place in this arena. Despite claims to the contrary, the charter school coalition not only continues, but intensifies their attacks. In my meetings with Achievement First (beginning in June 2014) we agreed to work together and collaborate for the good of Connecticut’s public school students. I am far from perfect, but I do have a good reputation as a collaborator and one who is willing to take the lead on difficult issues. Our success in addressing tough issues, such as tenure and teacher evaluation (TEVAL), is testimony to that. However, I do admit to being completely frustrated by the tactics and policies of charter schools.

Perhaps the worst example of exclusionary practices and downright discrimination is Amistad High School. For 15 years they have only accepted students from their own Achievement First network. Students had to be from one of the Achievement First feeder schools in order to be accepted. So, after systematically weeding out disciplinary problems from kindergarten through grade 8, only students graduating from Achievement First schools were allowed access to their

high schools. And they have the absolute audacity to claim superior student achievement despite “never doing what we do.”

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. Simply stated, I ask that all charter schools employ the same admissions and transfers policies of traditional public schools. Whether traditional or charter, we are all public schools operating with tax dollars. There should not be two separate sets of rules.

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.