



To: NHPS Board of Education

From: Garth Harries, Superintendent

Date: February 9, 2015

Re: Initial BOE Consideration of Proposed Achievement First Partnership

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Although there has been much public comment and discussion on the issue, tonight will be the first actual public presentation of the Achievement First (AF) Partnership proposal, with all of its different dimensions. It will also be the first opportunity for the Board of Education as a body to hear and discuss the issue in full. In that context, the goal of tonight is understanding and exploration, not making a final decision. This memo provides a summary of the potential partnership.

***Why Consider the Partnership?*** The core vision of the district is centered in the idea of engagement. In the language of our vision statement, “Engagement is the foundation of learning and growth, for students, adults, and the school district as a whole.” As a district over recent years, we have engaged our educators and the New Haven community across conventional fault lines to build a nationally recognized and powerful reform effort that has resulted in meaningful improvements for New Haven students. That engagement has centered in escaping either/or dichotomies, and instead embracing a both/and approach: in this case, both pursuit of excellence in both district and charters schools. Ultimately, the appropriate lens to use in evaluating this proposed partnership is whether the engagement is good for New Haven students, New Haven families, and the New Haven Public Schools – and I believe it can be.

***What Would the Partnership Involve?*** The proposed partnership addresses a wide range of issues and topics. Some of these have been points of contention over many years; some reflect attention to new issues in education; and all are focused on strengthening the education of New Haven students whether in district or charter schools. Any partnership should align with the core values of the district: collaboration, equity, and growth & innovation.

**Collaboration:** The partnership agreement would include a number of concrete steps to build a stronger, constructive, two-way relationship between the District and AF on behalf of New Haven families. This includes a commitment to avoid direct criticism, support of philanthropic fundraising, establishment and participation in practice sharing forums to encourage identification of district and charter areas of excellence and areas of growth, participation by AF in the district’s Restorative Practices as a particular area of development for the network, and public sharing of school-level data on learning results, student needs, and resources.

**Equity:** To address longstanding concerns about enrollment equity, the agreement would ensure full representation of the New Haven population in the choice process for all AF schools,

and would create a process to both limit mid-year transfers from AF schools back to the district and to fairly address whatever issues may be motivating the request for transfers. The goal here is for AF to take a lead in fair share enrollment, and for us all to focus on the needs of those families who need additional support.

**Innovation:** As one part of the district's innovation agenda, the district would support the creation of Elm City Imagine, a progressive school model drawn from best practices observed around the country – including creative scheduling, personalized learning platforms, and an orientation to enrichment and engagement of students. This opportunity should reinforce and encourage existing innovation efforts in the district, including the student-centered learning work in the high schools, professional learning innovations through our professional educators program, and emerging innovative practices in many of our New Haven schools.

**What Does Support to Elm City Imagine Entail?** In order to support the creation of the Elm City Imagine pilot for New Haven students, the Board would provide in-kind and contracted support for students in Elm City Imagine in the total amount of \$700 per student, on top of the \$11,000 per student provided by the State. This would be in addition to the legally required contribution for the transportation and special education of students in charters, and in part acknowledges that public operating support for charters does not include committed support for the building and capital resources. It is important to note that this additional district contribution is substantially less than originally discussed, or what is being provided in other CT jurisdictions. It also reflects just a small portion of the almost \$14,000 of operating resources that would be devoted to those students if they were enrolled in NHPS schools. This fiscal advantage, along with careful enrollment planning, would enable the District to target class size reduction starting in Kindergarten in 5 to 9 NHPS schools: at 5 schools, class-size reduction would be ~9 student reduction or a target of ~17 students per class; at 9 schools, it would be ~5 students and ~21 students per class.

**Next Steps:** Further consideration of the proposed partnership will happen both at the Finance & Operations and Governance Committees next Monday, and be brought back to the full board for appropriate action at a subsequent meeting. The specific vehicle for memorializing the partnership would be a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). A draft of that MOU, as of February 7<sup>th</sup>, is attached and reflects the issues and understandings described above – we expect the MOU to continue to evolve based on input today and from other stakeholders.

There is no question there is controversy associated with the proposed partnership. My hope is that this tension can be a creative tension, which strengthens the work of us all on behalf of New Haven students. Along the many dimensions of this partnership, there is the opportunity for a historic engagement focused on collaboration, equity, and innovation, with district and charter schools working together on behalf of New Haven students and families. My hope is that our ultimate agreement will capture that opportunity.