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ACHIEVEMENT FIRST HARTFORD ACADEMY POSTS GREATEST GAINS IN DISTRICT

Hartford Superintendent Adamowski Applauds Achievement First as a Model of Reform

July 29, 2009 – Hartford, Conn. – Last summer, the city, state and a coalition of private donors came together in an unprecedented effort to save a proposed charter school – and today it is clear that the tireless work was worth it. The students at Achievement First Hartford Academy posted the greatest performance gains of any school in the district on the 2009 Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT).

According to Superintendent Steven J. Adamowski, “This is a testament to what a school can accomplish. Achievement First Hartford Academy is a critical element in our plans to reorganize Hartford Public Schools into an all-choice system of high-performing learning centers.” Achievement First Hartford Academy is part of a larger “All Choice” plan to transform Hartford public schools through accountability and full parental choice.

Achievement First Hartford Academy fifth-grade students achieved an average of 68 percent proficiency on the CMT: 76 percent in math, 45 percent in reading and 85 percent in writing. In the 2007-08 academic year, 82 of the 85 Achievement First Hartford Academy fifth graders attended Hartford district schools as fourth graders, and averaged only 48 percent proficiency. As a cohort, they improved an impressive 20 percentage points on the CMT in just one year. (See chart below for year-over-year comparison scores in each subject).

Hartford Public Schools uses an Overall School Index (OSI) to measure student progress in every Hartford school. The cohort OSI for this group as fourth graders last year was 46.6. This year, as fifth graders, this group improved the OSI score to 59.6, the most significant gain in the district.

“We are extremely proud of our students. They proved this year that Hartford children can make significant gains when they work hard and have a supportive and focused school environment,” remarks Jeff House, principal at Achievement First Hartford Academy Middle. “We are also very proud to be a part of the larger effort to reform Hartford schools, led by Superintendent Adamowski. Achievement First Hartford Academy is modeled after the success of Amistad Academy in New Haven, and we are glad that Superintendent Adamowski had faith that this same school model could be replicated successfully in Hartford. We intend to have even higher achievement results in 2010, and to demonstrate even more emphatically that simple, feasible reforms like a longer school day, freedom to recruit and retain the best teachers, and a structured and positive school culture can and will make a real impact on student achievement.”

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Achievement First Hartford Academy Elementary posted similarly impressive performance gains on the Development Reading Assessment (DRA), with kindergarteners improving from an average DRA level of two at the beginning of the academic year to nine at the end of kindergarten. (The proficiency standard at the end of kindergarten is four). First graders achieved an average DRA level of 20 at the end of the academic year, outperforming the proficiency standard by four points.

As Connecticut prepares to potentially compete for “Race to the Top” federal funding, Secretary Duncan has said that the U.S. Department of Education will be “scrutinizing state applications for a coordinated commitment to reform.” One of the 19 selection criteria in the recently released draft guidelines calls for increasing the supply of high-quality charter schools such as Achievement First Hartford Academy.

The school was saved last year due to public and philanthropic support galvanized by Achievement First parents, Governor Rell, Superintendent Adamowski, Mayor Perez, the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving and other private donors. The absence of state funding placed Achievement First Hartford Academy in a precarious situation only weeks before its first day of school. Through a strong commitment to closing the achievement gap, necessary funds and in-kind considerations were secured from the State of Connecticut, the Hartford Board of Education, the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, the Olson Foundation, George Weiss, Jon Sackler, Mary Corson, the Hartford Steamboiler, the H.A. Vance Foundation, Michael and Joyce Critelli, the Imagineers Foundation, and anonymous gifts from a Greenwich foundation and individual donors.

Due to continuing resolutions by the governor and unresolved state budget discussions, Achievement First Hartford Academy remains unfunded for the current academic year.

The backbone of the school’s high student achievement program is a schedule that provides for more time on task – nearly three-and-a-half hours of literacy instruction and 90 minutes of math instruction for every student every day. In addition, the school focuses on developing strength of character through community-building activities and adherence to the REACH values of respect, enthusiasm, achievement, citizenship and hard work. The school also has a nascent after-school program that will grow until scholars are participating in a full array of sports teams, music and arts opportunities, and academic clubs.

Percent of student proficiency on the Connecticut Mastery Test:

	Math	Reading	Writing
Fourth Grade (Prior to AF Hartford – 2008)	52%	35%	57%
Fifth Grade (After one year at AF Hartford – 2009)	76%	45%	85%

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About Achievement First

The mission of Achievement First is to close the achievement gap and deliver on the promise of equal educational opportunity for all children in America. With its college-preparatory focus, the Achievement First model is attaining breakthrough academic gains throughout its network of public charter schools, which includes the nationally acclaimed Amistad Academy, Elm City

College Prep, Achievement First Bridgeport Academy and eight public charter schools in Brooklyn, NY. In September 2009, the Achievement First network of schools will educate nearly 4,500 children.

For more information about Achievement First, please visit www.achievementfirst.org.