

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 6, 2015

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**NEW HAVEN COMMUNITY LEADERS URGE BOARD OF EDUCATION  
TO APPROVE ELM CITY IMAGINE & NHPS-AF PARTNERSHIP**

***50 community leaders send joint letter of support to New Haven Board of Education***

NEW HAVEN, CONN. – Fifty New Haven leaders spanning the religious, non-profit, civic, education, political and business sectors joined together to urge the New Haven Board of Education (BOE) to support the creation of Elm City Imagine Elementary (Achievement First’s newly proposed public charter school), the proposed partnership between New Haven Public Schools (NHPS) and Achievement First (AF), and continued “bold” work for school change in New Haven.

The letter, which was emailed to the Board earlier today, cited the creation of Elm City Imagine Elementary and the NHPS-AF partnership as “exactly the types of measures that NHPS should be undertaking to continue the forward momentum in our city and ensure that all of our students succeed.” The Board of Education is currently considering whether to approve the partnership agreement.

Elm City Imagine, if approved, will open with kindergarten and first-grade classes in August 2015 and eventually grow into a Pre-K – 4 campus serving approximately 550 students. As cited in the letter, “The school will offer an innovative new school design model, which draws on best practices from across the country, the latest learnings from cognitive science, and the best thinking of some of New Haven’s own students, parents and teachers. Students will be provided with accelerated academics, taught habits of success, experience excellent enrichment opportunities and be supported by a powerful school community that will help them on their path towards success in college, career and life.” This new school design, known as “Greenfield”, has been developed by Achievement First. More about the school design can be found at [achievementfirst.org/greenfield](http://achievementfirst.org/greenfield).

Bishop Theodore L. Brooks, Sr. of the Beulah Heights First Pentecostal Church, one of the many faith leaders to sign the letter, commented, “We need to come together as a city and do more to support our young people. We’ve made progress, but we have a lot more to do.” Brooks continued, “That’s why so many faith leaders are excited and supportive of this new opportunity for New Haven families. Our kids need hope and the promise of a better future. Elm City Imagine would be another place where children can feel that hope and realize that promise.”

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Howard K. Hill, a civic and business leader stated, “Our city needs great public schools – the health of our community and economy depends on it. Children who do not get a great education are very unlikely to have real economic options and successful careers,” said Hill who was recently installed as the first African-American president of the Connecticut Funeral Directors Association. “We won’t be a great city if we don’t act boldly to do what we need to do for our young people. I support this partnership because I support anything that creates much-needed, high-quality opportunities for children and families.”

One of the letter’s signatories, Gwendolyn Samuel, president of the Connecticut Parents Union, said, “Elm City Imagine Elementary will provide New Haven parents with another high-quality public school option to meet their children’s academic needs. I’m pleased to join so many other community leaders to help ensure that this new school becomes a reality. Great schools nurture independent thinking and self-confident children and, most importantly, provide them with bright futures.”

Achievement First is seeking to open this new school in partnership with New Haven Public Schools and to, more broadly, strengthen its existing partnership and collaboration with NHPS. Achievement First would more closely align its enrollment practices, particularly mid-year transfers, with those of the district. AF and NHPS would also commit to sharing best practices and engaging in professional development together. Given the way state charter schools are funded, this partnership would also result in an influx of additional state resources to the city and would enable NHPS to significantly reduce class size in its highest-need schools. Since Elm City Imagine will need a new facility, NHPS will provide \$700 per pupil to support the facility-related expenses of the new school.

Khadijah Muhammad, a New Haven parent advocate and member of the Parent Leader Council at Amistad Academy Middle, said, “We need to come together and work as a team—public charter schools and traditional public schools—to do right by our children and provide them with a first-class education. Our schools should be working together to identify what works and share those learnings with others. The proposed NHPS-AF partnership does exactly that.”

Commenting on why many of New Haven’s top employers support these proposals, Anthony P. Rescigno, president of the Greater New Haven Chamber of Commerce, said, “There’s a direct link between the quality of education we provide our kids today and the growth of New Haven’s economy tomorrow. The jobs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century require a different set of skills, and employers across the city are looking to hire individuals with the skills that Elm City Imagine aims to give its students through hands-on experience, extended field trips and self-guided learning. This school will also instill in students critical-thinking and problem-solving skills,

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successful work habits and the ability to leverage technology.” Rescigno continued, “New Haven has made great strides, and in many ways has been a national model for education reform. Elm City Imagine and the proposed NHPS-AF partnership would be another huge step in the right direction.”

Signatories of the letter (attached) represent a diverse cross-section of individuals, including:

- Pastors and faith leaders from New Haven churches and congregations;
- Parent leaders and advocates from public charter schools and traditional public schools;
- Leaders from New Haven non-profit, social service and civic organizations;
- The presidents of every college and university in New Haven;
- Local elected officials from the Board of Alders;
- Executives from New Haven’s leading business organizations and largest employers,

Dacia Toll, president and co-CEO of Achievement First, said in response to this letter, “Achievement First is honored that Elm City Imagine and the proposed NHPS-AF partnership has received such broad and widespread support from so many of New Haven’s most trusted and respected leaders.” Toll went on to say, “We are eager to provide New Haven families with another innovative, high-quality public school option, and we look forward to partnering even more closely with NHPS as we collectively work together toward building a stronger city and brighter future for our children.”

Read the community letter here [bit.ly/1zWQUZF](http://bit.ly/1zWQUZF).

*To learn more, contact Amanda Pinto at [amandapinto@achievementfirst.org](mailto:amandapinto@achievementfirst.org) or 203-726-0168.*

### **About Achievement First**

Achievement First is a non-profit 501(c)3 organization that currently operates 29 public charter schools in Connecticut, New York and Rhode Island. The mission of Achievement First is to close the achievement gap and deliver on the promise of equal educational opportunity for all children, regardless of race, economic status or zip code. For more information, please visit [www.AchievementFirst.org](http://www.AchievementFirst.org).

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