

Testimony of Robert J. Traber, Bridgeport Education Association President Elect

Members of the CT State Department of Education.

My name is Rob Traber. I speak to you today as the President Elect of the Bridgeport Education Association. I am a 5th Grade Teacher in the Bridgeport Public Schools.

I am also the proud parent of a daughter who attended Bridgeport Public Schools from Kindergarten from Central High School in 2006.

On behalf of the BEA, I want to express the unanimous support of our Executive Board for the Bridgeport Board of Education's call for a moratorium on the establishment of any new charter schools in our city.

There are a number of reasons:

1. They don't work!

- National Studies by Stanford University have shown that Charter Schools perform at best as well as public schools less than 20% of the time. More often than not, they perform worse than public schools.
- Our own local analysis, based on data from the CT SDE website shows that in a direct comparison between Achievement First Bridgeport and our selective public schools, our local magnet public schools vastly outperform the charter school. Our standardized test scores are higher (not that we accept that as an accurate measurement). Our student demographics are superior. Our teacher experience is 5-6 times greater. They lose over ½ of their teachers per year and only have an average length of service of less than three years.
- So, we know the solution to the achievement/opportunity gap, provide the funds (\$40+Million per year) that we need to make every school in Bridgeport a local magnet school!

2. They won't fix the problem!

- Between local magnets, local charters, and regional magnets, you will only take care of 15-30% of our students. This will leave 70-85% of our students subject to the quality of school in their neighborhood.

3. They don't fulfill their commitments to our communities and there is no mechanism to ensure they will!

- When Achievement First was allowed to start in Bridgeport, they made a promise to match the demographics of the neighborhoods in which they would place their schools.
- Again, using data from the CT SDE, it is clear that they have failed to do this in four key areas: percentage of children from poor families, percentage of students from ELL homes, percentage of students from non-English speaking homes, and Special Ed students. Again, we hear the promises, but see no means to enforce them.
- When I spoke with Mr. Barth about this two years ago, all he could say was that it was a blind lottery. However, it is a lottery that requires parents to work the system to even be considered. I say make it a true blind lottery and place every child's name in the system, then let the parents choose to opt out if they don't want the Charter School.

4. They mislead about their success.

- We hear over and over again about their success in graduation rates versus our dropout rates. Yet the numbers are clear. Amistad, the flagship of Charters, has a worse dropout rate than our Bridgeport Public Schools. They start 90 and graduate 23, a 74% drop out rate! Achievement First Bridgeport loses 24% between 5th and 8th grade!

So, in the end, we oppose the addition of any new Charter Schools in our city because they don't work and are not the solution. But, perhaps most importantly, we oppose them because we can't afford them.

We have a Mayor who refuses to provide the funds for public schools that is required by State law. We get punished for his illegal behavior by having the State take away more money. The State is considering redoing the ECS formula and cutting our share by another \$1+Million. We've been underfunded by over \$40Million per year for years. And now, you want us to come up with another \$13Million over the next 5 years!

It's not possible! Who will suffer? The 70-85% of the students left in the Bridgeport Public Schools! We support the call for a moratorium, NO MORE CHARTER SCHOOLS!