

**Testimony of
Jeff Leake
President, Connecticut Education Association
CT State Board of Education Meeting
October 3, 2018**

Good morning Chairperson Taylor, Chairperson Lopez, Commissioner Wentzell, and esteemed members of the Board. My name is Jeff Leake. I am president of the Connecticut Education Association, the state's largest teachers' union, representing active and retired educators across Connecticut.

I am here today to explain why CEA is opposed to the proposed expansion of the charter school industry in CT.

CEA was an early adopter of the charter school model, which we viewed as promoting innovation, driving creative solutions that nurture student needs, and committed to the long-term health of the larger community. CEA, with the assistance of the National Education Association, partnered to develop one of the state's first charter schools. The faculty of three original Connecticut charter schools were members of CEA, and remain so today.

CEA believes that charter schools should be non-profit, publicly accountable, transparent, and operate without diverting public funds from neighborhood public schools or to third-party management organizations. The Association further believes that charter schools must not discriminate against students in their admissions policies, implement discriminatory or abusive disciplinary practices, or intensify segregation. CEA supports charter schools that exhibit respect for teachers, recognize collective bargaining, and include teachers in decisions that affect students' learning conditions. We do not believe the applications before you today ensure that these principles are honored.

We are here today asking you to consider critical questions before voting on the proposed new charter schools.

Can we afford to further expand a parallel system of schools in Connecticut?

The addition of the two proposed schools would significantly burden local school district budgets and impact state funds for education.

For example, based on analyses done by the Stamford and Bridgeport public schools in 2015, the operation of state charter schools in their districts resulted in significant costs. In Bridgeport, the cost to the district for special education, school psychologists, counselors, transportation, and other costs billed to the district amounted to \$2.9 million. Using a similar analysis, Stamford estimated the cost of the opening of the Stamford School of Excellence to be approximately \$4,071 per student (see attached). This would equate to a cost to Norwalk Public Schools of

\$684,000 in year one, rising to \$1.6 million annually. For Danbury, this would result in a \$3.1 million annual impact on the school district.

It should be noted that the Danbury Prospect Charter School application proposes growing the school into a grade 6-12 facility, with enrollment more than 3-times the statutory limit of 250 students. Their plan is to begin with 110 students, adding an additional 110 each year. This results in a student population of 880, which would equate to 15% of Danbury's grade 6-12 population, and make it the largest charter school in Connecticut not run by Achievement First. The application for this charter states specifically that it would be **"... financially and operationally unfeasible..."** to run the charter without the high enrollment they request. This is another way of saying they need the high student enrollment to get a sufficiently high profit margin to justify operating the school.

The Norwalk School of Excellence also proposes to exceed the statutory cap projecting a total enrollment of 392 students.

At a time when the state seeks to overcome budgetary constraints, opening these schools would cost the state \$3.1 million in 2019, growing to \$14.3 million a year at their proposed full enrollment levels. Furthermore, FY 2018-2019 will be the first year that the state funds ECS based on a formula, which has been ignored for years. Every student that leaves a local school district for a charter school will result in less ECS funding to the local town. The shifting of students to charters will also determine if a district is underfunded or overfunded, which will further impact ECS funding. Both Norwalk and Danbury school districts could go from underfunded to overfunded status as students enroll in charters.

Should we be expanding a model that is failing to meet the needs of the growing number of English learners in the state?

Charter schools in Connecticut enroll disproportionately fewer English learners (EL) than is reflected in their host districts. A 2014 Connecticut Voices for Children report found that in Hartford, only 3% of students enrolled in charters were English learners, while the host district enrolled 18%. Bridgeport charter school EL enrollment was only 2% versus 13% for the district. In a place like Danbury with faster than average growth in its Latino population, expansion of charter schools risks underserving the core population and increasing segregation. In fact, the proposal for the Danbury Prospect Charter School is unclear in its plan to serve the EL student population.

If there are additional resources to be allocated to public schools, they should be targeted to needs like those of EL students in Danbury, not building a separate and more segregated system.

Should we be fueling the growth of a school system that is causing increased segregation?

Diversity in our schools helps everyone learn better, and be better world citizens. In Danbury, the growth of a youthful Latino population is an asset to its potential future economic growth and cultural richness. Yet, with the expansion of charters into Danbury, we will exacerbate a pattern witnessed in Connecticut and evident across the nation – an increasing level of racial segregation

caused by the expansion of charter schools. We must begin to reverse this trend, which we can do today by rejecting these new charter schools.

Additionally, the expansion of charter schools is also resulting in the segregation and concentration of students with the greatest educational needs, and who pose the highest instructional and service costs, in our neighborhood schools. This results in our traditional public schools having to find a way to do more with less and being forced to pick winners and losers, while sacrificing the benefits that a community of diverse learners can have on all students.

The achievement gap is already narrowing in the Norwalk Public School District. Furthermore, Norwalk is a majority white urban area, which makes it less racially/ethnically concentrated than other urban areas in Connecticut. The application states unequivocally that, "... the [charter] school will deliberately concentrate recruitment activities to high-need communities..." which will segregate minority students in Norwalk. It is prohibited by statute for charters to recruit students from a limited geographic area within a district. Statutes do not allow the State Department of Education to give enrollment waivers based on ZIP Codes.

Should we be expanding the private chain-style operation of charter schools without sufficient transparency and accountability?

Over the past years, charter school expansion has resulted in egregious misuses of public funds. This has been true nationwide and Connecticut has not been immune. Recent developments with Our Piece of the Pie, and FUSE before that, exemplify the dangers of permitting private operators to operate schools with public tax dollars.

Both the proposed charters represent the expansion of New York City private operators into Connecticut. This is troubling in a number of ways.

The Schools of Excellence chain, which operates out of the Bronx, has exhibited some management and fiscal irregularities. A violation of statutes was found in their first audit and the auditors described the Bronx school as related to the Stamford school, but could not determine the nature of the relationship. Additionally, a review of IRS 990 Forms of each of the chain's schools and their umbrella Charter Management Organization (Excellence Community Schools, Inc.) shows that staff, such as the Executive Director Charlene Reid, works for each of the three entities. In fact, her \$313,000 salary and benefits package appears on each school's IRS 990 Form. On Stamford's 2015 IRS 990 Form, Ms. Reid received a \$100,000 bonus in addition to her base compensation of \$190,000. The source of Ms. Reid's compensation for the Stamford school is unclear. Was there a "loan" of monies between the Bronx and Stamford schools? If so, this would clearly violate Connecticut statutes.

This raises critical oversight questions. Who does Ms. Reid actually work for: Bronx, Stamford, or the New York based CMO? Are Connecticut tax dollars being used to pay for Ms. Reid's work with New York charter schools? Have the Stamford and proposed Norwalk charter schools received approval for their relationship with Excellence Community Schools, Inc., which describes itself consistent with a Charter Management Organization?

Similar questions need to be asked about the Danbury Prospect Charter School's relationship with its affiliate, the Brooklyn Prospect Charter School. What is the relationship? Is there an entity providing services to the schools that should be deemed a CMO? Has the school disclosed their relationship with a CMO and sought approval?

Let us not forget that Path Academy Charter School closed in June because of mismanagement and an unclear link to Our Piece of the Pie, Inc. The state poured millions of taxpayer dollars into Path Academy with little to show for it. These and other questions are important for you to consider before continuing to expand this second system of schooling in our state that has led to illegal practices and a lack of transparency by some charters.

Thank you.

**CHARTER SCHOOLS - FISCAL ANALYSIS
2014-15 SCHOOL YEAR**

Schools	Total # Bus Routes	# Bus Routes Added 2014-15	# School Days	Transp NOTES	TRANSP COST	SPED TR FTE at Charter School	Special Ed Teachers (annual cost billed by the Charter School to BPS)	Social Worker Service	FTE Psychologist	Speech Language Service	Social Worker	Psychologist	Speech Language	GRAND TOTAL	Additional Services Provided by BPS through BPS-employed staff:		Value of Services Provided by BPS-employed staff	
															FTE			
Bridge Academy	6	0	182 D	Tiered-50%	198,351	2	223,330	0.00	0.20	0.10	0	22,333	11,167	455,180				
New Beginnings	6	0	182 D	Tiered-50%	198,351	2	223,330	0.50	0.20	0.30	55,833	22,333	33,500	533,346				
Park City Prep	6	1	182 D	Tiered-50%	198,351	2	178,664	0.50	0.20	0.20	55,833	22,333	22,333	477,513				
Achievement First	12	3	191 D	182D Partial Tier -	435,936	3	334,995	1.00	0.40	0.80	111,665	44,666	89,332	1,016,594				
Great Oak	2	2	200 D	No Tier=100%	145,312	1	111,665	0.00	0.20	0.00	0	22,333	0	279,310				
Stanford Academy					0		0	0.50	0.20	0.00	55,833	22,333	0	78,166				
Side by Side					0		0	0.00	0.00	0.50	0	0	55,833	55,833				
Total	32	6			1,176,301	10	1,071,984	2.50	1.40	1.90	279,163	156,331	212,164	2,895,942				647,657

NOTE:

Transportation for Achievement First was calculated at 182 days (BOE) plus 9 additional days.
 Transportation for Great Oak was calculated for 200 days.

Cost Factor	2014-15	Res Tr	SW	Psy	Sp Lang
Salary	71,000	80,000	79,000	71,000	
Benefits	21,836	21,836	21,836	21,836	
Total	111,665	111,665	111,665	111,665	111,665

Bronx School for Excellence Charter Application						
Cost Estimate						
District is responsible for "Like Transportation" and Special Education						
Year			2015-16			
Grade	Pre-K	56				
	K	56				
	1	56				
	2					
	3					
	4					
	5					
		168				
Est Sp Ed Students			18			
Administration			\$ 10,000			
Sp Ed Teachers			1.0			
\$cost			\$ 70,000			
Pupil Services						
Speech & Language			0.4			
Social Work			0.4			
Psychology			0.4			
			1.2			
\$cost			\$ 84,000			
Sp Ed Para			1.0			
\$ cost			40,000			
Transportation						
6 buses x \$80,000			\$ 480,000			
Total SPS cost			\$ 684,000			