

V.B.

**CONNECTICUT STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
Hartford**

TO BE PROPOSED:

April 4, 2018

RESOLVED, That the State Board of Education, pursuant to Section 10-66ss of the Connecticut General Statutes, approves the material change to Achievement First Hartford Academy's (AFHA) operation merging its two middle schools (Achievement First Middle School and Achievement First Summit Middle School) into one middle school, known as (Achievement First Summit Middle School) for the 2018-19 school year, subject to the Commissioner's April 4, 2018, memorandum to the Board, "Approval of Material Change to Achievement First Hartford Academy," and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

Approved by a vote of _____, this fourth day of April, Two Thousand Eighteen.

Signed:_____

Dr. Dianna R. Wentzell, Secretary
State Board of Education

CONNECTICUT STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
Hartford

TO: State Board of Education

FROM: Dr. Dianna R. Wentzell, Commissioner of Education

DATE: April 4, 2018

SUBJECT: Approval of Material Change to Achievement First Hartford Academy

Executive Summary

Introduction

Achievement First Hartford Academy (AFHA) is a state charter school serving 1,198 students in Grades K-12. AFHA consists of one elementary school (Achievement First Hartford Academy Elementary School), two middle schools (Achievement First Middle School and Achievement First Summit Middle School) and one high school (Achievement First High School).

Achievement First seeks approval to merge the two middle schools into one middle school known as (Achievement First Summit Middle School) for the 2018-19 school year. In accordance with Section 10-66ss of the Connecticut General Statutes, the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) seeks State Board of Education (SBE) approval of the material change to the school's operation as allowed under state law.

Background/Process

Under Section 10-66ss of the Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.) a process is established for charter school governing councils to follow when making a material change to their operations. A material change is one that fundamentally alters the school's mission, organizational structure, or educational program, including:

1. Altering the educational model in a fundamental way.
2. Opening an additional school building.
3. Contracting for or discontinuing a contract for whole school management services with a Charter Management Organization.
4. Renaming a charter school.
5. Changing the charter school's grade configurations.
6. Increasing or decreasing the total student enrollment capacity of the charter school by 20 percent or more.

To request a material change in the school's operations, the charter school's governing council must provide the SBE with a written request to amend the school's charter. On January 31, 2018, the CSDE received AFHA's written request to merge the two middle schools into one school to be named Achievement First Hartford Summit Middle School (Attachment A). Achievement First Hartford Academy Elementary School, Achievement First Middle School and

Achievement First High School are located at 305 Greenfield Street, Hartford. Achievement First Summit Middle School has been in a temporary space on the Global Communications Academy campus located at 85 Edwards Street in Hartford. The merger will allow AFHA to serve all students at 305 Greenfield Street together on one K-12 campus. Combining the two schools will reduce operating costs, allow for additional classroom space, provide students access to a dedicated gym, and allow more enrichment offerings to students. Ben Cruse, the current principal of Achievement First Summit Middle School will lead the combined Achievement First Hartford Summit Middle School. All AFHA students are guaranteed seats through high school graduation.

In accordance with Section 10-66ss of the C.G.S. the CSDE is required to solicit and review comments on the material change request from the local or regional board of education of the town in which the charter school is located, Hartford. On February 22, 2018, Dr. Leslie Torres-Rodriguez, Superintendent of Hartford Public Schools responded to the request (Attachment B).

Recommendation with Conditions

The CSDE recommends that the SBE, pursuant to Section 10-66ss of the Connecticut General Statutes, approve AFHA's written request to merge the two middle schools into one middle school known as Achievement First Hartford Summit Middle School for the 2018-19 school year.

Prepared by: Robert E. Kelly
Charter School Program Manager
Turnaround Office

Approved by: Desi D. Nesmith, Chief Turnaround Officer
Turnaround Office

ACHIEVEMENT FIRST HARTFORD ACADEMY

January 31, 2018

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Desi Nesmith
Chief Turnaround Officer
State Department of Education
450 Columbus Boulevard
Hartford, CT 06103

Dear Mr. Nesmith:

I write on behalf of Achievement First Hartford Academy ("AFHA" or the "School") to request approval of a change to the School's charter. AFHA currently consists of an elementary school, two middle schools, and a high school. Beginning in the 2018-19 school year, AFHA seeks to merge its two smaller middle schools (Achievement First Hartford Middle School and Achievement First Summit Middle School) into one larger middle school, known as Achievement First ("AF") Hartford Summit Middle School. The rationale and specifics about this process for this requested revision follow.

Background

Currently, AFHA operates four separate schools that have achieved strong academic performance since the first elementary school and middle school opened in 2008. Since then, the high school opened in 2012 and AF Summit Middle School opened with its first 5th grade cohort in 2014. On the 2016-17 Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium exams (SBAC), AFHA schools overall demonstrated 52% proficiency in ELA and 43% in Math. This compares favorably to the performance of the host district which demonstrated 22% proficiency in ELA and 16% proficiency in Math.

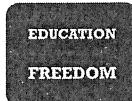
AFHA schools provide Hartford families with a quality schooling option, a track record of helping students matriculate to and succeed in competitive colleges, and the drive to return to Hartford as leaders of their communities.

Rationale for Merging Two Middle Schools

Like many districts and schools across the country, AFHA is facing real funding challenges. It is especially hard for AFHA since, as you know, public charter school students receive \$4,000 less per pupil compared to their district school peers. Combining the two schools will result in significant cost savings and reduce the funding gap experienced by AFHA.

Although funding is a driving factor, AFHA would not make this decision if it did not also believe that it was in the best interest of students and staff. Bringing these two strong schools together

will allow AFHA to offer an even stronger program to all middle school students. Both AF Summit Middle and AF Hartford Middle posted impressive results in 2016-17, outperforming the





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district averages, and in some grades and subjects, outscoring their state peers and peers from suburban communities. Importantly, combining these two strong schools will address some logistical challenges: AF Summit has been in a temporary space on the Global Communications Academy campus, does not have access to a gym, and has fewer classroom spaces than are needed. Correspondingly, AF Hartford, as a smaller middle school, has fewer enrichment offerings and requires a number of teachers to teach across grade or subject levels instead of focusing exclusively on their content areas. By bringing these two schools together, AFHA will address these issues and will grow stronger.

The approach to merging these two schools together is especially important. AFHA is working hard to do so in a way that is consistent with its values and commitments. AFHA is working intentionally to build relationships among staff and students at the new school. While the new middle school will be larger than either of the current schools, it will still have AF's strong "team and family" feel, and AF is committed to maintaining a student to staff ratio of around 15:1. Additional specifics:

- Ben Cruse, currently the principal of AF Summit MS, will be the principal of the AF Hartford Summit Middle School (which we expect will have a combined enrollment of 455 students in 2018-19.)
- Crucially, all current AFHA students are guaranteed seats in AFHA schools through high school graduation.
- AF Hartford Summit Middle will be housed at 305 Greenfield Street so that AFHA will all be together on one cohesive, K-12 campus.

Enrollment

Although every current AFHA seat is guaranteed a seat to continue at AFHA, overall middle school enrollment will decrease in 2018-19 because AFHA will no longer fill a second 5th grade as illustrated in the chart below. The majority of the decrease is the result of this smaller 5th grade, while the balance is reflective of anticipated attrition that occurs before any new school year.

Grade	2017-18 Actual	2018-19 Forecast
	(1 ES; 2 MS; 1 HS)	(1 ES; 1 MS; 1 HS)
K	89	93
1	88	93
2	91	93
3	92	93
4	93	93
5	136	93
6	127	120
7	139	121
8	133	121





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9	59	125
10	52	55
11	53	48
12	46	48
Total	1198	1196
Grades 5-8	535	455

For an enrollment projection going out five years, please see **Exhibit B** (please note that this does not constitute AFHA's formal seat request). The projection shows a larger middle school offset in 2018-19 by fewer students admitted in 5th grade. Then, as the larger middle school cohort moves through high school, the projections revert back to the optimal enrollment. At scale, AFHA projections show enrollment of 88 to 108 students in all grade levels.

Process

The following steps have been taken or are in process to ensure a smooth transition for the school community:

- AFHA notified Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) staff on November 13, 2017 of its intent to merge the two schools and began discussions regarding the required steps, resulting in this request for charter revision.
- The plan was approved by the AFHA Board later during its November 13, 2017 meeting, directing the schools and Achievement First to carry out any required actions, including the request of CSDE for this charter revision. (See minutes, attached as **Exhibit A**.)
- Plans for the combined middle school was announced to the school community on November 17, 2017 and to the general public on the following Monday.
- The principal of the new middle school, Mr. Cruse, hosted Town Hall meetings in December, focused primarily on current AF Hartford MS families.
- Schools are currently soliciting each family's intent to return to AFHA, and these results are being tracked closely to ensure that families feel welcomed to the new configuration, particularly those that will be moving from 85 Edwards Street to 305 Greenfield Street.
- AFHA now awaits final approval from CSDE and/or the State Board of Education as required.

Please let me know if you have any questions or require additional information.

Sincerely,

Peter Cymrot
General Counsel,
Achievement First



Board Chair Report

Barry Jacobson led a discussion about the consolidation of the two AF Hartford Middle Schools. The board brainstormed ideas for communicating with families and shared those ideas with Dacia Toll, AF's Co-CEO who joined the meeting at 6:40pm.

RESOLVED, the AF Hartford Academy Board of Directors hereby elects Marshall Ruben to serve as Treasurer.

Motion by David Dee

Seconded by Lisa Tanan-Lafontaine

All in favor

WHEREAS the AF Hartford Academy Board of Directors has reviewed, considered and vetted the relevant facts and circumstances concerning the subject of these Resolutions;

BE IT RESOLVED, that the AF Hartford Academy Board of Directors approves the plan to merge Achievement First Summit Middle School and Achievement First Hartford Academy Middle School (the "schools") beginning in the 2018-19 school year, and provided that all existing students of the schools shall be guaranteed a seat at the merged school.

RESOLVED FURTHER, that the AF Hartford Academy Board of Directors hereby authorizes and directs Achievement First Network Support and the schools to take and carry out such action as required in connection with the foregoing Resolution.

Motion by Angela Scott

Seconded by Alice Turner

All in favor

Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 7:07pm by Barry Jacobson.

Motion by David Dee

Seconded by Angela Scott



Attachment B

Leslie Torres-Rodriguez, Ed.D.
Superintendent

RECEIVED

February 22, 2018

FEB 23 2018

Chief Turnaround Office
CT State Dept. of Education

Desi D. Nesmith
Chief Turnaround Officer
State of Connecticut
Department of Education
P.O. Box 2219
Hartford, CT 06145

Dear Mr. Nesmith,

Thank you for your letter of February 15th regarding the request from Achievement First Hartford Academy (AFHA) to amend its charter by merging Achievement First Hartford Middle School and Achievement First Summit Middle School into one middle school in Hartford.

Hartford Public Schools has recently launched our plan for a District Model for Excellence with a goal of creating a network of excellent schools that provides a high-quality educational experience for all HPS students. We do not foresee any negative implications of the AFHA planned merger on our restructuring plans, and therefore have no objection or comment on their request to amend their charter as a result of this merger.

Thank you for contacting me on this matter. Please let me know if you have any questions or need further information.

Sincerely,

Dr. Leslie Torres-Rodriguez
Superintendent of Schools