

Ruben Felipe
Connecticut Charter Schools Association
State Board of Education Public Comment
Wednesday, November 4, 2020

Good day members of the State Board of Education and State Department of Education. My name is Ruben Felipe and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Charter Schools Association, which supports the proposed grade growth for Stamford Charter School for Excellence.

The Connecticut Charter Schools Association is a nonprofit membership organization that serves as a unified voice for the state's public charter schools, representing their interests at the state and local levels. Our work is grounded in the belief that a growing, more effective public charter school sector will significantly increase student outcomes throughout the state. We envision a future where every child in Connecticut has the opportunity to attend a great public charter school that can unlock their full potential.

An item that was previously raised in the Board's last meeting under the Financial Matters section, but was ultimately tabled, is the grade growth of Stamford Charter School for Excellence from a Pre-K-5 to PreK-8 school, which we support.

During its 2020 renewal, although it was granted a 5-year renewal, Stamford Excellence was not granted the seats for its middle school. This Board approved a material change to freeze enrollment at 392 students but have rolling grades each year so that Stamford Excellence could serve every student that it currently has into the following grade.

While it was important that Stamford Excellence have a way to continue serving its current students, it was always the intention of this high-performing and needed public school option to fully serve as a PreK-8 school. Additionally, the closure of the only other two public charter schools in Stamford - a city with growing needs - only increased the need for high quality options for Stamford kids.

Stamford Excellence stands ready to serve, but needs to be allotted the seats to become a full PreK-8 school. This school has proven over the last several years that it provides an exceptional education to every student who walks through its doors and seeks to continue doing so through the elementary and middle school years.

As you may know, following the closures of Stamford Academy and Trailblazers Academy, Stamford Excellence is now the only public charter school serving the city of Stamford. It currently serves 392 students in Grades 1 through 6 and plans to grow into a full PreK-8 school. As of the 19-20 school year, 98% of its population identified as minority and over 40% came from low-income families.

The school has demonstrated, time and time again, that it achieves exceptional results for its students. On the 2019 and 2018 Smarter Balanced assessment results, Stamford Excellence had some of the state's highest results and outperformed its traditionally high performing and

wealthier counterpart districts in Fairfield County and statewide. Stamford Excellence has been named a School of Distinction and in short, has a clear track record of success for kids.

Especially as the city faces the closure of the only other two public charter schools and rising enrollment, shifting funding from these schools to Stamford Excellence will help provide families a place for their kids to receive a great education. It would send the wrong message to these students and their families if they were denied the opportunity to this quality public education in Stamford.

We support the State Department's request for the grade expansion and ask the State Board to approve Stamford Excellence's request as a full preK-8 school with the seats for all of these grades.

Thank you for your time and consideration.