

# Testimony Before the Appropriations Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly

## In Support of Funding for Danbury Prospect Charter School

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**Madame Chairpersons Osten and Walker**, Members of the Committee:

My name is Stephen Tracy. I am a lifelong public school educator, having served as the superintendent of schools in the Town of New Milford, the City of Derby and the Department of Children & Families here in Connecticut. I am also a longtime advocate of parent choice in education, believing that we can generate significant progress in our schools if families are empowered to select the public schools that they believe will work best for their children.

I did my homework two years ago when I was invited to join the board of directors for Danbury Prospect Charter School. I spoke with colleagues who were familiar with the work that Prospect Schools had been doing in New York. I looked at the test scores. I visited their existing schools to talk with teachers and students. And I found a lot to like.

As you may know, our school's charter application was approved by the State Board of Education in **October of 2018**. Since then, thousands of Danbury citizens have expressed their enthusiasm for the public school choice that we hope to provide to the families of Danbury. The only significant hurdle standing between us and our opening this fall is the inclusion of state funding for our school in the General Assembly's 2020-21 budget. Here is why I urge you to take that step:

1. An Ambitious Instructional Program: This is not an experiment. Our school features the same highly regarded International Baccalaureate curriculum as has been employed by the Prospect team for over ten years.
2. A Commitment to Diversity: Danbury Prospect will serve an intentionally diverse group of students and will employ a diverse faculty to serve them – just as has been the case with all Prospect Schools currently in operation.
3. Proven Results: Year after year, Prospect Schools continue to deliver results for students, as evidenced by the most recent round of state assessment results achieved by the current 1,500 Prospect students. What’s more, over 10,000 families are on the Prospect Schools waiting list!
4. A Partner for the Danbury Public School District: As a Connecticut superintendent, I know that our public schools do not need any more critics – they need partners. We are eager to collaborate with the district on issues like instructional improvement, professional development and staff diversity. And we’ve chosen to begin our school at the middle school level, so as to assist the district with the growing problem of overcrowding that it is experiencing at that level.
5. Savings for Taxpayers: A generous local philanthropist has committed to funding the cost of a facility for the school, meaning that hundreds of students will have a place to learn at no cost to the taxpayers of Danbury or Connecticut.
6. A Quality Choice for Teachers: Prospect Schools has established a reputation for treating teachers like the professionals that they are. This means competitive salaries and benefits, as well as a supportive work environment with engaging professional growth opportunities. We plan to offer the same to Danbury educators.
7. A Quality Choice for Danbury Families: Danbury remains the only large city in Connecticut that does not offer a public charter school option to its families and teachers. It is time to correct that inequity.

As I said, there is a lot to like here. We are asking you to give a green light to a quality public school choice for Danbury families.

- A choice that builds on proven success with respect to performance and diversity;
- A choice that has earned the enthusiastic endorsement of your State Board and State Department of Education;
- A choice that helps Danbury to solve its overcrowding crisis while saving taxpayer dollars at both the state and local level; and
- A choice that I know Danbury parents and teachers will embrace.

Please find a way to say “yes”!

Thank you!