

Testimony of Eliza Halsey, Executive Director of Elm City Montessori School
495 Blake St, New Haven
Submitted to the Appropriations Committee
February 13, 2020

Honorable Chairs, Members of the Appropriations Committee,

I am Eliza Halsey, Executive Director of Elm City Montessori School. I am here to address the inadequate funding for New Haven Public Schools and for Elm City Montessori School proposed in the Governor's FY21 budget. This year's increase of just 1.5 percent to New Haven Public Schools does not keep up with inflation and leaves New Haven with a continued deficit and an inability to meet students' holistic needs. The funding proposed for Elm City Montessori does not account for grade growth for our 5th graders transitioning to 6th grade. We are committed to ensuring ALL New Haven children succeed and urge you to ensure New Haven's public schools receive sufficient funding.

Seven years ago, New Haven parents, educators and community leaders developed the vision for a high-quality public Montessori school in our community, modeled after three successful public Montessori schools in Hartford. Core to the Montessori approach is a focus on interactive, hands-on inquiry in thoughtfully-prepared multi-age classrooms that foster independence, creativity, critical thinking and leadership. We wanted all New Haven students to have access to the well-rounded education that Montessori provides.

In 2014, through a partnership with New Haven Public Schools and the State Department of Education, we launched Elm City Montessori School (ECMS), New Haven's first local charter and first public Montessori school. Today, ECMS is a strong and growing PK-Grade 5 school filled with hope, passion and a deep commitment to equity and social justice. Our program's developmental approach to education integrates math, science, language arts, music and the outdoors in a nurturing and academically rigorous environment that promotes lifelong learning and helps each child realize his or her full potential. We are one of the most diverse schools in New Haven: 44% African American, 28% Latinx, 24% White and 4% Multi-racial. We have consistently had hundreds of families apply to our school each year—more than 600 applications for roughly 40 seats for the past 5 years. We have made critical investments in early childhood education, offering one of the largest public preschool programs of our schools in New Haven.

As a local charter school, we receive \$3,000 per pupil from the State Department of Education. This year, we enrolled 229 students. Next year, we plan to enroll 266 students, including 18 students from outside of New Haven through the Open Choice program. Based on these numbers, we anticipated \$744,000 from the State Department of Education in FY21. The Governor's budget proposes only \$690,000 for Elm City Montessori School. The impact of this cut on our small and growing school would be substantial. This reduction affects our planned growth to 6th grade next school year. We urge you to fully fund ECMS for 266 students to ensure that our current 5th graders can continue on to 6th grade at our school.

The Montessori model is unique and transformational and our partnership with New Haven Public Schools is critically important. When we launched ECMS, we made a commitment to our children and families to build a high-quality, public Montessori school. Limiting our grade growth undermines our commitment to current families and will impact hundreds of prospective families in our community seeking an authentic Montessori education. The Governor's budget undermines the commitment that educators across all New Haven schools make to their students and families each day. We are deeply invested in our partnership with NHPS and will continue to advocate on its behalf. We urge you to maintain full funding for our school in 2020-21 in order to sustain our growth and success and to ensure New Haven Public Schools receives the resources it needs to provide a quality education to all students.

Sincerely,



Eliza Halsey

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