

# Testimony Before the Black/Latino Caucus of the Connecticut General Assembly

Regarding H.B. 5005  
An Act Regarding the 2020-21 Budget

## In Support of the Funding of the Danbury Prospect Charter School

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Mr. Chairman, Members of the Caucus:

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 of the Danbury Prospect Charter School. I spoke with colleagues who were familiar with the work that Prospect Schools had been doing in Brooklyn. I looked at the test scores. I visited their Brooklyn 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, scores 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 operating funds 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 in Brooklyn 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 the Brooklyn Prospect Schools. Sixty-three percent of Brooklyn Prospect student body are persons of color, and 55% of the faculty are persons of color.
3. Proven Results: The Brooklyn Prospect Schools continue to deliver results for students, regularly outperforming students in New York City and New York State, as evidenced by the most recent round of state assessments and the hundreds of families who have lined up to enroll. Over the past three years, Brooklyn Prospect has been closing the achievement gap for economically disadvantaged children in both mathematics and English-language arts
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: In recognition of the critical nature of this project, a generous local philanthropist has committed to funding the cost of a facility for the Danbury Prospect Charter School. This means that hundreds of students who would otherwise be a part of Danbury's overcrowding problem will have a place to learn – at no cost to the taxpayers of Danbury and Connecticut.

6. A Quality Choice for Teachers: The Brooklyn Prospect Schools have 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 do the same for 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.

Please encourage the General Assembly to restore the reduction that the Governor has recommended to the state's charter school funding to that the \$1.3 million that Danbury Prospect needs to open its doors this fall can be made available.

- 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 to a quality public school choice for Danbury families.

Thank you!