



**CITY OF NEW HAVEN
BOARD OF ALDERS**

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Alder, Ward 14

Member
Education Committee
City Services and Environmental Policy Committee
Health & Human Services Committee
Youth Commission
Development Commission

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June 12, 2023

Dear Honorable Chair Smart and members of the Charter Revision Commission,

Thank you for your hard work on the charter revision throughout this year. Since I was unable to join the Committee of the Whole last Wednesday, I write to propose two items for your consideration. These recommendations echo suggestions that I shared with the Commission on February 16, 2023, as well as public testimony delivered by other New Haven residents.

1. Mayoral seat on the Board of Education replaced with a fifth appointed seat.

The vast majority of US cities safeguard the separation of powers between their Executive Branches and Public School Governance Boards. This separation serves to protect school district governance from hyper-politicization and the coercive forces that are potentially present given the Mayor's broad role. There is near national consensus on this separation as a democratic best practice and the current administration's own 2020 Transition Team recommended the same.

A Mayoral seat on the Board of Education can also serve to relieve pressure and diminish responsibility for the Executive Branch. The current Mayor frequently asserts that he is "just one Board member" on equal footing with six other New Haven residents, as a deflection from critiques of the Board and school district. This practice reveals that a Mayoral seat on the Board of Education does not make the Mayor inherently more accountable for the school system, but rather can facilitate the opposite.

Whether a seat on the Board of Education enables coercion or diminished responsibility, neither serves New Haven students and their school system well. In a healthy system with separation of powers, the Executive Branch's educational agenda is implemented via appointments, coalition and partnership building, and

advocacy. The Board of Education and Superintendent may advance specific proposals or not, in the same way that we on the Board of Alders advance Executive Branch proposals or not, as part of a democratic system of checks and balances.

For all these reasons, our city would be better served by replacing the Mayoral seat on the Board of Education with a fifth appointed seat.

2. Representation from at least two current New Haven Public Schools parents or caregivers among the elected and appointed members.

Many cities and towns across the nation enshrine parental representation on their Boards of Education, in order to ensure that the most direct users of the system – current parents and caregivers – have a seat at the decision-making table. Historically our Board of Education has had parental representation even without this requirement. Yet the Board’s current composition, with no one in this category except the Mayor, underscores that this representation is not guaranteed.

Decades of research¹ reveals the myriad benefits of parental and caregiver involvement in schools and school systems, both for individual student outcomes and achievement across systems. A healthy democratic governance structure centers the voices those who are personally invested in a system and have direct, current knowledge of how it is or isn’t working. Without this requirement, there may be no one on the Board who can speak from direct experience regarding what kind of homework kids come home with; how kids feel about school; and how responsive teachers, principals, and administrators are to user-level concerns, etc.

Representation from at least two current New Haven Public Schools parents or caregivers would facilitate the flow of information on current school conditions from families to the Board of Education, bring a sense of urgency to the governance process, and improve outcomes overall. The presence of at least two such persons would help to ensure that the needs of a single school, grade level, or demographic are not prioritized over any other, as well as help to identify trends across schools.

Thank you for your consideration of these recommendations.

Sarah Miller

¹ Jeynes, W. H. (2007). The Relationship between Parental Involvement and Urban Secondary School Student Academic Achievement: A Meta-Analysis. *Urban Education*, 42, 82-110.