

MR. PRESIDENT AND FELLOW MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL:

I WISH TO THANK VICE CHAIR SALVATORE AND THE EDUCATION SUBCOMMITTEE FOR THEIR ASSISTANCE IN PREPARING THIS REPORT. I WISH ALSO TO THANK THOSE OF YOU WHO INVESTED YOUR TIME IN REVIEWING THE DRAFT REPORT, ATTENDED THE SUBCOMMITTEE HEARINGS AND OFFERED YOUR COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS, WHICH HELPED TO IMPROVE THE REPORT.

MUCH OF THE DISCUSSION CONCERNING ACHIEVEMENT FIRST HAS CONSISTED OF TALKING POINTS AND SOUND BITES. ACCORDING TO ACHIEVEMENT FIRST'S SUPPORTERS AND LOBBYISTS, THE NEW SCHOOL WILL ALLOW THOSE FORTUNATE STUDENTS WHO ATTEND IT TO ENTER THE PROMISED LAND. ACCORDING TO THE OPPONENTS, THE ACHIEVEMENT FIRST ORGANIZATION IS AN EVIL CORPORATION THAT SUBVERTS THE DEMOCRATIC UNDERPINNINGS OF PUBLIC EDUCATION. FOR BOTH OF THESE GROUPS, THE CHOICE BEFORE THE BOARD OF REGENTS IS CLEAR WITHOUT ANY MIDDLE GROUND.

IN CONTRAST, THE SUBCOMMITTEE REPORT RECOMMENDS THAT THE BOARD OF REGENTS APPROVE ONE OF THE TWO PROPOSED ACHIEVEMENT FIRST SCHOOLS BUT DEFER FOR THREE YEARS ON THE SECOND ONE. AS NOTED IN THE REPORT, THIS APPROACH ALLOWS US TO GAIN MOST OF THE BENEFITS DESCRIBED BY THE SUPPORTERS OF ACHIEVEMENT FIRST, WHILE REDUCING THE HARMS IDENTIFIED BY ITS OPPONENTS. WITH THAT SAID, HOWEVER, I BELIEVE THIS RECOMMENDATION HAS INDEPENDENT VALUE BEYOND ITS ABILITY TO FIND A MIDDLE GROUND BETWEEN THE EXTREMES.

MORE SPECIFICALLY, I THINK WE SHOULD VIEW SCHOOLS SUCH AS ACHIEVEMENT FIRST AS A USEFUL SHORT-TERM (OR PERHAPS MEDIUM TERM) WAY TO ADDRESS OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS' MOST URGENT PROBLEMS WHILE CONTINUING OUR LONG-TERM WORK FOR PUBLIC SCHOOLS THAT EXCEED THE LIMITATIONS IMPOSED BY ACHIEVEMENT FIRST'S MODEL.

THE ACHIEVEMENT FIRST SCHOOLS IN NEW YORK AND CONNECTICUT CONTAIN STUDENT BODIES THAT ARE BETWEEN 97% AND 99% AFRICAN AMERICAN OR LATINO, EVEN WHILE THE HOST

COMMUNITIES TYPICALLY CONTAIN 10% WHITE STUDENTS AND 2% ASIAN STUDENTS. AS A RESULT, ACHIEVEMENT FIRST CURRENTLY SERVES THE POOR AND PEOPLE OF COLOR, TO THE VIRTUAL EXCLUSION OF EVERYONE ELSE. THESE SCHOOLS PROVIDE PARENTS WITH A CHOICE THAT PROMISES QUALITY ACADEMIC INSTRUCTION. THESE ARE GOOD CHOICES FOR PARENTS TO HAVE GIVEN THE CHALLENGES THAT THE PROVIDENCE PUBLIC SCHOOLS CURRENTLY FACE.

WITH THAT SAID, IN THE LONG TERM, WE SHOULD AIM FOR MORE DIVERSE PUBLIC SCHOOLS THAT COMBINE ACADEMIC AND SOCIAL EDUCATION. WHEN WE HAVE DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIOECONOMIC DIVERSITY IN OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS, WE INCREASE THE EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE OF OUR STUDENTS AND ALSO ENCOURAGE HARMONY IN OUR GREATER SOCIETY. MY MIDDLE CLASS CHILDREN WHO ARE IN THE PROVIDENCE PUBLIC SCHOOLS HAVE CLASSMATES AND FRIENDS FROM ALL PARTS OF THE CITY AND FROM MANY DIFFERENT POINTS ALONG THE DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIOECONOMIC CONTINUUM, INCLUDING A MAJORITY OF THE CHILDREN (THOUGH LESS THAN 97%) AT EACH OF

THESE SCHOOLS WHO ARE ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED AND ARE FROM THE LATINO AND AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITIES. MY CHILDREN COULD NOT GAIN THIS TYPE OF EDUCATION AT A PRIVATE OR PAROCHIAL SCHOOL.

IN CONTRAST, THE ACHIEVEMENT FIRST PROGRAM AIMS FOR A K-12 SELF-CONTAINED MODEL SO THAT THE STUDENTS WHO ENTER IN KINDERGARTEN WILL NOT INTERACT WITH ANY OTHER STUDENTS THROUGHOUT THEIR ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION. NO MATTER HOW COMPLETE THEIR ACADEMIC EDUCATION IS THROUGH THIS PROCESS, IN MY OPINION THEIR OVERALL EDUCATION WILL BE LIMITED. NOT ALL CHARTER SCHOOLS HAVE THIS TYPE OF LIMITATION. FOR EXAMPLE, I HAVE FRIENDS WHOSE CHILDREN ARE AT THE INTERNATIONAL AND CUFFEE CHARTER SCHOOLS, SCHOOLS WHICH HAVE SUCCEEDED IN DEVELOPING A PROGRAM THAT APPEALS TO MIDDLE CLASS FAMILIES AS WELL AS DISADVANTAGED ONES.

FOR EXAMPLE, CONSIDER THE HIGH SCHOOL EDUCATION OF TWO OF THE MAYORS BEHIND THIS APPLICATION. MAYORS TAVERAS AND FUNG

WERE CLASSMATES IN A PROVIDENCE PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL, ALONG WITH MICHAEL D'AMICO AND AMONG OTHERS, MY SISTER. IF THE TAVERAS FAMILY HAD CHOSEN TO SEND THEIR SON TO ACHIEVEMENT FIRST, HE COULD WELL HAVE RECEIVED A FINE ACADEMIC EDUCATION, BUT THE DEMOGRAPHIC ODDS ARE OVERWHELMING THAT NOT ONLY WOULD MY SISTER HAVE MISSED THE CHANCE TO GET TO KNOW HIM BUT, MORE IMPORTANTLY, HE WOULD NOT HAVE STUDIED WITH THE FUTURE MAYOR OF CRANSTON OR THE BUSINESS EXECUTIVE WHO NOW SERVES AS HIS CHIEF OF STAFF.

IN SOME WAYS, THE ACHIEVEMENT FIRST MODEL APPEARS TO ME TO BE A MIRROR IMAGE OF WHAT OTHER FAMILIES I KNOW LOOK FOR IN CHOOSING TO SEND THEIR CHILDREN TO MOSES BROWN OR WHEELER. I HAVE ENCOURAGED MANY OF MY FRIENDS TO TRY OUT THE PROVIDENCE PUBLIC SCHOOLS SO THAT THEIR CHILDREN CAN ENJOY THE OPPORTUNITY FOR A DIVERSE SOCIAL EDUCATION AS WELL AS AN ACADEMIC ONE. FOR MANY OF THESE FAMILIES, HOWEVER, THE MOST IMPORTANT THING IS TO ENSURE THAT THEIR CHILDREN WILL RECEIVE A

HIGH QUALITY ACADEMIC EDUCATION, EVEN IF THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR SOCIAL EDUCATION ARE LIMITED BY THE SCHOOL'S \$25,000 TUITION CHARGE. IN RESPONSE, THE PRIVATE SCHOOLS NOW TYPICALLY OFFER TWO OR THREE SCHOLARSHIPS IN EACH YEAR TO CHILDREN FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF THE TRACKS, IN ORDER TO OFFER A SLIVER OF DIVERSITY TO THE OTHER STUDENTS. I RESPECT EACH PARENTS' RIGHT TO CHOOSE WHAT IS BEST FOR THEIR CHILDREN, AND I RESPECT THE PRIORITY MOST FAMILIES PLACE ON ACADEMIC EDUCATION. IN MY OPINION, HOWEVER, THESE TOKEN EFFORTS OF DIVERSITY AT THE PRIVATE SCHOOLS ARE OF LITTLE VALUE.

PROVIDENCE HAS ONE OF THE HIGHEST PERCENTAGES OF CHILDREN IN PRIVATE SCHOOLS, AND IN SOME NEIGHBORHOODS THE DISPARITY IS EVEN MORE EXTREME. OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS CANNOT AFFORD TO LOSE THE COMPETITION FOR MIDDLE CLASS FAMILIES WITH A CHOICE. FOR PROVIDENCE TO THRIVE, IT NEEDS A STRONG MIDDLE CLASS, AND TO HAVE A STRONG MIDDLE CLASS, PROVIDENCE NEEDS PUBLIC SCHOOLS THAT ARE ATTRACTIVE TO PARENTS WITH A CHOICE. WHAT IS MORE, WE

NEED MIDDLE CLASS CHILDREN IN OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS TO HELP KNIT OUR SOCIETY TOGETHER BOTH INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE CLASSROOM.

IN THE LONG RUN, I HOPE WE DO NOT NEED TARGETED SCHOOLS SUCH AS ACHIEVEMENT FIRST'S CURRENT MODEL, WHICH PROVIDES CHILDREN WITH THE PROMISE OF A STRONG ACADEMIC EDUCATION AT THE EXPENSE OF THE SOCIAL EDUCATION WE CAN OFFER IN OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS. WHAT IS MORE, THE STATE'S NEW "MONEY FOLLOWS THE CHILD" FUNDING FORMULA HAS THE EFFECT OF SLOWING DOWN THE PROGRESS OF THE PROVIDENCE PUBLIC SCHOOLS EACH TIME A NEW CHARTER SCHOOL OPENS.

AS THESE CONSIDERATIONS MAKE CLEAR, THE ISSUES RAISED BY THE ACHIEVEMENT FIRST APPLICATION ARE NOT SIMPLE OR OBVIOUS. INSTEAD, THE NEW SCHOOL PRESENTS SHORT TERM OPPORTUNITIES AND LONG TERM CHALLENGES, WHICH PROVIDE THE BASIS FOR THE SUBCOMMITTEE'S RECOMMENDATION OF OPENING ONE OF THE TWO SCHOOLS BUT DEFERRING ON THE SECOND.

FOR THOSE REASONS, I ASK ALL OF YOU TO CONSIDER THE POSSIBLE
BENEFITS OF THE RECOMMENDATION OF THE EDUCATION
SUBCOMMITTEE. PLEASE LET ME KNOW IF YOU WOULD LIKE ADVANCE
ITS SUGGESTION IN A LETTER TO THE BOARD OF REGENTS.

THANK YOU.