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Testimony to support a more democratic Board of Education

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My name is Richard Hernandez. I currently live in Ward 7 at 32 High Street. As a Yale Undergraduate, I have gathered some experience and connection with the New Haven Public Schools. Throughout my first year at Yale, I participated in a program called Big Brother, Big Sister where I was a mentor to two elementary school students at Truman School.

Coming from Los Angeles and going to public schools within one of the largest public school districts in the country my whole life, I was surprised to find that New Haven has a Board of Education with **four** appointed members, the mayor himself, and only two elected members. To me, this was unheard of since the Los Angeles Board of Ed consists of seven elected members who in turn elect the superintendent. Upon this finding, I decided to do some more research into the school districts within Connecticut.

I have not completed my research, but so far I have found the following data:

- In Norwalk Public Schools, all 9 members of the Board of Ed are elected by voters.
- In the Hartford school district, the mayor appoints five members, and voters elect four members.
- In the New Britain school district, all ten members of the Board of Education are elected, and the mayor is never on the Board of Education.
- In the Bridgeport school district as well, all nine members of the Board of Education are elected and the mayor is never on the BOE.

I also want to share some data about school boards in the rest of the country. Around the nation, 95% of school boards are elected by voters.¹ In Boston in 2021, voters overwhelmingly approved a referendum to change from an appointed school board to an elected school board. Every other city in Massachusetts – 351 municipalities – have elected school boards.

I believe the New Haven Board of Education should be more representative of the families and communities that NHPS serves. NHPS families and voters should have a real voice in the decisions that impact their children. I support the following reforms:

Four seats on the BOE should be elected by city voters and three appointed by the mayor. Immigrants should be allowed to serve on the Board of Education and on all city commissions. Two seats on the BOE should be reserved for parents/guardians of current NHPS students.

Thank you for considering my testimony.

¹ Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools, “Out of Control: The Systematic Disenfranchisement of African American and Latino Communities through School Takeovers,” (2015).

