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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
October 6, 2017

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Governors Baker, Carney Visit Springfield Empowerment Zone Schools

Gov. John Carney travelled to learn about Springfield's approach to turning around struggling schools

SPRINGFIELD – Governor Charlie Baker welcomed Delaware Governor John Carney today to Springfield where the governors met with teachers, principals and school leadership teams at schools involved with turnaround efforts as part of the Springfield Empowerment Zone Partnership.

"Springfield's Empowerment Zone Program is a great example of how effective this approach can be for certain districts willing to give teachers and administrators the ability to create the best learning environment for students," **said Governor Baker**. "It was a pleasure to show Governor Carney the success of this program and reiterate our commitment to working with the legislature to replicate this approach for other schools in need."

"Thank you to Governor Baker and educators in Springfield for hosting this visit," **said Governor Carney**. "We wanted to see first-hand how local officials in Springfield partnered with the state to improve performance in high-needs schools. We also believe that giving greater autonomy to principals and teachers could lead to better outcomes for students in Delaware."

Governor Carney visited Springfield with representatives from the Christina School District in Wilmington, Del., the Delaware State Education Association, the Christina

Education Association, and the Wilmington Education Improvement Commission.

Governor Carney spent the morning visiting classrooms and meeting teachers and principals at the Chestnut schools, a group of three middle schools on the same campus that each take a different approach. Both governors toured the High School of Commerce, which recently joined the Springfield Empowerment Zone partnership and held a roundtable discussion with teachers, school leaders, and local officials. Afterward, the governors visited Honors Academy, a 65-student honors program housed within the same building.

“We support the Empowerment Zone approach because we want to empower school-level leaders and their teams to make decisions and changes needed for their schools,” **Education Secretary James Peyser said.**

In 2014, Springfield Public Schools partnered with Empower Schools, a nonprofit organization that works with communities to improve schools and boost academic results for students. Nine middle schools and two high schools are in the Springfield Empowerment Zone Partnership, which is overseen by an independent joint city-state board.

During his State of the Commonwealth address in January, Governor Baker highlighted the Empowerment Zone approach in Springfield as a promising way to improve struggling schools, and said he supports legislation filed by Senator Eric Lesser (D-Longmeadow) and Rep. Alice Peisch (D-Wellesley) that would give school districts more flexibility to turn around underperforming schools by creating “Innovation Zones,” similar to what Springfield schools did.

“It’s an honor to welcome Governor Carney to Western Massachusetts and to showcase the fantastic work happening in the Springfield school system. The Springfield model is showing success for students that can be replicated across the state and even around the country,” **Senator Eric Lesser said.**

"The model embraced by the Springfield Public Schools gives those at the school level, teachers as well as administrators, the authority and flexibility that are critical to improving student outcomes," **said Representative Alice Peisch.** "Governor Carney's visit today indicates that the work in Springfield is valued beyond our borders. I am hopeful that the legislation I filed along with Sen. Lesser will be enacted so that this model can be replicated across the Commonwealth."

The schools in the Springfield Empowerment Zone Partnership are governed by a seven-member board that includes Mayor Dominic Sarno, School Superintendent Daniel Warwick and School Committee Vice Chair Chris Collins, as well John Davis,

James Morton, Beverly Holmes and Chris Gabrieli, who chairs the empowerment zone board. After the first year (2015-2016), the majority of schools in the Zone showed improvements in three of the state's primary performance measures, including percentage of students meeting standards, composite performance index (CPI) and student growth percentile (SGP).

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