

**Jennifer Alexander Harmon, ConnCAN, Education Committee Hearing,
March 15, 2010**

Senator Gaffey, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the Committee- Thank you for this opportunity to testify this evening on S.B. 440, H.B. 5491 (section 3), and H.B. 5493. My name is Jennifer Alexander Harmon. I am a researcher, formerly with the American Institutes for Research in Washington, DC—one of the nation's leading education research firms. I am pleased to be working back in my home state representing the Connecticut Coalition for Achievement Now. ConnCAN is building a movement of concerned citizens advocating to fundamentally reform our public schools through smart public policies.

I testify today about these bills, as they apply to our competition in Race to the Top. At ConnCAN, we have analyzed the characteristics of the 16 states selected as finalists with particular attention paid to the handful of states most likely to be winners when Round 1 concludes in early April.

ConnCAN's analysis of Round 1 finalist applications showed that our competition is tough. It is clear that Connecticut must go after every single point to earn a spot at the finish line. Here is an overview of our findings on the Race to the Top finalists, as they relate to the bills now under consideration.

In the area of **measuring effectiveness**, ConnCAN's analysis of the 16 finalists' applications revealed that leading states already have the ability to track individual student achievement and have made or are planning to make student achievement growth a significant part of teacher evaluation.

In fact, nearly 70 percent of the finalists (11 out of the 16) have data systems with a teacher identifier that allows evaluators to match individual teachers and students, something Connecticut still doesn't have in place. And, half of the finalists explicitly committed to making student achievement growth worth at least 50 percent of a teacher's evaluation.

Although it may seem like the frontrunner states have a strong head start on Connecticut, it is worth noting that several finalists, including Tennessee and Illinois, passed recent legislation on teacher evaluation to strengthen their application ahead of the Round 1 deadline.

These two bills, S.B. 440, and H.B. 5491 (Section 3) would allow Connecticut to take immediate action so that, like the leading Race to the Top finalists, we have a solid policy to measure teacher and principal effectiveness in place before the next round of applications.

On the topic of **superstar principals**, ConnCAN's analysis revealed that 16 Race to the Top Round 1 finalists already have a policy or program creating an alternate route for principals. Frontrunner states paid particular attention to ensuring that their policies and programs met the characteristics specified in the Race to the Top application, including:

selective admissions criteria, rigorous standards, intensive training and ongoing support. In fact, 11 finalist states clearly meet all 5 criteria for a strong alternative route. For example:

- Colorado and Florida are among a handful of states that have passed policies allowing local school districts to create alternative routes to principal licensure. Florida's program allows school districts to create alternate educational leadership programs that take high performing teachers or executives through an intensive, job-embedded fast-track program.
- Louisiana has worked with highly regarded organizations such as New Leaders for New Schools and has developed not one, but three, rigorous alternative paths for principals.

The Education Committee has previously heard testimony on bill, HB No. 5421, that would significantly increase our chances of a successful Race to the Top application in Round 2.

On the topic of **money follows the child**, we found that Race to the Top frontrunner states have opened up access to charters, improved charter financing policies and raised or eliminated limits on the number of charter schools and/or charter school students. Half of the Round 1 finalists have no limits on the number of charter schools in the state. Some finalist states, such as Colorado and Florida, are long recognized leaders in helping create conditions needed for high achieving charter schools to thrive, including no cap on the number of charter schools and funding for charter-school facilities.

One-third of the finalist states have taken action on charter schools within the last few months to improve their charter policies and chances in Race to the Top. Frontrunner states such as Illinois, Louisiana, Massachusetts and Tennessee, enacted critical policies at the last minute to boost their odds in Race to the Top by lifting caps on charters, approving new charter schools, increasing management flexibility for charters and changing state spending policies to allow more funding to flow to charter schools.

Connecticut's existing charter laws significantly undermine our competitiveness in Race to the Top. The State Education Committee is now considering a bill, HB 5493, that directly address the weakest aspect of our state's charter policies: the way charter schools are funded. This bill would significantly increase our state's competitiveness in Race to the Top.

In sum, ConnCAN's analysis showed that our competition in Race to the Top is tough. Connecticut must go after every single point to earn a spot at the finish line. I urge you to help Connecticut align itself with frontrunner states by taking action on S.B. 440, H.B. 5491 (Section 3) and HB 5493. Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify today.