



Great Schools for All ConnCAN

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My name is Alex Johnston, and I am the CEO of ConnCAN, the Connecticut Coalition for Achievement Now. I am testifying today in support of

RAISED BILL NO. 278: AN ACT CONCERNING TRUANCY

Inspired by the breakthrough success of a number of Connecticut's urban public schools in dramatically raising student achievement, the Connecticut Coalition for Achievement Now (ConnCAN) was established five years ago with the ambitious goal of ensuring that every child in our state has access to a great public school.

Since then we have worked with parents and community leaders throughout the state to understand the challenges facing Connecticut's public schools. We have also worked with innovative public school leaders to better understand the elements of their success and what these lessons teach us about the effort to raise student achievement more broadly in their districts and across the state. Along the way there has been much to learn, but one constant throughout has been the urgency of closing Connecticut's achievement gap—a gap that falls along all the fault lines of our society, including race, ethnicity, class and geography. And a gap that is the largest in the nation when we look at 4th and 8th grade math and reading scores for low-income students vs. others in the Nation's Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

Drawing on the lessons learned from great public schools across Connecticut, the insights and experiences of parents and community leaders tackling this challenge, and the latest research on proven policies for raising student achievement from around the country, ConnCAN is proud to have worked alongside the members and leaders of this Committee in the last legislative session on the passage of an important measure to expand access to the state's longitudinal data on student achievement: An Act Concerning Longitudinal Studies of Student Achievement. This legislation opened up stores of data that was not previously available to the public, but there remains important work to be done in improving the quality of the data that the State Department of Education is collecting from school districts around the state.

That is why I'm testifying today in favor of Raised Bill 278, which would help ensure that the state develops a consistent definition of school absences, so that districts across the state report attendance rates in consistent and comparable way. This is vital for reliable analysis of this data—and in particular for identifying those districts which have developed best practices for reducing school absences—best practices which must be identified before they can be emulated. Likewise, Raised Bill 278 would also serve to expedite the district referral process to the courts to designate families with service needs. It's important to note that although these children comprise just a portion of the more than 100,000 students suffering from Connecticut's achievement gap, ultimately academic progress comes one child at a time. This bill will make important steps in stabilizing the educational experience of some of our most vulnerable students and I urge you to support its passage.