



**Testimony: Jennifer Alexander, Acting CEO for ConnCAN**  
*Appropriations Committee – Thursday, February 21, 2013*

Good afternoon Senator Harp, Representative Walker, and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on our state's biennial education budget.

My name is Jennifer Alexander and I am the Acting CEO for the Connecticut Coalition for Achievement Now (ConnCAN), a statewide advocacy organization focused on ensuring that every child in Connecticut has access to a high-quality public education.

The proposed budget before you, for the most part, follows through on the promises made last year through groundbreaking education reform (Public Act 12-116) that was approved by the General Assembly – including many of the committee members who are here today – with nearly unanimous support. This law introduced fundamental changes necessary to close our state's worst-in-the-nation student achievement gap.

Since then, a dire budget crunch forced some tough choices: December's deficit mitigation plan cut \$11.4 million from education funding, and nearly half of those cuts were to key measures of the education reform law.

Now, as we continue to face tough choices on the state's budget, we urge the legislature to protect the progress made with last year's landmark education law. If we are serious about investing in our children, we cannot afford to dial back our efforts to ensure great teachers, principals, and public schools for every child.

The education budget recently proposed by Governor Malloy does protect and sustain last year's education reforms — by allocating \$214.9 million in new funding to key education reform programs, including:

- ✓ **Substantial investment in transforming the 30 lowest-performing districts** (the Alliance Districts), including a new focus on teacher evaluation, implementing Common Core, turning around low-performing schools, and increasing access to quality public school choice options;
- ✓ **The creation of four new, high-performing state charter schools**, and preliminary steps to more equitably fund public charter school students;
- ✓ **The development of the Commissioner's Network**, aimed at turning around 25 of our state's lowest-performing schools.

**More specifically, ConnCAN supports the measures in the proposed budget that will:**

- ✓ **Direct additional resources to Alliance Districts:** The proposed budget directs more resources to help students in our state's lowest performing school districts – the Alliance Districts – while holding these districts accountable for results. The budget will encourage Alliance Districts to use this additional funding to support implementation of essential reforms, including: implementation of the Common Core standards, educator evaluation system, and turning around low-performing schools. This effort will help ensure that every child in Connecticut is able to receive a quality public education regardless of wealth, race, or zip code.

✓ **Allocate funding for the creation of additional public charter schools:** By proposing the creation of nine additional public charter schools (4 state charter schools and 5 local charter schools), the governor's budget represents a clear response to families across Connecticut that have been demanding additional charter seats in record numbers. In 2009-2010, the number of students on waiting lists for public charter schools was 5,286, exceeding the number of total charter enrollment.<sup>1</sup> To meet that demand, this year the state received 27 letters of interest from potential charter school operators. It should be noted, however, that many of these applicants seek to open state charter schools. We hope that the state will consider approving and funding more than 4 new state charters over the next two years. The opening of new charter schools over the next biennium would benefit hundreds of our neediest students in communities across Connecticut.

✓ **Offer statewide support for key school improvement initiatives:** The proposed budget provides needed support (\$24 million) for districts to implement two critical reforms: the state's System for Educator Evaluation and Development (SEED); and the Common Core State Standards initiative.

The new educator evaluation system is a foundational step towards ensuring great teachers and school leaders for every student. It will help provide a way to identify and support the state's best teachers and principals, while at the same time offering feedback, professional development, and training for those educators who need it, and a swift process for removal of educators who consistently fail to improve.

In addition, implementing Common Core standards will be an essential, and intensive, effort that will help ensure all our students' graduate high school ready for college or a career.

✓ **Grow the Commissioner's Network school turnaround program:** By supporting the four current Commissioner's Network schools, and allocating funds for an additional 17 schools, the proposed budget offers students in our lowest-performing schools real hope for a better education and, ultimately, a better future.

**In addition, the proposed budget doesn't go far enough because it:**

✓ **Falls short of the charter school per student increases set in statute:** December's deficit mitigation plan slashed funds for charter students by \$2 million – \$300 per-pupil. This budget restores some of that funding increase originally promised in Public Act 12-116. However, this bill fails to fully restore the per-pupil charter funding levels in statute (\$11,000 per-pupil in FY14 and \$11,500 in FY15). Right now, traditional school students receive far more dollars per-pupil than charter school students. We urge you to increase the per pupil amount to \$11,500 per student in FY15, to level the playing field for public charter schools that are delivering strong results for children.

✓ **Continues to fund education through a broken ECS Formula:** Connecticut's Education Cost Sharing (ECS) formula, which allocates over \$2 billion a year, relies on decade-old data and has been altered more than two dozen times. The resulting formula does an incredibly poor job of fairly serving all of Connecticut's students. Connecticut needs a comprehensive overhaul of school finance that fairly funds all public school students based on their learning needs, including children who attend public schools of choice.

In conclusion, we know that members of this committee – and your colleagues in the General Assembly – will have to make tough decisions regarding the state's budget. In doing so, we urge you to remember the promises made to our children when enacting last year's Public Act 12-116. If we are serious about investing

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<sup>1</sup> Connecticut State Department of Education. "Annual Report on the Operation of Charter Schools in Connecticut." 2009-2010. [http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/equity/charter/report\\_on\\_the\\_operation\\_of\\_charter\\_schools.pdf](http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/equity/charter/report_on_the_operation_of_charter_schools.pdf).

in our children, we cannot afford to dial back our efforts to ensure a high-quality public education for every child. Our students are counting on us.

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