



Testimony: Jamilah Prince-Stewart, Senior Associate of Community Engagement, ConnCAN
Appropriations Committee – Thursday, February 21, 2013

Good evening Senator Harp, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Jamilah Prince-Stewart and I am the Senior Associate of Community Engagement 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.

I am here to testify in support of the governor's education budget proposal, specifically for the inclusion of a per-pupil increase for our state's public charter schools, and for funding of an additional nine new charter schools over the next two years. For too long, too many children who look like me and come from communities like mine have been trapped in failing schools, waiting for our state leaders to save them from a grim future. Without the efforts of my mother, I could have been one of those students.

I grew up in New Haven's West Hills neighborhood. Hoping that I wouldn't end up attending my neighborhood school, which was failing, my mom entered me in the district's school choice lottery. Like far too many of Connecticut's students, my number was not called. Fortunately, my mother refused to send me to my assigned school, and instead took on second job so I could attend a nearby parochial school, but for many families, that was simply not possible. Her wants were no different than those of any other parent in New Haven; we were just blessed to have the means to do it.

My mother's extreme efforts changed my life. As a result of excellent educational opportunities, I was one of far too few New Haven natives to attend Yale University. We have one of the best educational institutions in our backyard and we're not even preparing our children to gain access to it.

The budget you are considering today changes that. In response to the thousands of families across Connecticut that have been demanding additional charter school seats, this budget funds the creation of nine new public charter schools. These schools are an essential part of ensuring that every child will have access to a high quality education, regardless of race, class, language or zip code.

With 90% of the more than 6,000 Connecticut public charter school students out-performing their traditional public school counterparts, it's clear that these schools are providing students with tools they need to succeed.¹ The proposed budget increases access to these high-quality schools of choice, schools that are essential to closing our worst in the nation achievement gap and ensuring that success isn't just limited just to the families that can afford it.

As members of this committee – and your colleagues in the General Assembly – make tough choice regarding the state's budget, please remember that Connecticut's public charter schools are working for our kids, and are key to giving all of our students an equal opportunity to thrive.

There are parents in this state who wake up everyday knowing that they send their child to a failing school. If no one on this Committee is willing to send their child to a failing school, then you should never ask a parent from my community to do that. Charter schools alone will not close the achievement gap, but they must be part of the solution. Parent choice is power.

¹ According to the Connecticut State Department of Education's Student Performance Index.