



**Testimony: Jennifer Alexander, Acting CEO for ConnCAN**  
*Education Committee – Friday, February 15, 2013*

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.

I want to thank Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann, and members of the committee for the opportunity to provide testimony on three separate pieces of legislation: House Bill 6357, An Act Implementing the Budget Recommendations of the Governor Concerning Education; House Bill 6358, An Act Unleashing Innovation in Connecticut Schools; and House Bill 6359, An Act Concerning an Early Childhood System.

**HB 6357: An Act Implementing the Budget Recommendations of the Governor Concerning Education**

Regarding HB 6357, “An Act Implementing the Budget Recommendations of the Governor Concerning Education,” last year the governor and the legislature worked together to create groundbreaking education reform (Public Act 12-116) that was approved by 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 in 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 aimed at closing our worst-in-the-nation achievement gap and moving Connecticut toward a future where every single child has access to a quality public school.

HB 6357, along with the budget proposed by Governor Malloy, protects most of the progress made with last year’s education law, 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.
- ✓ Increased flexibility from bureaucratic mandates for districts that demonstrate positive results for kids that will allow these districts to further innovate.
- ✓ A new Office of Early Childhood that can improve management and quality control within our early childhood system.
- ✓ Preliminary steps to improve school funding and more equitably fund public charter school students.

**More specifically, ConnCAN supports the measures in HB 6357 that will:**

- ✓ **Improve the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) Formula measures of student need and town wealth:** Measuring student need using Free/Reduced Price Lunch eligibility will identify thousands more low-income students and direct additional funds to schools that serve students who need it most. Furthermore, measuring town wealth using more recent income data will help to more accurately reflect the changing fiscal capacity of communities and their ability to fund education.
- ✓ **Direct additional resources to Alliance Districts:** By directing more resources to help students in our state's lowest performing districts – the Alliance Districts – while holding these districts accountable for results, the bill will help further ensure that every child in Connecticut is able to receive a quality public education regardless of wealth, race, or zip code. The bill 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.

**In addition, HB 6357 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 bill restores some of that funding increase promised in Public Act 12-116. However, this bill fails to fully restore the per-pupil charter funding levels established in Public Act 12-116 (\$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.
- ✓ **Does not overhaul the ECS Formula:** The proposed changes to the ECS formula in this bill represent tinkering around the edges school finance reform. However, Connecticut needs a comprehensive overhaul of school finance that fairly funds all public school students based on their learning needs, including children who attend schools of choice.

**HB 6358: An Act Unleashing Innovation in Connecticut Schools**

We support the intent of HB 6358, "An Act Unleashing Innovation in Connecticut Schools," to offer high-performing and improving school districts with increased flexibility. In addition, ConnCAN hopes that the teacher pilot program, proposed in HB 6358, will help raise standards for teachers based primarily on demonstrated effectiveness in the classroom, and not just years on the job. Such changes are desperately needed to recruit the best and brightest to the profession, support them in classrooms, recognize and reward our outstanding educators, and ensure all kids have access to great teachers.

**More specifically, ConnCAN supports the measures in HB 6358 that will:**

- ✓ **Incentivize high-performance and minimize bureaucracy:** We support easing statutory requirements, eliminating bureaucratic barriers, and incentivizing innovation in high performing districts as well as districts that are showing real improvements.
- ✓ **Provide innovation flexibility for teacher preparation:** We support efforts to promote innovation in teacher preparation, recruitment, hiring, certification, salary, promotion and assignment practices, which can go a long way toward ensuring great public schools for every child. However, in encouraging local innovation, caution must be taken not to create more bureaucracy at the local level. For example, local professional standards boards, mentioned in the legislation, could impose more obstacles that keep the best and the brightest from our classrooms, and a streamlined state

option might be preferable. We must ensure that local innovations streamline processes and grant flexibility based on evidence about what will improve teacher quality and improve student performance.

**HB6359: An Act Concerning an Early Childhood System**

Regarding HB6359, “An Act Concerning an Early Childhood System,” the bill would improve coordination of a number of early childhood services and centralize efforts within one office to include intervention, development, early care, and education functions.

ConnCAN supports the creation of this new agency, and hopes it will continue state work towards higher quality standards and services for early childhood education. In addition, if created, we hope the new agency will work to offer clear information to parents on the quality of their preschool options.

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 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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