



**Connecticut Education
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Sheila Cohen
Connecticut Education Association
Before the
Appropriations Committee

Re: Agency Budget Hearings – Early Childhood

February 24, 2014

Good afternoon Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Sheila Cohen, President of the Connecticut Education Association. CEA represents 43,000 active and retired teachers across the state. I am testifying today in support of Governor Malloy's proposed expansion of preschool opportunities for Connecticut's children.

There are rare instances in public policy discussions when so many agree on one thing. Investing in early childhood is one of them. Increasing our commitment to early childhood education increases student achievement while reducing the future costs of governmental programs, including costs associated with special education and child welfare.¹ A recent study found a return on investment in early childhood education of 11 to 1.2. Embracing Governor Malloy's proposed investments in early childhood education is penny wise.

¹ University of Minnesota (2011, February 4). "Early Childhood Education Program Yields High Economic Returns," ScienceDaily (Retrieved December 17, 2011).

² Reynolds, Arthur J., Judy A Temple, Barry A.B. White, Suh-Ruu Ou, Dylan L. Robertson. Age 26 Cost Benefit Analysis of the Child-Parent Center Early Education Program. *Child Development*, 2011; 82(1): 379 (Jan/Feb 2011).

Additionally, Connecticut cannot realistically expect to narrow the achievement gap without addressing the readiness gap. Student readiness is perhaps the most significant factor impacting the gap. Research shows that when preschool children learn about colors, letters, and numbers they have advantages over those who haven't begun that process until they first step foot in a public school. Young children who have opportunities to travel, participate in camps, and visit museums – enriching activities that come with a cost – are better prepared to learn than those without such opportunities.³ Expanding preschool access and affordability will go a long way toward equalizing educational opportunity and enhancing learning for all children.

Governor Malloy's proposal also recognizes that it is not enough to simply fund more preschool seats. It is important to ensure quality. Governor Malloy's proposal increases tuition subsidies, which help programs attract and retain trained and certified teachers. It also provides funding for Care 4 Kids child care workers whose role in our state's child care network helps to reach more children in need.

We believe that the Governor's goal of attaining universal access to preschool by 2019 is laudable, sensible, and achievable. We also believe that all children should have access to high quality teachers, who are trained and certified as early childhood educators. This too is a critical and achievable goal, particularly if we aspire to create in Connecticut a universal preschool system that is the envy of the nation.

In closing, we urge members of the Appropriations Committee to not only support funding for universal preschool, but to ensure that such funding increases children's access to trained and certified early childhood professionals.

³ Murnane, Richard J. and Greg J. Duncan, "Economic inequality: The real cause of the urban school problem." Chicago Tribune (10/6/2011).