



**Testimony: Jennifer Alexander, Acting CEO for ConnCAN**  
*Appropriations Committee – Monday, February 24, 2014*

Good evening Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the governor's proposed revisions to the state's biennial budget.

My name is Jennifer Alexander and I am the Chief Executive Officer for the Connecticut Coalition for Achievement Now (ConnCAN), which is a statewide advocacy organization focused on ensuring all kids get the high-quality education necessary to attend college and get a good job.

I strongly believe that all kids in Connecticut deserve the opportunity to attend a high-quality school, no matter where he or she lives. But unfortunately, that's not happening in our state today.

Right now, only one out of three African-American, Hispanic, or low-income 3<sup>rd</sup> graders in Connecticut are reading at grade level.<sup>1</sup> In our cities, like Bridgeport, one in three students are not graduating from high school, which is a fifty percent higher dropout rate than the national average.<sup>2,3</sup> Further, far too many of our students who do graduate from high school are not ready for college level work.

That's unacceptable. We can—and must—improve these outcomes to make sure our children and our state have a brighter economic future.

The 2012 landmark education reform law – Public Act 12-116 – took important steps in this direction. The education reform bill – which received nearly unanimous support from this General Assembly and was signed into law by the governor – prioritized the sort of reforms we need: expanding early childhood education; turning around our lowest-performing schools; creating new high-performing public school options; providing fairer funding to public charter school students; supporting effective teachers, principals, and leaders; and raising standards to ensure all kids are prepared for college and good careers.

One year later, in 2013, despite a massive budget deficit and setbacks during the legislative session, those of you on this committee joined the governor and other legislators in putting kids and investments in education reforms first by allocating funds for these measures in the 2014-15 biennial budget.

This year, we urge you to once again step up for kids and support the current budget proposal because it continues these critical investments in education reforms, including: additional funds for early childhood programs and funding to evaluating and support for teachers, principals, and leaders. The governor's budget proposal also maintains funding for: turning around schools, expanding high-quality public school options, providing fairer funding for public charter school students, and supporting our state's move towards higher expectations and accountability for kids via the Common Core State Standards.

It's imperative that members of the Appropriations Committee support these continued investments in education reforms because it's the right thing to do for our children. It's also the will of voters: More than three out of five Connecticut voters (61 percent) believe that "making sure Connecticut schools have the

<sup>1</sup> Connecticut State Department of Education. "Connecticut Mastery Tests." 2013. Hyperlink: <http://solutions1.emetric.net/CMTPublic/Index.aspx>.

<sup>2</sup> Connecticut State Department of Education. "Connecticut High School Graduation Rates by District." 2013. Hyperlink: <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/excel/evalresearch/cohortgradbydistrict2012.xls>.

<sup>3</sup> National Center for Education Statistics. "Public School Graduates and Dropouts from the Common Core of Data: School Year 2009–10." 2013. Hyperlink: <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2013/2013309rev.pdf>.

resources they need” and continuing education reforms should be a top priority of the governor and state legislature this year, according to a new statewide survey of 600 voters from Benenson Strategy Group.<sup>4</sup>

The same poll found that nearly half of voters (44 percent) believe the Connecticut public school system is in crisis or requires significant reforms, and nearly three in four voters (73 percent) support education reforms after hearing specifics about the 2012 landmark law.<sup>5</sup>

Continued efforts to improve our public schools is good policy and good politics. Most importantly, it’s what will help ensure all kids are prepared for future success.

Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and members of the committee.– I urge you to support the governor’s proposed revisions to the state’s biennial budget. Doing so will help give all our kids the tools they need to succeed, and ensure make certain that Connecticut is a place where people want to live and work, where companies want to invest and hire, and where our children thrive.

Thank you.

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**Summary of Governor Malloy’s Proposed FY15 Budget Adjustments**

ConnCAN Priority	Budget Item	Proposed FY15 Adjustments	Proposed FY15 Appropriation (including adjustments)
Starting early	Office of Early Childhood	\$33,258,625	\$274,560,967
Raising standards and accountability	Common Core	N/A	\$6,300,000
Increasing quality public school options	Current State Charter School Funding*	N/A	\$83,515,000
	New State Charter School Funding* (3 schools)	N/A	\$8,415,000
Turning around our lowest-performing schools	Commissioner’s Network	N/A	\$17,500,000
Supporting great teachers, principals, and leaders	Talent Development	\$3,486,221	\$13,511,221
<b>Totals</b>		<b>USD36,744,846</b>	<b>USD403,802,188</b>

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<sup>4</sup> Benenson Strategy Group. “Key Findings from CT Education Reform Survey.” February 7, 2014. Hyperlink: [http://webivadownton.s3.amazonaws.com/696/16/7/1696/2014-02-11\\_ConnCAN\\_Poll\\_Memo.pdf](http://webivadownton.s3.amazonaws.com/696/16/7/1696/2014-02-11_ConnCAN_Poll_Memo.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Benenson Strategy Group. “Key Findings from CT Education Reform Survey.” February 7, 2014. Hyperlink: [http://webivadownton.s3.amazonaws.com/696/16/7/1696/2014-02-11\\_ConnCAN\\_Poll\\_Memo.pdf](http://webivadownton.s3.amazonaws.com/696/16/7/1696/2014-02-11_ConnCAN_Poll_Memo.pdf).

# OUR KIDS ARE COUNTING ON US. LET'S CONTINUE STANDING UP FOR THEM.



Every child deserves access to a high quality education regardless of race, wealth, or zip code. We must protect education reforms that ensure all students have an equal opportunity to succeed, and cannot allow success to be limited just to families that can afford it.

The 2012 education reform bill—which received nearly unanimous support from the General Assembly and was signed into law by the governor—raises standards for educators, allows immediate action to improve failing schools, and increases access to quality public school options.

Despite a massive budget deficit and setbacks during the legislative session, the legislature and governor made the tough choice to put kids and investments in education reform first by affirming these measures in the 2014-15 biennial budget.

By continuing education reforms, the legislature and governor are ensuring that kids across Connecticut have access to the great teachers, principals, and public schools they deserve.

## THIS YEAR, WE BELIEVE THAT THE LEGISLATURE SHOULD CONTINUE INVESTING IN OUR KIDS' FUTURES BY:

- **Increasing Quality Options:** Establish policy and funding conditions to support new high-quality public school and digital learning options for students.
- **Turning Around Failing Schools:** Ensure state and local policy allows for bold “restart” approaches to school turnarounds and improved management of schools and districts.
- **Supporting Great Teachers, Principals, and Leaders:** Eliminate barriers and support policy designed to recruit, support and retain great district leaders, school leaders and teachers.
- **Starting Early:** Support efforts to expand the access to high-quality pre-K programs, especially for children in high-needs areas.
- **Raising Standards and Accountability:** Raise academic standards via the Common Core and hold the education system accountable for results and efficient use of funds.

We are grateful that the legislature acknowledged the importance of education reform when they crafted their 2014-15 biennial budget. We urge legislators continue to prioritize these areas and to protect the funding allocated for key reforms for the coming year:

## FISCAL YEAR 2015 EDUCATION REFORM LINE ITEMS

Line Item	FY15 Appropriation	% of SDE Budget
Commissioner's Network	\$17,500,000	0.21%
Charter Operating Grant	\$83,515,000	2.77%
New State Charter Schools	\$8,415,000	0.28%
Talent Development	\$10,025,000	0.33%
Common Core	\$6,300,000	0.58%
Office of Early Childhood	\$232,302,802	N/A