

**Jennifer Alexander, Chief Executive Officer, ConnCAN**  
Testimony at Joint Committee on Appropriations Public Hearing  
Tuesday, March 3, 2015

Good afternoon Chairwoman Walker and Chairwoman Bye. My name is Jennifer Alexander and I'm the Chief Executive Officer of Connecticut Coalition for Achievement Now, better known as ConnCAN.

ConnCAN is committed to promoting student-centered policies that ensure all children have access to an excellent education. Schools across our state--schools of all kinds--are proving that children can achieve at high-levels, regardless of their race, zip code or family-income, when they are given the tools and support they need. Our state has taken promising steps in recent years to expand success and opportunity to all Connecticut children.

However, far too many students – nearly 40,000, in fact, who are disproportionately children of color and low-income students, still attend schools that are chronically and persistently low-performing. If we do not turn this situation around, the consequences will be devastating, not just for children but for the economic future of our state.

For these reasons, I urge you and your colleagues in the Connecticut General Assembly to maintain key investments in our children's present to ensure their future success and the future prosperity of Connecticut. If we fail to invest in education now, our children, particularly our most vulnerable children, will suffer the consequences. In plain terms, this means our youngest children will not have access to the high-quality early education that will give them the start they need to be successful, our schools will not have the teachers and leaders they need to drive achievement for students; students will not have a grade to grow into at their current school of choice; and our students at our lowest performing schools will remain in schools that are not meeting their needs.

To provide all of Connecticut's children with an excellent education will require you to make tough choices that swiftly advance strategies that work for kids, even in this challenging fiscal climate. To this end, we ask you to consider the following funding priorities to advance the state of education in Connecticut:

- Strengthen Connecticut's School Turnaround program. We must continue to invest in the Commissioner's Network while adjusting policy to strengthen the Network by prioritizing our lowest performing schools and ensuring they have the support and flexibility needed to improve their performance. For more detail, please reference ConnCAN's school turnaround report that has accompanied this testimony.
- Improve teacher and principal preparation and recruitment. To educators are ready for the challenges of the job, teacher and principal preparation programs must be held accountable for the quality and effectiveness of the graduates they produce and must focus on improving both the quality and diversity of our educator workforce.
- Build an integrated and equitable Early Childhood Education program to ensure all children have access to high quality education options from day one.
- Increase the number of high quality school options. Students and families must have the opportunity to choose a school that will meet their needs and ensure their success, whether traditional district, magnet or public charter school.

From turnarounds to charters and early childhood education to teacher preparation, Connecticut needs to ensure that our education funding and priorities truly address the challenges our students face from the time they are born to the time they graduate.

This is not, and never has been an either/or discussion for us. ConnCAN's goal is to ensure students have access to quality schools and the opportunity to lead successful lives. We know that high-quality schools come in many forms, and we want students at all schools funded fairly. Given our state's fiscal challenges and given that far too many children in our state are waiting for the high-quality education they deserve, we urge you to make investments that help deliver on the promise of a high-quality education for all children.

To build this system and ensure all kids have the opportunity to succeed, we urge you to address our most fundamental roadblock: an outdated, unfair and broken education funding formula. We urge you to overhaul this system and ensure that all students at all types of schools are funded fairly, to help our state move past these either/or discussions that fail to move the conversation to anything but real solutions rather than short-term fixes.

There is no investment that will have a greater impact on the economic progress of our state than an investment in improving public education. Our children, and our state, need you to act boldly and decisively to prioritize education and ensure a bright future for Connecticut.