

Testimony Regarding The Governor's Proposed Biennial Budget for the Connecticut State Department of Education

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Appropriations Committee
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Senator Osten, Senator Formica, Representative Walker, Representative Lavielle and the esteemed members of the Appropriations committee,

We are testifying today on behalf of Connecticut Voices for Children, a research-based child advocacy organization working to ensure that all Connecticut children have an equitable opportunity to achieve their full potential. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding the Governor's proposed changes to the Department of Education and Office of Early Childhood budgets.

Budget for the State Department of Education

Just because a program is small or has a limited service area does not mean that it is not impactful in improving educational outcomes for target groups of students. **We urge the committee to remove the cuts the Governor's Budget implements in grants for several small programs, including: Leadership, Education, Athletics in Partnership (LEAP); Connecticut Writing Project; Bridge to Success; Parent Trust Fund; and Young Parents Program.**

In total, these programs cost only \$775,782 per year, less than .026 percent of the SDE budget.

This is disappointing because SDE has worked hard over the last few years to support family/community engagement and to support students with community service needs. A significant body research shows that parental involvement can have a powerful impact on improving educational outcomes for both the family's students and school districts as a whole.¹ Programs like those supported by the **Parent Trust Fund** provide parents with opportunities to

¹Wood, L., & Bauman, E. (2017). *How Family, School and Community Engagement Can Improve Student Achievement and Influence School Reform*. Nellie Mae Education Foundation.

engage in leadership development and knowledge sharing related to community development, community resources, and social policy change.

The **Young Parents Program** (YPP) provides day care services for the infants/toddlers of students who are enrolled in and attending a comprehensive high school program leading to graduation from high school in six Connecticut towns. It is unclear whether the increased Care4Kids funding will make up the shortfall. Special attention should be paid to ensure that this special population of students receives the services they need to complete their education.

We hope that special attention will be paid to ensure that programs that serve limited service areas or special populations, like those discussed above, are not simply cut because of their size. We ask that the Appropriations Committee continue to support efforts by SDE to support unique populations of students and engage in community development work by maintaining funding for the above line items.

Budget for the Office of Early Childhood

Young children who participate in high quality care and education are more ready for school and require fewer social services.² For example, children who receive high quality early care get better test scores throughout their schooling, are less likely to be involved in the criminal justice system, and even receive higher earnings than children who are unable attend quality preschool.³ The Governor's proposed budget for the Office of Early Childhood invests in Connecticut's future by valuing early childhood programs and initiatives that support children and the adults who take care of them. However, it does not go far enough.

The Governor's proposed budget provides increased funding for Connecticut's child care subsidy, Care4Kids. Over the next two years, there is a proposed increase of \$4,900,000 in 2020, \$9,800,000 in 2021, and \$9,800,000 in 2022. These allocations will allow the state to address the gross underfunding of this essential support over the next three years. **The governor's proposal provides for several changes to the Care4Kids program that will further its compliance with federal guidelines including:**

- **rate increases for childcare providers;**
- **funding to support background checks; and**
- **increasing the income limits for program eligibility.**

However, it is still unclear exactly how funds will be allocated towards each of these areas. Additionally, it is not certain that the increased appropriations provide funding adequate to serve the number of families and providers who will be able to access Care4Kids under the new guidelines.

² Child Trends. (April 2018). High-quality preschool can support healthy development and learning. Retrieved from https://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/PreschoolFadeOutFactSheet_ChildTrends_April2018.pdf

³ Ibid.

The Governor's budget proposal also streamlines the allocation of federal funding to the Care4Kids program by separating the grants directed to Care4Kids from the General Fund. This move away from the gross appropriating method of funding increases transparency and allows for a clear look at how much state funding is going to Care4Kids, ensuring that adequate funding is available to address the needs of young children and their families.

Several smaller programs remain in the Governor's budget proposal with funding increases or a maintenance of current funding levels. Birth to Three provides early intervention services to infants and toddlers with disabilities or developmental delays. Although it is a federal program, the state contributes funding. The budget provides a modest increase in funding (\$375,319) from FY 2019 to FY 2021 to expand the caseload. While this is a step in the right direction, funding still remains below FY 2017 levels. After several years of funding cuts, both the Even Start and 2 Generation-TANF programs remain in the budget without further cuts and the Nurturing Families Network will receive a small (\$48,519) cost of living increase. These wraparound services ensure that families have the supports that they need to provide strong and stable homes for their children. More significant increases to these programs will allow for a higher number of Connecticut families to be served, giving children a strong foundation and strengthening our state not only in the present but for years to come.

Thank you for providing us the opportunity to submit this testimony on the budgets for the Department of Education and the Office of Early Childhood. We can be reached with any questions via phone at 203-498-4240 or email at jnelson@ctvoices.org and chudson@ctvoices.org.