



A VIEW FROM THE CLASSROOM

# Preparing students to achieve



## Preparing Students to Achieve

Connecticut, like the rest of the nation, faces the critical challenge of closing the achievement gap. The achievement gap is about a continual struggle for economic opportunity and justice that is centuries old. Connecticut teachers stand, as they long have, as advocates for a just society—one where equal opportunity exists for all. They believe that educational opportunity is the path to such a society. And they share with lawmakers a commitment to ensure that Connecticut schools continually improve in order to reach a just society.

It's time to confront the hard fact that 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 has pointed out that when preschool children interact with more adults, they have a fuller understanding of the world. Those who have been taught their colors, letters, and numbers have advantages over those who haven't begun that process until they first set foot in a public school. When young children understand more words, they understand more concepts. When they have the opportunity to travel, attend enriching activities, and visit museums, the interaction builds more awareness and knowledge that enhances learning.<sup>3</sup>

There are rare instances in public policy discussions when so many agree on so much. Investing in early-childhood education is one of them. Connecticut teachers join with the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, superintendents, child advocates, neighborhood groups, religious leaders of all denominations, and the many others urging lawmakers to enhance early-childhood education.

Investing in a statewide early-childhood education initiative will bring future economic, social, and fiscal returns that outweigh the costs. And it will do more than anything else to close the achievement gap in Connecticut.

### Universal Preschool

When so many children start school without the early-childhood opportunities experienced by others, an achievement gap is born. Connecticut elementary schools—and the teachers and staff inside them—inherit this gap and work every day to narrow it. It's a noble goal but one that can only truly be reached when Connecticut joins the eight states that have committed to providing universal preschool.<sup>4</sup>

### CALL TO ACTION

- ➔ Ensure universal access to high-quality, preschool experiences.

### Universal All-Day Kindergarten

Lawmakers should also ensure that children in one town have the same access to universal all-day kindergarten that often is provided to children in a neighboring town. They must recognize the important and potentially constitutional responsibility to equalize access to all-day kindergarten.

### CALL TO ACTION

- ➔ Provide incentives for full-day kindergarten to extend the reach of early learning.

### Quality Early-Childhood Educators

At a time when we are improving teaching standards for certification for K-12 educators, we must extend high-quality standards for early educators as well. With increasing demand for early education, Connecticut faces the opportunity for job growth in this sector. But tolerance for low standards has been driven by persistently low wages in a vicious cycle that has led to high turnover and insufficient quality. It is time to break this cycle, raise our expectations, and increase early-childhood teaching standards.



### **CALL TO ACTION**

- ➔ Upgrade certification requirements for preschool educators to enable them to deliver developmentally appropriate, knowledge-rich programs.

### **Early Reading and Literacy**

One of the strongest factors in a child's likelihood to continue in school, and to do well, is literacy. When young children begin school without the basic building blocks to literacy, many never catch up. The result can be disengagement, school dropout, and lifelong limitations on opportunities.

Connecticut recognized the importance of literacy when it established the Early Reading Success program almost 15 years ago. However, the challenges have expanded beyond its limited reach. To be successful in the 21st century, children must first be proficient in reading and writing. They also must develop the more complete listening, observation, and speaking skills that compose literacy. Connecticut needs to do more to ensure literacy by the end of third grade.

### **CALL TO ACTION**

- ➔ Develop and implement tutoring opportunities and extend student and teacher days, weeks, or year to ensure reading proficiency by the end of third grade.

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