

Dannel P. Malloy

GOVERNOR
STATE OF CONNECTICUT

December 20, 2011

Honorable leaders of the Connecticut General Assembly,

The time has come for change in our schools.

Less than two months ago, we came together and showed the people of Connecticut that Hartford is not like Washington, DC. That when it comes to the most pressing issue facing our state – job creation – Democrats and Republicans can put partisanship aside to create real change.

One of the most frustrating things I heard repeatedly from employers on my jobs tour was some version of, “I have job openings at my company, but I can’t find enough qualified people to fill them.” These comments underscore the fact that our state’s economic future is dependent on our students’ educational outcomes. We cannot prosper if we do not produce a workforce equal to the task of keeping Connecticut’s companies competitive. And we cannot fulfill our moral obligation to give every student a genuine chance to succeed – whether that child happens to live in Avon, Bridgeport, Greenwich, or Windham – if we do not make fundamental reforms to our schools.

Connecticut’s school system has a storied history of excellence. And our state continues to boast a number of exemplary schools and districts that produce students who can out-compete any of their peers nationwide. But over time, we have lost our edge as a state. Our performance on standardized assessments has stagnated, and students in other states have begun to catch and surpass ours. Our state’s positioning has weakened to the point that we are not competitive in national grant competitions like the recent Race to the Top Early Learning Challenge. Worse, the recent release of the National Assessment of Educational Progress results demonstrated that in most cases, Connecticut’s poor and minority students are less prepared for success than their peers in the vast majority of other states – and that our state has the largest achievement gap in the nation.

Addressing these challenges will require Connecticut to embrace a real sense of urgency and a willingness to deploy bold strategies. We must create a system that focuses at every level on preparing our students for success in college and careers. We must enable our educators by providing the support they need. We must embrace performance-based accountability as a lever for continuous improvement. And we must reduce bureaucratic barriers to excellence – if a district is producing fantastic results, the State Department of Education should be getting out of its way.

Doing so will require some new tools enacted in partnership with the legislature. Today, I am asking the Commissioner of Education to develop a set of legislative proposals for the

coming session. This package must be both ambitious and carefully tailored. It must reflect the best ideas in Connecticut and nationwide for improving education.

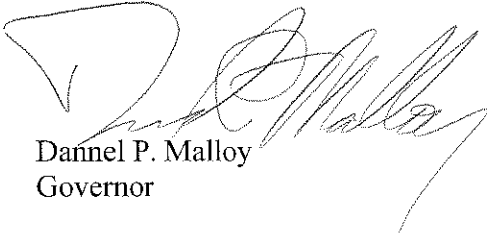
Our proposal, therefore, will be based upon the following principles:

- Enhance families' access to high-quality early childhood education opportunities.
- Authorize the intensive interventions and enable the supports necessary to turn around Connecticut's lowest-performing schools and districts.
- Expand the availability of high-quality school models, including traditional schools, magnets, charters, and others.
- Unleash innovation by removing red tape and other barriers to success, especially in high-performing schools and districts.
- Ensure that our schools are home to the very best teachers and principals – working within a fair system that values their skill and effectiveness over seniority and tenure.
- Deliver more resources, targeted to districts with the greatest need – provided that they embrace key reforms that position our students for success.

On January 5th, I will convene a set of multi-stakeholder workshops to delve more deeply into some of the most pressing education reform issues for Connecticut. Commissioner Pryor will continue to meet with you, education associations, teachers and their representatives, parents, advocacy organizations, business leaders, and others going forward. And come February, I look forward to continuing to work with you and your colleagues in the General Assembly, the State Board of Education, and an array of groups across the state on the passage and enactment of a package focused upon these principles.

We should not and will not accept half-measures and repackaged versions of the status quo. Rather, I have instructed Commissioner Pryor to craft legislation that is potent enough to make Connecticut a national leader in narrowing the achievement gap, and comprehensive enough to set the stage for a restoration of Connecticut as a model for creating academic excellence for all. We owe our children nothing less.

Sincerely,



Dannel P. Malloy
Governor

Cc:

Connecticut State Department of Education: Commissioner Stefan Pryor
Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents: Joe Cirasuolo
Connecticut Association of Boards of Education: Bob Rader
Connecticut Association of Schools: Karissa Niehoff
Connecticut Education Association: Mary Loftus Levine, Phil Apruzzese
American Federation of Teachers Connecticut: Sharon Palmer
Connecticut Business & Industry Association: John Rathgeber
Connecticut Council for Education Reform: Brenda Cisco and Steve Simmons
Connecticut Parents Union: Gwen Samuel
Connecticut Conference of Municipalities: Jim Finley
Connecticut Voices for Children: Jamey Bell, Robert Cotto
Connecticut Parent Power: Paul Wessel
Connecticut Coalition for Justice in Education Funding: Diane DeVries
Our Piece of the Pie: Bob Rath
Connecticut Association of Urban Superintendents: Phil Streifer
Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance: Maggie Adair, Karen Rainville
Connecticut Commission on Children: Elaine Zimmerman
Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission: Werner Oyadanel
CREC: Bruce Douglas
EDUCATION CONNECTION: Danuta Thibodeau
EASTCONN: Paula Colen
Cooperative Educational Services: Evan Pitkoff
Area Cooperative Educational Services: Craig Edmondson
LEARN: Virginia Seccombe
African American Affairs Commission: Glenn Cassis
ConnCAN: Patrick Riccards
Teach for America: Nate Snow
Connecticut Charter School Network: Michael Sharpe
Connecticut Center for School Change: Andrew Lachman
Connecticut Association of School Business Officials: Sherri DiNello
NAACP: Scot X. Esdaile
State Education Resource Center: Marianne Kirner
Connecticut Parent Teacher Association
Black Alliance for Educational Options: Danielle Smith
Connecticut Federation of School Administrators: Roch Girard
Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center
Connecticut After School Network: Michelle Doucette Cunningham
Connecticut Association for the Gifted
Connecticut Board of Regents: Mike Meotti
University of Connecticut Neag School of Education: Tom DeFranco
Connecticut State Universities: Jill Ferraiolo, Louise Feroe
Connecticut Policy Institute: Ben Zimmer
Yankee Institute: Fergus Cullen
American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut: Andrew Schneider