



High Quality Education & Training: A Proven Investment in Connecticut's Future

CANDIDATE BRIEFING
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There is no better state investment than the education of Connecticut's children and youth. Providing a high quality educational system — from the earliest years through college and graduate school — helps all children reach their full potential. In our knowledge-based economy, post-secondary education is a prerequisite for jobs that pay enough to support a family, and is associated with higher educational attainment in children. It is a ticket to upward mobility, and also reduces the risk of unemployment when these youth become parents. In addition, a well-educated workforce is an important investment for the well-being of our communities, the health of Connecticut residents, the future of our businesses, and the fiscal health of our state.

Investments in higher education and continuing training ensure that Connecticut maintains a strong and competitive workforce. Yet, the increasing costs of higher education threaten students' access, and the share of our workforce with a college education is declining relative to other states. A well-educated workforce is key to keeping Connecticut attractive to business. Since 1990, Connecticut has had the greatest relative loss of its 25 to 34 year old population among all states— about 175,000 fewer young adults in 2007 than in 1990. It is *especially* critical that today's students be well prepared to enter Connecticut's workforce to fill this labor gap.

The cost of higher education is growing out of reach for many families. Between 1989 and 2007, college tuition and fees grew by more than 250% across our public institutions of higher learning, more than three times the growth rate of median family

income. Yet, state-funded need-based college scholarship aid has been consistently under-funded; while FY 2008 saw a modest increase of 19% (as compared to FY 2002, adjusted for inflation), prior to 2008, state college aid had been declining (adjusted for inflation).

Our overall state investment in education is far too frugal for a state of our wealth.

According to the most recent comparative Census data on state and local government spending, Connecticut ranked 47th among all states in state and local spending on all education as a share of our total personal income, and 49th in its spending on higher education. If Connecticut's state and local education spending had matched the 50-state average (7.0% of personal income, compared to Connecticut's 5.7%), Connecticut's education investment in 2004 would have been \$1.99 *billion* greater, an increase of 25%.

Connecticut has shifted more of the burden of funding schools to our cities and towns.

Even with the frequently-lauded and much-needed increases in state education funding in the 2007 General Assembly Session, state funding for primary and secondary education has only increased by 9% from FY 02 to FY 08 (adjusted for inflation). The state's contribution to K-12 public education is now only about 40%, one of the lowest shares in the nation, though the state once contributed 45% of town costs. As a result, Connecticut must rely more on the property tax to fund education than nearly any other state. This places a particular burden on middle-income families, small businesses, seniors and others on fixed

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incomes, cities and towns with a disproportionate share of tax-exempt property, and lower-income towns.

We all have a stake in closing Connecticut's educational attainment gap. A recent study by the respected periodical *Education Week* gave Connecticut a C+ in offering children a chance to succeed through education. Connecticut does a better job than most states in providing a first-rate education to its youngsters, particularly those in the higher income brackets. Unfortunately, thousands of Connecticut's children, particularly its poorer children and children from certain minority groups, face multiple obstacles that make it harder to achieve academic success.

While Connecticut's students, as a whole, do well on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) compared to other states, our poor students lag their counterparts. On the 2007 4th grade NAEP math test, only 16% of our poor students performed at the proficient level or above – 5th lowest in the nation (in only four jurisdictions – Alabama; Arizona; Washington, DC; and Mississippi did poor students fare worse). On the 8th grade math test, just 10% of our poor students scored proficient or above; only Alabama; Washington DC; Mississippi; and New Mexico did worse.

A gap in academic achievement also exists between the state's white and African-American and Latino students. The most recent analysis of national test data found that

Connecticut was consistently ranked as having one of the top 5 largest gaps in the nation between African American students and white students and between Latino students and white students. To compound the problem, average reading scores for our African-American and Latino students have declined from previous levels.

Since our aging population will rely increasingly on our poor, as well as our non-poor, students for its future workforce, Connecticut cannot afford to leave behind *any* of its children and youth. Indeed, providing *all* Connecticut students with a substantially equal educational opportunity is a requirement of our Connecticut Constitution. Yet, given our pervasive achievement gap and the fact that the state spends a greater share of its operating budget on corrections than on higher education, it is clear that Connecticut is losing ground to other states in strategically directing the investments needed to prepare its future workforce and for its long-term economic health.

Training in some fields can increase earnings as much as receiving a bachelor's degree. Recent Census data show that workers with vocational certificates in engineering earned, on average, about as much as workers with a bachelor's degree in natural science (\$3,880/month). Workers with associates' degrees in computers earned close to what those with bachelors' degrees in social science or education earned (\$3,760/month). Providing good training for

non-college bound students also is essential, yet here too Connecticut is lacking.

Connecticut can ensure equal educational opportunity and a high quality workforce by:

- Substantially increasing the state's *own* investment in pre-school, K-12, and higher education;
- Ensuring that state funding for K-12 education is distributed in a manner that assures truly equal educational opportunity;
- Reducing the segregation and the high concentration of poor students in Connecticut's schools;
- Ensuring that all Connecticut high schools provide college prep as a standard curriculum, and that all students are adequately prepared to take college prep courses;
- Further enhancing the capacity of the State Department of Education to track and report on individual student progress and educational spending;
- Substantially increasing funding for need-based scholarships for higher education and for training programs;
- Increasing state operating support for our colleges and universities to reduce their need to increase tuition and fees;
- Supporting continuing education programs for workers who lose, or who want to change, their jobs; and
- Counting enrollment in educational programs as "work" for people transitioning off cash assistance.