



# STATE OF CONNECTICUT

## DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



**Connecticut General Assembly  
Appropriations Committee  
Testimony of Commissioner Charlene M. Russell-Tucker  
February 23, 2023**

Thank you Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Berthel, Representative Nuccio and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Charlene Russell-Tucker, and I am the Commissioner of the State Department of Education (department). I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss Governor Lamont's proposed budget for FY 24 and FY 25, as it pertains to the State Department of Education.

We are thankful to the Governor that his budget is reflective of what the department requested including:

- (1) funding ECS at the current statutory level;
- (2) funding formula grants at the statutory level;
- (3) funding the Commissioner's Network; and
- (4) funding school choice programs based on preliminary enrollment estimates and the funding needs required in the Sheff Agreement.

We are also thankful for the \$10M in the Governor's budget to invest in education workforce development. It was our shared desire to create a fund to support programs to recruit diverse candidates to teaching; reduce teacher and paraeducator shortages in the short and long-term; fill shortage areas such as bilingual and special education, STEM, and other content areas; attract and incentivize educators to teach in high need districts; and support and retain our exceptional current educators. We are hopeful that the Legislature will also support this funding.

The Governor's budget also includes \$7M to continue the LEAP home visiting initiative. Through the program, home visitors connect directly with families and students to establish trusting relationships, help return them to a more regular form of school attendance, and assist with placement in summer, after school, and learning programs. Funds will support reengaging students with the educational process and enrichment opportunities, augmenting other educational recovery efforts. You will find in your packet of materials an executive summary from the Center for Connecticut Education Research Collaborative (CCERC) demonstrating the effectiveness of the LEAP Program in reducing chronic absenteeism among our high needs students.

We are pleased to share that the department will be launching a third round of competitive summer enrichment grant funding for the 2023 and 2024 summer periods. We intend to launch this program earlier than usual, releasing applications in March and notifying selected grantees by April. We are grateful to the General Assembly for allocating \$11.5M in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding for summer enrichment (\$3.5M in the 2021 budget and \$8.0M in the 2022 budget), making this third round possible. It is important to note that CCERC has also conducted in-depth evaluations of the program during each of the last two summer periods. This research has established positive impacts of

the grant program on student outcomes, including increased student attendance at summer camp, greater student excitement for the return to school, and gains in academic and social-emotional learning. We fully support the provision in the Governor's 2023 legislative proposal to consolidate these two prior allocations into a single line item for summer enrichment, thereby removing language around a 50% financial match and allowing more camps to participate in this valuable program.

The Governor's budget address marked the start of a process. As we move forward, the department is prepared to work with the Legislature to provide you with whatever guidance or information you will need to make informed decisions to ensure equity and excellence in education for all students. Again, I appreciate being given the opportunity to testify before you today, I look forward to working with you and the Governor this session, and while I may need to gather more formal responses, I am happy to answer any questions you may have.