



## A Crisis We Can Solve: Connecticut's Failing Schools and Their Impact

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<http://www.conncan.org/media-room/press-releases/2014-11-connecticut-education-in-crisis-40000-children-trapp>

### INTRODUCTION

Right now, nearly 40,000 children in Connecticut remain stuck in chronically failing schools where many students are below grade level in reading or math.<sup>1</sup> Nearly 90 percent of the children attending these schools are children of color and children living in poverty.<sup>2</sup> The vast majority of these schools are concentrated in five cities (Bridgeport, Hartford, New Britain, New Haven, and Waterbury).<sup>3</sup>

Connecticut families want a better education for their children, but they have nowhere to turn. That's why we have over 4,000 families stuck on charter wait lists statewide,<sup>4</sup> systematically denied access to the education they deserve. Simply put, demand for great schools far exceeds availability.

Despite recent progress, we continue to make only incremental gains in student achievement. At our current rate of progress, it will take us 64 years to close the gap for African American students, 46 years to close the gap for Hispanic students, and nearly 76 years to close the gap for low-income students.<sup>5</sup> This rate of progress is unacceptable.

All of us, no matter where we live, are impacted by this persistent — and needless — failure. The costs are extreme, with billions of dollars lost in lifetime earnings, significantly increased healthcare costs, and tens of millions of dollars flowing into state prisons rather than into the state's economy.

Yet, everyday, we knowingly subject our most vulnerable students to inadequate schools that are not preparing them to succeed.

Connecticut's outdated state policies limit our ability to create new options, limit great educators' ability to do what it takes to meet student needs, and prevent far too many students and their parents from seeking a higher performing school. Our continued failure to address these deficiencies within the system creates huge opportunity gaps that have devastating and lifelong consequences for the students most in need of educational opportunity.

This problem is solvable, but our kids cannot wait 76 years for us to do it. Across Connecticut, a small but growing number of schools are showing what is possible when children from any background are given the support and tools they need to succeed.

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<sup>1</sup> 38,967 students are enrolled in 63 schools that receive a School Performance Index of 50 or below, which means that on average, many students are below proficient. These are state's lowest performing schools. See Conn. State Dept. of Education District and School Performance Reports 2012-2013, <http://www.csde.state.ct.us/public/performance-reports/20122013reports.asp>.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*

<sup>4</sup> "The number of student on wait lists has also remained high from 4,186 to 4,273 between 2009-2010 and 2012-2013." See Conn. State Dept. of Education Biennial Report on the Operation of Charter Schools in Connecticut (2014), [http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/equity/charter/report\\_on\\_the\\_operation\\_of\\_charter\\_schools.pdf](http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/equity/charter/report_on_the_operation_of_charter_schools.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> See ConnCAN 2013 CMT/CAPT Analysis, [http://webiva-downton.s3.amazonaws.com/696/05/0/761/ConnCAN\\_2013\\_CMT-CAPT\\_Analysis.pdf](http://webiva-downton.s3.amazonaws.com/696/05/0/761/ConnCAN_2013_CMT-CAPT_Analysis.pdf).

We need our state leaders to enact bold change to improve education for all children and ensure Connecticut remains a place where people want to live and work and where communities thrive.

## **ANALYSIS**

### **The Problem**

Across Connecticut, there are nearly 40,000 children attending 63 schools in 12 cities, where most students are well below grade level in reading, writing or math.<sup>6</sup> Most of these schools (53 of them) are concentrated in just five cities - Bridgeport, Hartford, New Britain, New Haven, and Waterbury.<sup>7</sup> On average, nearly 90 percent of students at these schools are African American or Hispanic and live in low-income households.<sup>8</sup>

These are schools where drastically low-performance is persistent and widespread. Consider these examples:

- In one school, during a recent six-year period, only 28 out of 286 children were able to read at grade level by the third grade.<sup>9</sup> That means only about 1 in 10 third grade students could read at grade level, each year. During one of those years, no student was reading at grade level—not a single one. And in 2013, only 8.8% of 3rd graders were reading at grade level.<sup>10</sup>
- At another school, over a four-year period, approximately only 1 in 15 third grade students could read at grade level.<sup>11</sup>
- Of 64 third grade students at another school, none of the 23 African American students were reading at grade level, and only 2 of the 32 Hispanic students reached proficiency.<sup>12</sup>
- At one high school, even though the school reported a graduation rate of 74.7% in 2008, less than 10% of students taking the 10<sup>th</sup> grade state exam were at grade level in reading from 2007 to 2011.<sup>13</sup> That means the vast majority of students were not on track to graduate prepared for college or career. All students at this school are from low-income families and over 90 percent of the students are children of color.

### **Chronic Failure, Slow Improvement**

This is not a new or unknown problem. Many of these schools have been chronically underperforming for years, leaving multiple generations of kids behind. It is also not a small problem. The number of kids in these schools in 2012-2013 alone is enough to fill Bridgeport's Webster Bank Arena nearly four times over.<sup>14</sup>

We are knowingly trapping many of our most vulnerable students in inadequate and broken schools that are not preparing students to succeed, year after year. In doing so, we ensure far more children are

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<sup>6</sup> See Conn. State Dept. of Education District and School Performance Reports 2012-2013, <http://www.csde.state.ct.us/public/performance-reports/20122013reports.asp>.

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

<sup>9</sup> *Id.*

<sup>10</sup> *Id.*

<sup>11</sup> See Conn. State Dept. of Education District and School Performance Reports 2012-2013, <http://www.csde.state.ct.us/public/performance-reports/20122013reports.asp>.

<sup>12</sup> *Id.*

<sup>13</sup> *Id.*

<sup>14</sup> See Conn. State Dept. of Education District and School Performance Reports 2012-2013, <http://www.csde.state.ct.us/public/performance-reports/20122013reports.asp>. See also Webster Bank Arena: Arena Info, [http://www.websterbankarena.com/ViewArticle.dbml?DB\\_LANG=C&DB\\_OEM\\_ID=26700&ATCLID=205156904&SPID=91995&SPSID=629650](http://www.websterbankarena.com/ViewArticle.dbml?DB_LANG=C&DB_OEM_ID=26700&ATCLID=205156904&SPID=91995&SPSID=629650).

likely to see the inside of a prison cell rather than to walk the halls of higher education and that whole communities will remain economically and socially depressed.

While Connecticut has made incremental gains in student achievement in recent years, the pace of improvement is far too slow for children currently attending our schools. At our current rate of progress, it will take us 46 years to close the gap for Hispanic students, 64 years to close the gap for African American students, and nearly 76 years to close the gap for low-income students. And for Connecticut's English Language Learners, the gap is actually widening.<sup>15</sup>

### **Pockets of Excellence Prove What is Possible**

Our current rate of progress is unacceptable. But it does not have to be this way. There are schools in these same cities that are proving success is possible and that failure is not an option.

In every corner of Connecticut, there are thriving public schools that provide students with the opportunities and skills needed for lifelong success, particularly children of color and children who live in poverty. For example, in 2012-2013, over 30 schools earned recognition as a ConnCAN Success Story.<sup>16</sup> These schools approach education with the attitude that high academic achievement is possible for all students, not just those who come from more fortunate circumstances. Success Story schools enroll more minority students and more low-income students than the state average, post achievement levels at or above the overall statewide average for African American, Hispanic, and/or low-income students, and ensure that no single student group's performance falls far below the rest of the students. For example:

- Montessori Magnet School, in Hartford, serves 43.5% low-income, 26.8% African American, and 39.7% Hispanic students, all of these groups perform above the statewide average, and the school is one of the state's highest performing schools for African American students.
- Eli Whitney Elementary School in Stratford serves 38.1% low-income, 16.9% African American, and 22.5% Hispanic students, all of these groups perform above the statewide average, and the school is one of the state's highest performing schools for Hispanic and low-income students.
- Amistad Academy in New Haven serves 81.1% low-income, 62.8% African American, 34.6% Hispanic, and 8.3% English Language Learner students. Amistad's Hispanic students perform above the statewide average, and the school is one of the state's highest performing schools for English Language Learners. At the high school level, its African American and low-income students perform above the statewide average, and the school is also one of the state's highest performing schools for African American and low-income students.<sup>17</sup>
- Thomas Hooker School in Meriden serves 53% low-income, 41.8% Hispanic, 29.9% English Language Learner, and 4% African American students. Low-income and Hispanic students at the school perform above the statewide average, and the school is also one of the state highest performing schools for low-income students.<sup>18</sup>
- Multicultural Magnet School in Bridgeport serves 100% low-income, 19.7% African American, 64.3% Hispanic, and 15.1% English Language Learner students, its low-income, African American, and Hispanic students perform above the statewide average, and the school is one of the state's highest performing schools for African American students, Hispanic students, and low-income students.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> See ConnCAN 2013 CMT/CAPT Analysis, [http://webiva-downton.s3.amazonaws.com/696/05/0/761/ConnCAN\\_2013\\_CMT-CAPT\\_Analysis.pdf](http://webiva-downton.s3.amazonaws.com/696/05/0/761/ConnCAN_2013_CMT-CAPT_Analysis.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> See ConnCAN School Report Cards Methodology, <http://reportcards.conncan.org/methodology>.

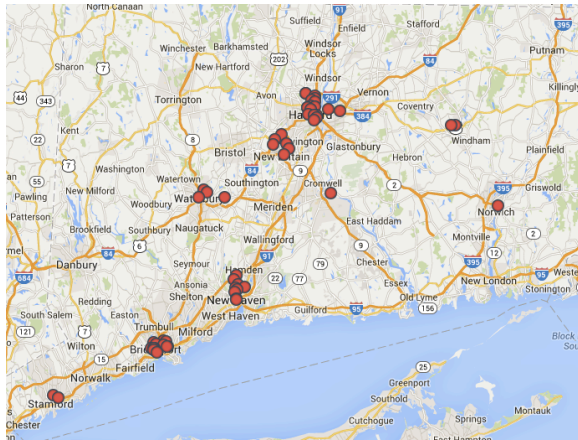
<sup>17</sup> See *id.*

<sup>18</sup> *Id.*

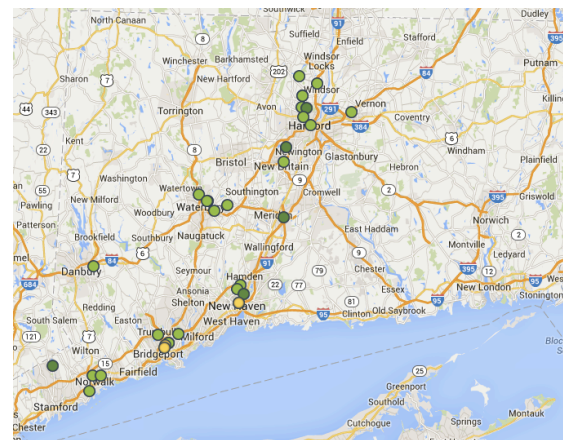
<sup>19</sup> *Id.*

These pockets of excellence are proof that when schools focus on the needs of students—and provide them with the right resources and great educators—they can produce remarkable results, especially for our most vulnerable low-income students and students of color.

### **Mapping the Crisis and What’s Possible: Failing Schools and Success Story Schools<sup>20</sup>**



Map A: Failing Schools in Connecticut



Map B: Success Story Schools

### **Children and Families Lack Quality Options**

Unfortunately, too few students in our state have access to schools like these. The more common story, especially for schools serving low-income and minority students, is one of chronic and persistent failure.

Many Connecticut families want better options, but they have nowhere to turn. Last year, for example, 20,000 students applied for just 5,000 seats in Hartford’s magnet schools.<sup>21</sup> That amounts to a 1 in 4 chance of being selected. And, in 2012-2013, the number of students on waitlists for public charter schools was 4,273, close to 66 percent of the total number students enrolled in the state’s charter schools.<sup>22</sup> In Bridgeport alone, there were more students on public charter school waiting lists than the number of students enrolled in Bridgeport charter schools in 2011-2012.<sup>23</sup>

### **The Cost of the Achievement Gap (and Economic Benefits to Closing It)**

All of us, no matter where we live, are impacted by these failing schools. And, our state is paying a price its residents cannot afford. We are not producing the highly skilled workforce that we need to keep Connecticut competitive, and we are setting our state up for devastating economic consequences.

<sup>20</sup> Success Story schools provide a high-quality education to some of Connecticut’s most underserved students regardless of race, wealth, or ZIP code. These schools must enroll more minority students and more low-income students than the state average, and at least one group (African American, Hispanic, or low-income students) performs above the overall state average. These schools also ensure that the performance of any one single group does not fall far below the rest of the students at their school. See ConnCAN School Report Cards: Success Story Schools, <http://reportcards.conncan.org/Success-Stories>.

<sup>21</sup> “Navigating the Magnet-Open Choice Lottery System,” Hartford Courant, Nov. 20, 2014, <http://www.courant.com/features/hc-mommy-minute-1110-20141110-story.html>.

<sup>22</sup> “The number of student on wait lists has also remained high from 4,186 to 4,273 between 2009-2010 and 2012-2013.” See Conn. State Dept. of Education Biennial Report on the Operation of Charter Schools in Connecticut (2014), [http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/equity/charter/report\\_on\\_the\\_operation\\_of\\_charter\\_schools.pdf](http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/equity/charter/report_on_the_operation_of_charter_schools.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> Conn. Dept. of Education 2011-2012 Enrollment by Race, Gender, & Grade, 2012, <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2758&q=334898>.

In Connecticut, more than 8,000 students drop out of high school each year, costing the state more than \$4 billion in lost revenues and increased social service costs over the life of those students.<sup>24</sup> Each high school dropout costs Connecticut more than \$500,000 over the course of his or her lifetime, as those without a high school diploma earn less and require far more social services than their peers who graduate.<sup>25</sup>

Of those who do make it to graduation and go on to Connecticut colleges and universities, 66% percent of those attending Connecticut State Universities and 73% of students attending community colleges require remedial coursework.<sup>26</sup> This remediation costs the state an estimated \$84 million per year.<sup>27</sup>

In addition, we are knowingly setting our children on a pathway that is more likely to lead to prison than college. The research is clear that children from low-income families who are not reading on grade level by the end of third grade are less likely to succeed academically, less likely to graduate from high school ready to succeed in college and career, and are more likely to fall into poverty.<sup>28</sup>

Turning this around, providing every child with great schools and closing the achievement gap would result in significant boosts to our economy. If the United States were able to close the educational achievement gaps between native-born white children and African American and Hispanic children, the projected U.S. economy would be 5.8 percent—or nearly \$2.3 trillion—larger in 2050.<sup>29</sup> Additionally, federal tax revenues would increase an average of \$110 billion each year between 2014 and 2050.<sup>30</sup> Consequently, even very large public investments that close achievement gaps would pay for themselves in the form of economic growth by 2050.<sup>31</sup>

If Connecticut increased its overall graduation rate to 90 percent, the economic benefits from these 5,900 additional graduates would likely include as much as: \$86 million in increased annual earnings and \$14 million in annual state and local tax revenues; 450 new jobs and a \$108 million increase in the gross state product; and \$293 million in increased home sales and \$9.7 million in increased auto sales.<sup>32</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Everyday, our system knowingly subjects 40,000 of our most vulnerable students to inadequate schools that are not preparing children to succeed. Worse, our outdated state policies limit great educators' ability to do what it takes to meet student needs and prevent far too many students and their parents from seeking a higher performing school. As a result, we ensure that whole communities will remain disempowered and trapped in cycles of poverty.

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<sup>24</sup> Connecticut Commission on Educational Achievement, "Every Child Should Have a Chance to be Exceptional. Without Exception: A Plan to Help Close Connecticut's Achievement Gap," [http://ctedreform.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/CCER\\_2012Report.pdf](http://ctedreform.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/CCER_2012Report.pdf).

<sup>25</sup> *Id.*

<sup>26</sup> Alliance for Excellent Education, "The High Cost of High School Dropouts," 2011, <http://all4ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/HighCost.pdf>. See also Connecticut P-20 Council, "Connecticut College and Career Readiness Toolkit" 2011, <http://www.ctregents.org/files/pdfs/p20/p20-CT-Toolkit.pdf>.

<sup>27</sup> *Id.*

<sup>28</sup> The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Early Warning Confirmed: A Research Update on Third-Grade Reading, 2013, <http://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/AECF-EarlyWarningConfirmed-2013.pdf>. See also The Annie E. Casey Foundation, Double Jeopardy: How Third-Grade Reading Skills and Poverty Influence High School Graduation, 2012, <http://www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/AECF-DoubleJeopardy-2012-Full.pdf>.

<sup>29</sup> Nov. 2014 CAP Report, The Economic Benefits of Closing Educational Achievement Gaps: Promoting Growth and Strengthening the Nation by Improving the Educational Outcomes of Children of Color, <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/WinningEconomyReport2.pdf>.

<sup>30</sup> *Id.*

<sup>31</sup> *Id.*

<sup>32</sup> Alliance for Excellent Education, "Connecticut High Schools," 2013, [http://all4ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Connecticut\\_hs.pdf](http://all4ed.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Connecticut_hs.pdf).

The social and moral costs of this persistent failure are high and unacceptable, with billions of dollars lost in lifetime earnings, increased healthcare costs, and tens of millions of dollars flowing out of the state's economy annually. All of us, no matter where we live, will be impacted by this crisis.

We do not have to accept this situation as the status quo. This problem is solvable. Schools across our state are showing us the way.

Turning this crisis around will, however, require our leaders to unite around bold and proactive solutions. We will have to move past the pitfalls of the tired, old debates that only offer false choices. To give every Connecticut child a chance to succeed, we must move past the arguments that suggest one cannot possibly be for increasing education options and also for better educator compensation or for raising student performance and supporting children's social and emotional development. These either/or debates have only paralyzed our efforts to improve schools.

It is time to stop the ideological wars and work together to give the 40,000 kids currently trapped in chronically failing schools and all of our children a better future, starting now. We must enact bold change to improve education for all children and ensure Connecticut remains a place where people want to live and work and where communities thrive.

#### **ABOUT ConnCAN**

*The Connecticut Coalition for Achievement Now (ConnCAN) is an advocacy organization leading a movement to improve public education for kids. We bring parents, educators, policymakers, and advocates together to help ensure that all kids have access to great schools regardless of race, wealth, or zip code.*

*To learn more about ConnCAN, visit: [www.conncan.org](http://www.conncan.org).*