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DEMOCRATS

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LEGISLATIVE LEADERS UNVEIL UNIVERSAL PRE-KINDERGARTEN PLAN

Connecticut Smart Start: 10-year investment will exponentially increase enrollment in preschool programs in Connecticut's public schools

HARTFORD, CT – Standing with teachers, superintendents of schools and early education experts, state legislative leaders today announced Connecticut Smart Start, an historic 10-year, \$200 million plan to provide 50,000 children with a high-quality early education experience and set Connecticut on a path toward universal pre-kindergarten.

“This is the opportunity breakthrough Connecticut’s children need,” said **Senate President Donald E. Williams, Jr. (D-Brooklyn)**. “Children who experience high quality pre-K arrive at school ready to learn, are less likely to need remedial or special education services and have higher rates of high school graduation. Connecticut Smart Start will help level the playing field for tens of thousands of children—it’s the best educational investment we can make.”

“Everyone agrees Pre-K helps prepare children for grade school, academically and socially, so why wouldn’t we want to make this investment?” said **Speaker of the House Brendan Sharkey (D-Hamden)**. “Pre-K not only increases the chances of future success in and out of the classroom, but helps meet the ongoing challenge of providing equal educational opportunity to every child.”

“Nothing will yield the state higher returns than investing in our children,” said **Senate Majority Leader Martin M. Looney**. “Multiple studies have shown that early childhood is a time when a caring teacher’s attention can have a positive and lasting effect on a child. Pre-K programs work and will prepare our children for lifelong learning success.”

“Providing kids with high-quality early education is crucial to ensuring their future success,” said **House Majority Leader Joe Aresimowicz (D-30)**. “Every child deserves the opportunity to enroll in a preschool program, no matter what their family’s income is or where they live.”

“I am encouraged to see the commitment by state leaders for early childhood education,” said **Ken DiPietro, Superintendent of Plainfield Public Schools**. “Given stresses on families, the

changing economy and the expectations of student achievement, we need to provide schools with the means to give all children the tools they need to succeed in school.”

“This initiative gives teachers a much better chance of reaching those young minds and opening them up to a myriad of possibilities, so that they can make their own lives better,” said **Blaise Messinger, 2013 Connecticut Teacher of the Year**. “That’s why we teach. To make lives better. Yes, as the research shows, it will help to close the achievement gap, but it’s about more than just academics and test scores. It’s about kids getting a real opportunity to become good citizens and make a better state, a better nation, and a better world.”

“Any efforts, especially one such as this, that help expand pre-K in our public schools for our students is greatly appreciated, said **Dr. Karen List, Superintendent of West Hartford Public Schools**. “The West Hartford Board of Education is committed to the concept that ‘earlier is better for children’ and we appreciate this effort to help fund pre-K programs. One of the reasons I strongly support pre-K programs in public schools is that we connect earlier with families and build on the early learning throughout the elementary school years.”

“We have empty space in many of our schools, we have public school districts that are committed to providing high-quality preschool, and we have a history of state and local educational partnerships that get things done,” said state **Senator Beth Bye (D-West Hartford)**, who is a longtime advocate of early childhood education. “This investment is going to make a huge difference down the road.”

“The evidence is in on pre-K programming, and the lifelong benefits of early childhood learning are undeniable,” said **Senator Andrea Stillman (D-Waterford)**, Chair of the General Assembly’s Education Committee. “Incentivizing local investment in building these programs will make them a vital part of our communities, and help us achieve universal pre-K in Connecticut.”

Said **Representative Andy Fleischmann**, “This critical investment will help ensure that all Connecticut children get the educational and job opportunities they deserve in the years to come.”

CEA President Sheila Cohen said, “This pre-K initiative is a tremendous step forward for Connecticut. Teachers’ rooms today are ringing with applause as educators celebrate this new recognition of the importance of high-quality, universal pre-K. The leadership shown by Senator Williams and his colleagues in spearheading this program will help thousands of children succeed in school and in life.”

Program Structure:

- Oversight: grant program administered by Office of Early Childhood (OEC).
- High Quality: teachers must be certified; programs must obtain National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accreditation within 3 years of receiving funding; classroom size cannot exceed 16 children with child-teacher ratio not greater than ten to one.

- New Capacity: funding is directed toward traditional public schools and cannot supplant existing program funding; towns must create or expand current programs.
- Creating Efficiencies: programs will be funded on a programmatic basis rather than a “per-slot” basis of the current system.
- Allowable Expenses: capital costs such as renovation of classroom space, and operating expenses such as hiring of certified teachers, and purchasing materials and supplies.

Who can Apply?

- Any city or town that can demonstrate an unmet need for pre-school.
- Programs must prioritize space for students eligible Free and Reduced Price Lunch.
- Programs in traditional public schools are eligible for funds.
- Includes but is not limited to Priority School Districts, Competitive School Districts and Alliance Districts.

Cooperative Efficiencies:

- Program offers the potential for regional cooperation – multiple towns could join together to create a regional program and submit a joint proposal.
- Professional development offered by school districts for their teachers must be made available at no expense to community child care providers – currently some professional development offered regionally – private providers could take advantage of greater opportunities for professional development.

How is it funded?

- \$10 million each year over 10 years in bonding for capital expenses; \$10 million each year over 10 years appropriated from Tobacco Trust Fund for operating expenses.
- Initial funding grant to town is for 5 years; possible renewal for another 5 years assuming quality and outcomes; annual reporting to OEC.
- Any funding allocated for this purpose will be excluded from the Minimum Budgetary Requirement (MBR).

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