



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Connecticut General Assembly Appropriations Committee Testimony of Commissioner Charlene M. Russell-Tucker February 20, 2024

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Berthel, Representative Nuccio and members of the Appropriations Committee. As the Commissioner of the Connecticut State Department of Education (Department), I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss Governor Lamont's proposed 2026-2027 budget, as it pertains to the State Department of Education.

We are thankful to the Governor that his budget is reflective of some of the Department's important initiatives and priorities, of which I will highlight a few.

I would first like to thank the Governor for a \$40 million funding increase for the Excess Cost Special Education Grant beginning in fiscal year 2027 to help subsidize districts for expenses incurred for high-cost special education placements for students with the greatest needs. Additionally, this budget proposal establishes a High-Quality Special Education Incentive Grant program beginning in fiscal year 2027. This new program will competitively award funding to districts to provide more high-quality special education services in-district or regionally, reducing reliance on out-of-district placements.

This proposed budget provides additional funding in fiscal year 2026 to eliminate the cost to families for reduced-price breakfast and lunch and provides for breakfast at no cost for all families statewide in fiscal year 2027. Considering the important impact that health, and especially breakfast have on learning and academic success, this funding directly addresses the contribution that nutritional health has on the overall well-being of children in our state.

We are also pleased that the Governor's budget includes funding for the Learner Engagement and Attendance Program (LEAP) beginning in fiscal year 2027. Through this evidence-based program, since inception, home visitors have conducted 71,000 home visits, engaging directly with families and students to build trusting relationships, and strengthen connections with schools. The LEAP has contributed to more than 30,000 students attending school more regularly, while serving as a connector of services for families, such as mental health and housing supports, as well as placing students in summer and afterschool programming.

Lastly, I would like to highlight the Governor's commitment to continue funding impactful programming, such as (1) the Department's High-Dosage Tutoring (HDT) program, which is a well-researched strategy to address learning loss, and ensure students have intensive, curriculum-aligned support to close academic gaps; (2) the Dual Credit Expansion Grant Program, designed to increase the percentage of students earning college credit in high school; and (3) the Science of Reading Masterclass, a statewide professional learning and coaching model for district literacy leadership teams to develop local capacity for the science of reading and components of comprehensive K-3 literacy instruction.

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 that every student is prepared for learning, life, and work beyond school. Again, I appreciate being given the opportunity to testify before you today, I look forward to working with you and the Governor during this session. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.