



Connecticut Voices for Children 2015 Policy Agenda

What would it mean if all children in Connecticut were able to realize their full potential? It would mean that all youth would graduate from high school **ready for success** in college or career. It would mean that employers could count on a **well-trained workforce**. It would mean a dramatic **reduction in today's achievement gap**, a sharp **decrease in child poverty**, an increase in median wages, and a healthier economy fueled by a growing middle class with increased demand for products and services. By making a commitment to **equitable opportunity** for all children, our state could **advance our overall economic standing** at the same time as it advanced quality of life and child and family wellbeing.

Connecticut Voices for Children has created our 2015 Policy Agenda as a **roadmap to opportunity**: for children, for families and for our state. While mindful of the fiscal challenges facing the state, we issue this call for **strategic investment** to help promote the healthy development, educational achievement and well-being of all the state's children and families.

Healthy Child Development

All children in Connecticut should grow up in nurturing environments, free of trauma, with consistent access to high-quality, affordable healthcare.

1 Implementation of national health reform has built on the successes of our HUSKY Health program. This year we must **support federal legislation to extend funding of the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP)** to protect the gains we have made in health care access for children, pregnant women and families. On the state level, we support maintaining current **eligibility and benefits** for children, parents and pregnant women in the HUSKY program. We support health reform initiatives, including the federally funded **State Innovation Model**, to promote access to timely, appropriate, culturally competent, and integrated care for children and families. We will seek renewed legislative funding for **independent performance monitoring** of HUSKY.

2 For children and youth to become healthy adults, their behavioral health needs must be addressed without stigma, using evidence based methods that are developmentally and culturally appropriate. We support policies that improve access for all children, including our youngest children, to a **full continuum of behavioral health and substance abuse services and supports**.

- Extend CHIP Funding
- Protect HUSKY Eligibility & Benefits
- Continue HUSKY Performance Monitoring
- Improve Behavioral Health Access
- Integrate Early Care & Education
- Improve ECE Work Incentives
- Improve ECE Rate Structure
- Address Exclusionary Discipline
- Enact Uniform Definition of School Arrest
- Restore State EITC
- Enact Dependent Care Tax Exemption
- Foster Permanent Relationships for Youth in State Care
- Prevent Youth Homelessness
- Study DCF Work Load

Educational Opportunity

Every child in Connecticut should have access to high quality public education from cradle to career, enabling all of our children to graduate ready for success in school, the workplace, and society.

3 We support the creation of an **integrated statewide system of early care and education** to increase access to and improve the quality of state-subsidized programs. We seek amendments to the state's child care subsidy program that will **avoid disincentives to work and ensure compliance with new federal requirements and recommendations**, including establishing an eligibility period of no less than 12 months and allowing families earning up to 85% of the state median income to continue to participate in the program. Additionally, we recognize the importance of **attracting and retaining high quality early childhood educators**, and recommend developing a rate structure that will support salaries commensurate with the educational qualifications mandated for teachers in state funded child care settings.

4 We support an educational system that values keeping students in the classroom where they learn best and that grants each child, regardless of race, education status, and socioeconomic status the right to an equal and high-quality education. We support an **overall reduction in the use of exclusionary school discipline policies**, with a focus on decreasing the disproportionate impact such policies have on minority populations. To this end, we propose a **uniform definition of "school arrest"** and the mandatory collection of **comprehensive school discipline data** by public school systems.

Family Success

Many children face barriers to success based on family instability, family income, race, ethnicity and/or town resources. Our family economic security work promotes family friendly tax policies and a two-generation approach to family learning and economic attainment. Recognizing that not all families are able to offer safe and nurturing homes, our child welfare work will focus on the following initiatives.

5 All working families should be able to meet their basic needs. To that end, we support **restoring the state Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)** to 30 percent of the federal credit and by enacting a **tax exemption for dependent family members** targeted at moderate-income families and phasing out at higher incomes. Connecticut is one of only two states that do not adjust income tax to reflect the cost of raising children.

6 Developing healthy and permanent relationships is essential for young people in foster care to become successful adults. Without secure and stable relationships, youth who grow up in foster care have greater difficulty achieving positive life outcomes. We therefore support legislation that would **help youth establish permanent adult relationships**, prevent youth homelessness, support youth transition to adulthood, and ensure social workers have the time to meet the needs of children in their care. With regard to social work capacity, the state should **conduct a work load study**.