Sen. McCrory, Rep. Sanchez Announce Education Committee Legislative Initiatives for the 2020 Session

HARTFORD — Despite improvements and efforts in the past several years to close Connecticut's opportunity gap, it remains one of the widest in the nation. Monday afternoon at the Legislative Office Building, 210 Capitol Ave., Education Committee Co-Chairs, State Senator Douglas McCrory (D – Hartford) and State Representative Bobby Sanchez (D – New Britain) joined Education Committee members, educators and advocates and for a press conference to roll out their legislative priorities for the 2020 session, which focus on closing that gap.

“Students should not have their ability to reach their academic and professional goals limited because of where they live or the income of their family. We can work to close the opportunity gap by applying methods to measure academic improvement and setting goals for enhancing academic opportunities,” said Sen. McCrory. “We must address inequality in the education Connecticut’s students receive and ensure they have the skills required of a 21st century workforce.”

"The quality of education in one of the wealthiest states in the country should not be dependent on zip code. Students deserve the same academic opportunities to succeed and realize their full potential regardless of where they live,” said Rep. Sanchez. "No student should be limited by poverty or because
their school isn't providing the tools or resources they need. We must proactively address the systemic barriers to education our students face and lay out clear goals and achievable results."

"The responsibilities entrusted to the Education Committee are some of the most serious in the entire General Assembly. We ultimately represent the youngest people in Connecticut, the children in our public schools, who themselves, represent the future of our state and our nation. Our priorities - our mission - for the 2020 session must be to ensure that we take into consideration the needs of all children in Connecticut and to ensure that we provide the tools and support necessary for every child, in every school, in all four corners of our state. I am honored to serve with the legislators on this committee to work towards that end goal, building on the progress the committee made in the last session," said Education Committee Ranking Member Senator Eric Berthel (R – Watertown).

"It is essential that we work together to create the best teaching and learning environments that support students both academically and emotionally. Although CT has many exceptional components to its education system, we still have much work to do to close the achievement gap and to ensure excellence and equity for all of Connecticut's students," said Education Committee Ranking Member State Representative Kathleen McCarty (R – Waterford). "I look forward to working with my colleagues on the Education Committee and the entire educational community to achieve these goals."

During the 2020 session, Education Committee members plan to build upon initiatives passed in previous sessions to address the wider inequities in Connecticut's education system.

The Education Committee's legislative agenda for the 2020 session will include:

- The Opportunity Gap
- Diversity in the Teaching Profession
- Reading Literacy
- Financial Literacy
- Expanding Eligibility for the Care4Kids Program

Speakers also included Steven Hernández, Interim Executive Director of the Legislature's Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity and Opportunity; Subira Gordon, Executive Director of ConnCAN; Shannon Marimon, Executive Director of ReadyCT; and Andrea Comer, Executive Director of Educators for Excellence.

"In our experience persistent gaps in opportunity, show us that we need to do things differently by our children of color, including targeting resources more equitably and ensuring that we do everything in our power to repair the conditions of teaching and learning through a school, family and community approach to intergenerational success," said Hernández. "This is especially critical in providing the social and emotional skills necessary for a young person to thrive in school, and in life. We can no longer be satisfied with simply teaching our poor, black and brown kids how to behave."

"One elementary school in Waterbury has less than 15 percent of kids who are on grade level for math. If you go three miles down the road to Wolcott, over 80 percent of those kids are on grade level for math. This is a system that has to change," said Gordon.
In recent years, legislators have identified and implemented initiatives to address the state's opportunity gap, which have led to improved results. In 2018, Connecticut's high school graduation rate reached 88.3 percent, and has steadily trended upwards since 2013.

However, the percentage of Black or African American, and Hispanic/Latino students reading at grade level is consistently lower than the rates of white students. During the 2018-2019 school year, 53.7 percent of Black or African American students and 55.5 percent of Hispanic/Latino students met English/Language Arts targets compared to 62.5 percent of white students.

In the 2018 legislative session, the Connecticut General Assembly passed a new Education Cost Sharing Formula. The formula took effect during the 2019 fiscal year and provided a 4.1 percent increase in ECS grants for underfunded school districts. It also calls for funding increases of 10.66 percent per year from 2020 to 2027. By fiscal year 2028, municipalities should receive 100 percent of their ECS grant as calculated by the formula.

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