

Imagine a system where thousands of low-achieving and special needs students are moved to schools that are allowed to operate with little oversight or accountability. That's the case with Connecticut's alternative schools. Connecticut, which has some of the best schools in the nation, also has the largest achievement gap in the nation between low-income students and their counterparts. The proliferation of so-called "alternative schools" across Connecticut is a significant contributor to the state's achievement gap and contributes to depressed on-time graduation rates, which run between 51 and 55 percent in New Haven, Hartford, and Bridgeport.

CENTER FOR CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY RECEIVES \$200,000 ROBERT WOOD JOHNSON FOUNDATION GRANT TO IMPROVE ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN CONNECTICUT

Hartford, Connecticut (December 13, 2012) - The Center for Children's Advocacy has been awarded a *Roadmaps to Health* Community Grant of \$200,000 by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) to improve and ensure state oversight of alternative education programs in Connecticut. The grant will support the Center's work with a coalition of agencies in Bridgeport to upgrade and standardize programs that routinely provide alternative means of education for youth not attending regular high schools.

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has awarded *Roadmaps to Health* Community Grants to 18 coalitions across the United States to improve the health of those communities. These alliances aim to create healthier places to live, learn, work, and play. In its second year, the *Roadmaps to Health* grants now support a total of 30 state and local coalitions made up of leaders from government, business, education, health care, public health, and community organizations.

New data released last week by the U.S. Department of Education revealed that the gap between Connecticut's overall graduation rate and the graduation rate for economically disadvantaged students was 21 percentage points — the largest such gap among all the states reporting data. The 62 percent graduation rate for economically disadvantaged students in Connecticut is among the worst in the country. The state has similarly abysmal graduation rates for African-American students, Latino students and students with special needs. Alternative schools in Connecticut impact thousands of Connecticut students, and while some provide quality educational services, the schools are not required to meet state education standards and as a result many have extremely low graduation rates. Educational attainment has profound effects on the health of individuals and their communities. By advocating for alternative schools that meet state education standards, the Center for Children's Advocacy and the coalition will improve opportunities for youth to graduate high school.

"I'm eager to begin this important work. So many of our teens in Connecticut continue to suffer from inadequate 'alternative' educational programs. Our kids deserve better: the opportunity to attend a program that will give them the education they need to succeed and become

independent. There is very little future for a teen who has not completed high school,” said Bob Francis, executive director of RYASAP, Bridgeport, a community organization whose focus is the safe and healthy development of youth.

“*Roadmaps to Health* grantees are impressive examples of leaders from multiple sectors—including public health, health care, education, faith and family organizations—working together to improve health. We hope to see more communities learning from these *Roadmaps* collaborations and using the *County Health Rankings* to create a healthier, better life for families,” said James S. Marks, MD, MPH, director of RWJF’s Health Group.

The Center for Children’s Advocacy was among 18 grantees selected from more than 400 applicants. This year’s grantees [will join 12 existing grantees](#) to build consensus and implement policy and systems changes that address the factors we know influence how healthy people are and how long they live.

The *Roadmaps to Health* Community Grants are a major component of the *County Health Rankings & Roadmaps* program—www.countyhealthrankings.org—a collaboration of RWJF and the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute. The program promotes solutions that make it easier for people to be healthy in their own communities by focusing on specific factors that affect health, such as education, employment, social support, and community safety. The grants will be managed by Community Catalyst, a national consumer health advocacy organization.