



## **EDUCATION REFORM UPDATE**

### **Alliance District Application Approvals**

*Public Act 12-116, An Act Concerning Educational Reform, created the Alliance District program with the goal of providing new resources to the districts in greatest need – provided they embrace key reforms to position their students for success. To achieve this, the law establishes a process for identifying 30 Alliance Districts – the districts with the lowest district performance index scores statewide – and allocates to these districts \$39.5 million in increased Education Cost Sharing (ECS) funding in the upcoming fiscal year. Each district’s receipt of its designated allocation is conditioned upon district submission, and Connecticut State Department of Education approval, of an Alliance District Plan for the expenditure of the new increment of conditional funds in the context of the district’s overall strategy to improve academic achievement.*

#### **October 24, 2012**

HARTFORD, CT – Governor Dannel P. Malloy and Commissioner of Education Stefan Pryor today announced that Waterbury’s Alliance District application has been finalized and approved by the Connecticut Department of Education. The Waterbury Public Schools district is now eligible to receive \$4,395,509 in additional Education Cost Sharing (ECS) funds to support its proposed initiatives to increase student achievement.

Waterbury’s grant is the third largest in the state. The size of each district’s Alliance allotment is determined by the ECS formula. Waterbury’s proposed uses of Alliance funds will support the community’s recently created Blueprint for Change reform plan.

“For too long, the formula for turning around struggling schools followed one guiding principle - increased funding,” said Governor Malloy. “While there are many schools throughout the state that would benefit with increased resources, we can’t simply continue to throw good money after bad. Thanks to the creation of Alliance Districts, increases in funding must now come with a plan for turning around schools and increasing student performance. Our state may have the nation’s largest achievement gap, but thanks to our reform effort, we now have the tools we need to make sure that all of our children can succeed.”

Commissioner Pryor said, “I congratulate Superintendent Kathleen Ouellette and her team on their successful application. Waterbury will deploy Alliance District funding toward new early childhood education programs, new efforts to strengthen early-grade literacy instruction, a redesign of its central office, and the creation of an alternative education program for students in need of special supports. I particularly commend Waterbury on key aspects of the approach it took to the plan’s development –

including analysis of trends in student achievement data and the Superintendent’s extensive stakeholder meetings and school visits.”

Summary Information: Approved Alliance District Applications

The Alliance Districts developed a variety of multi-faceted initiatives for their applications, drawn in many instances from the list of reform strategies set forth (on a permissive basis) in statute. The chart below categorizes the key initiatives that will be undertaken by the twenty Alliance Districts approved to date.

Initiative Type	Talent Development	K-3 Literacy	Extended Time	Common Core	Accountability / Data Systems	Parent and Community	Pre-K / Full-Day Kindergarten
Number of Districts	11	12	8	4	5	5	4

Each district has also allocated funds toward interventions that will begin this year in Focus Schools, as identified through Connecticut’s No Child Left Behind (NCLB) waiver. Districts have begun planning processes for future interventions in Turnaround Schools and Review Schools – also designations emanating from the state’s waiver – for future school years.

Below is a summary of Waterbury’s approved plan. For a full description of the district’s proposal, please examine the district’s application (posted on the Department’s website, click on “Alliance Districts”) or contact district staff.

**Waterbury: \$4,395,509**

- Waterbury will address the issue of equal access to quality curricula across the district by centralizing the curriculum development function and bringing materials into alignment with the Common Core State Standards.
- The district will pilot preschool programs in four elementary schools to ensure that students arrive in kindergarten with the preparation needed to succeed.
- Waterbury will redesign and modernize its central office through the identification of new senior staff and new leadership roles. The Chief Academic Officer and Instructional Leadership Directors will work directly with school leaders through instructional rounds, the development of school improvement plans, and support for data-driven instruction.
- To help improve graduation rates for struggling high school students, Waterbury will launch an extended-year alternative education program and a credit recovery program.
- Waterbury also will engage in new initiatives to improve parent involvement and create a positive school climate.

Background on Alliance Districts

Application Process

- All 30 designated Alliance Districts submitted applications in August
- The iterative process involves rounds of dialogue between the Department and districts to ensure proposals fulfill program guidelines and goals
- Districts have been asked to revise, expand, focus, and/or clarify components of their proposed plans

- Districts were asked to consult local stakeholders, including the local bargaining unit, and submit plans to their boards of education

#### Approved Alliance District Plans

- Cohort one (approved September 6, 2012): Ansonia, Naugatuck, and Windsor Locks
- Cohort two (approved September 24, 2012): Bristol, Vernon, and Windsor
- Cohort three (approved October 22, 2012): Bloomfield, Danbury, East Haven, East Windsor, Hamden, Manchester, Meriden, New London, Norwalk, Stamford, Winchester, Windham, and West Haven
- Cohort four (approved October 24, 2012): Waterbury

#### Alliance Districts, Year Two

- A short timeframe necessitated expedited reviews and approvals for the 2012-2013 school year; a more rigorous process is planned for year two
- The Department of Education has requested that districts commit to working on several priority areas as process shifts to year two, including:
  - School intervention and redesign
  - Evaluation-informed professional development
  - Transition to new accountability system described in Connecticut's approved NCLB waiver
  - Preparation for the Common Core
  - Strategic planning
  - Monitoring of Alliance plan implementation