

**CONNECTICUT STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION  
Hartford**

**TO:** State Board of Education

**FROM:** Dr. Dianna R. Wentzell, Commissioner of Education

**DATE:** May 4, 2016

**SUBJECT:** Update on Commissioner’s Network Activities and Structures

*Executive Summary*

**Introduction**

Public Act 12-116 established the Commissioner’s Network to provide new resources and flexibilities to improve student achievement in some of the state’s lowest performing schools. On July 11, 2012, in accordance with Public Act 12-116, the Connecticut State Board of Education unanimously adopted guidelines to govern the implementation of the Commissioner’s Network.

**Background**

The Commissioner’s Network is a commitment between local stakeholders and the Connecticut State Department of Education to improve student achievement in up to 25 schools. The Network offers resources and authority to empower teachers and school leaders to implement research-based strategies in schools selected by the Commissioner of Education. Participation in the Network may last for a period of three to five years. Each year since 2012, schools have joined the Commissioner’s Network. Currently there are 17 schools, broken into four cohorts. For the 2015-2016 school year the total funding for Network schools is \$10.6 million.

**Commissioner’s Network by Cohort**

<b>Cohort</b>	<b>Entry Date / Year</b>	<b>Schools</b>
Cohort 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Entered Network in 2012</li> <li>• Now in Year 4</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High School in the Community (9-12), New Haven</li> <li>• James J. Curiale (K-5), Bridgeport</li> <li>• John B. Stanton (K-5), Norwich</li> <li>• Thirman L. Milner (K-8), Hartford</li> </ul>
Cohort 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Entered Network in 2013</li> <li>• Now in Year 3</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Richard C. Briggs High (9-12), Norwalk</li> <li>• Frank J. DiLoreto (PK-8), New Britain</li> <li>• Paul Laurence Dunbar (K-8), Bridgeport</li> <li>• Crosby High (9-12), Waterbury</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Walsh (K-5), Waterbury</li> <li>Wilbur Cross High (9-12), New Haven</li> <li>Windham Middle School (6-8), Windham</li> </ul>
Cohort 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Entered Network in 2014</li> <li>Now in Year 2</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Luis Munoz Marin (PK-8), Bridgeport</li> <li>Lincoln-Bassett (PK-8), New Haven</li> <li>Uncas (K-5), Norwich</li> <li>Robert J. O'Brien (K-6), East Hartford</li> <li>John C. Clark (PK-8), Hartford</li> </ul>
Cohort 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Entered Network in 2015</li> <li>Now in Year 1</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>East Hartford Middle School, East Hartford</li> <li>Clinton Avenue, New Haven (planning)</li> <li>Columbus, Bridgeport (planning)</li> </ul>

### Successes

- New Haven's Lincoln Bassett leadership team is a model that adeptly addresses aspects of Talent, Academics, Climate and Culture and Operations.
- East Hartford's O'Brien and East Hartford Middle School have chronic absenteeism under 10%.
- Waterbury's Walsh School is implementing the Project Child program which focuses on instructional team clusters in reading, writing and math.
- Hartford's Milner School implemented a professional development block for teachers before the beginning of the school day.
- Norwich implemented a redesigned teacher evaluation system that requires administrators to conduct eight mini-observations for each classroom teacher.

### Area of Continued Focus

The Turnaround Office continues to support Commissioner's Network schools as they address challenges of chronic absenteeism. Schools that have seen a reduction in chronic absenteeism will have the opportunity to share their best practices with other schools in the Commissioner's Network. These opportunities will be provided by the Turnaround Office through Netstat Convenings along with the opportunity for schools to partner with Attendance Works.

### Ongoing Enhancements to the Commissioner's Network System

Over the last several years, lessons have been learned about how the CSDE can best support schools in the enormous and complex work of school reform and turnaround. To rebuild stronger, more resilient schools with the structures, systems and climate necessary for success for all students, the Commissioner's Network must operate as an intelligent system, adjusting and adapting to changing circumstances, outcome data, and the expressed needs of its member schools. Listed below are several key adaptations made to the Commissioner's Network system in the last two years:

1. The Turnaround Office now requires that each new school interested in participating in the Commissioner's Network to actively participate in a comprehensive planning year prior to the State Board of Education's adoption of the school turnaround plan and entry into the Network. This allows entering schools and their leaders, educators, parents, and community members time to reflect, discuss and carefully plan for turnaround efforts. We believe that this additional year is vital for the development of a rigorous, coherent and local stakeholder-approved action plan to turn around school performance. Additionally, schools have an early opportunity to demonstrate their commitment to Commissioner Network mutual expectations and obligations.
2. The Turnaround Office is collaborating with the Northeast Comprehensive Center, a technical assistance service center funded through the U.S. Department of Education, which provides support to state education agencies. Professional development, planning, and technical assistance are provided bi-monthly to the education consultants in the Turnaround Office. The consultants, in turn, provide greater supports directly to the Network schools. The goal of this professional development initiative is to increase CSDE capacity and expand our role from one of a strict monitoring and compliance function with activities such as school walkthroughs and data audits, to a much more in-depth, direct support function for improved leadership, instruction, and operations in the Commissioner's Network schools.
3. Turnaround sustainability is a critical component of the Commissioner's Network system and a goal for each school. Sustainability means that when the Network support is withdrawn after five years, schools have a high probability of continuing on an upward trajectory in instructional improvements, organizational stability, enduring positive school climate, and ultimately, high levels of student achievement. To ensure such sustainability, a thoughtful fiscal plan to incrementally absorb a greater share of the costs of the turnaround plan staffing, services, and/or materials must occur on an annual basis. Cohort 4 schools and schools entering as Cohort 5 have agreed to annually absorb a portion of staffing costs beginning in the 2016-17 school year. The small district portion (10-20% of salary/benefits per 1.0 full time equivalent) will be increased each year. This approach provides a predictable budgeting expectation for schools and districts. It will also increase the probability of progress continuing after state funding is withdrawn.

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CONNECTICUT STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

**Connecticut State Board of Education  
May 4, 2016**

**Turnaround Office Update  
Desi D. Nesmith**

# Commissioner's Network Update



# Commissioner Network

- Public Act 12-116 created the **Commissioner's Network** to provide resources to improve student achievement in up to 25 of the state's lowest performing schools.
- The Network is a partnership between local stakeholders and the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE). The Network offers a vehicle for innovative initiatives, a platform for sharing effective practices, and a model for other schools and districts.
- Turnaround Plans must include intensive/transformational strategies needed to turn around schools that, to date, have been unsuccessful in their improvement efforts.



# Commissioner's Network

## Our Collective Impact:

- **11,000 + Students**
- **17 Schools**
- **9 Districts**

## Cohort I Schools

- Stanton, Norwich
- Milner, Hartford
- Curiale, Bridgeport
- HSC, New Haven

## Cohort II Schools

- Dunbar, Bridgeport
- DiLoreto, New Britain
- Walsh, Waterbury
- Windham MS,  
Windham
- Cross, New Haven
- Briggs, Norwalk
- Crosby, Waterbury

## Cohort III Schools

- Lincoln-Bassett,  
New Haven
- Uncas, Norwich
- Marin, Bridgeport
- O'Brien, East  
Hartford
- Clark, Hartford

## Cohort IV Schools

- Clinton Avenue,  
New Haven  
(planning)\*
- Columbus,  
Bridgeport  
(planning)\*
- East Hartford  
Middle School,  
East Hartford



# Enhancements to the Commissioner's Network

## 1) Shift in CSDE Focus

Commissioner's Network Focus 2012-2015	Commissioner's Network Focus 2016-Beyond
<p data-bbox="119 511 658 635"><b>Turnaround Plan and Compliance-focus</b></p> <ul data-bbox="19 682 608 1029" style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Plan Elements</li><li>• External Partners</li><li>• Walkthroughs</li><li>• Audits</li><li>• Monitoring Meetings</li></ul>	<p data-bbox="1000 511 1705 635"><b>Transition to <i>both</i> Supports and Compliance-focus</b></p> <ul data-bbox="797 682 1903 1368" style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Build CSDE internal capacity to directly support schools</b><ul data-bbox="894 825 1903 1368" style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Provide differentiated school level supports for instructional sustainability, positive climate &amp; restorative practices</li><li>- Provide professional development/resources based on school needs</li><li>- Provide supports for leadership and organizational effectiveness</li></ul></li></ul>

# Enhancements to the Commissioner's Network

## 2) Commissioner's Network Pre-Planning Year

Date:	Activity:
February–April 2016:	Expression of Interest Form
Summer 2016:	Acceptance into Planning Phase of Commissioners Network
Fall 2016-Spring 2017:	Plan Development with Turnaround Office
May- June 2017:	Plans submitted to State Board of Education for approval



# Enhancements to the Commissioner's Network

## 3) Build Turnaround Plan Sustainability Across Time

- To ensure sustainability of turnaround efforts, a thoughtful fiscal plan is necessary.
- Cohort Four and Five schools have agreed to annually absorb an increasing portion of staffing costs beginning in the 2016-17 school year.
- This approach provides a predictable budgeting expectation for schools and districts.
- This approach will increase the probability of progress continuing after state funding is phased out.



# NetStat Convenings

## 2015-16 Convening Topics

- Connecticut's new accountability system
- Connecticut English Language Proficiency Standards
- Tools for Smarter Balanced
- Closing the Achievement Gap (Bloomfield High School)
- Sustainability (DiLoreto, New Britain)
- Climate (East Hartford Middle School)
- Restorative Practices (Global Experience Magnet School, Bloomfield)
- February NetStat dedicated to best practices



# Alliance District Update



# Enhancements to the Alliance District Program

1. Alliance District application approval process now includes multiple CSDE divisions to provide a holistic review of applications and more comprehensive feedback to districts
2. Differentiated questions for monitoring meetings based on data



# Alliance District Convenings

## 2015-16 Topics

- Dr. Fay Brown - Yale Child Study
- Building Sustainability and Optimizing District Resources
- Restorative Justice Model - Engineering Science University Magnet, New Haven
- Michele Brooks - Transformative Solutions in Education
- Connecticut's New Accountability System
- Chronic Absenteeism (Vernon Public Schools)
- Minority Teacher Recruitment Panel (CSDE, East Hartford, Bridgeport, Waterbury, Bloomfield)
- CSDE District Resource Fair



# Alliance District Monitoring Meetings

November 16, 2015 - December 4, 2015

March 7, 2016 - March 25, 2016

July 5, 2016 - July 22, 2016

## Topics Include:

- Average daily attendance
- In-School/Out-of-school suspensions
- Reading/Math proficiency
- Alliance District spending
- Professional Development Needs



# Superintendent's Professional Development

Chief Turnaround Officer facilitated inquiry into Superintendent's professional development and district needs in the following areas:

- Talent
- Academics
- Culture/Climate
- Operations

**Results used to inform future AD convenings and to focus additional supports from across the CSDE**



# Alliance District Highlights

- New Britain Public Schools is implementing **Project Child** at Chamberlain School
- **Bristol Public Schools** is implementing a “**Dine & Discuss**” series for administrators, faculty, staff on Restorative Practices
- **New London’s** Bennie Dover Jackson Middle School is implementing the “**Teach-to-One**” differentiated math instruction program

