

**CONNECTICUT STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION  
Hartford**

**TO:** State Board of Education

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

**DATE:** November 7, 2018

**SUBJECT:** State Board of Education Comprehensive Plan – Goal 1 Update

*Executive Summary*

**Introduction**

The Connecticut State Board of Education’s Five-year Comprehensive Plan, *Ensuring Equity and Excellence for All Connecticut Students*, adopted in July 2016, represents the Connecticut State Department of Education’s (CSDE) commitment to Connecticut citizens, communities, and local school districts’ efforts to provide every student in our state an exceptional education in an outstanding school. The aspirational goals of the Board’s Comprehensive Plan are:

1. Ensuring that students’ non-academic needs are met so that they are healthy, happy, and ready to learn.
2. Making sure all students learn what they need to know to succeed in college, career, and life.
3. Giving all students access to great teachers and school leaders.
4. Supporting schools and districts in staying on target with learning goals.

Immediately following the adoption of the Board’s Comprehensive Plan, the CSDE began extensive planning using a system of performance management focused on achieving defined results. By operationalizing the Board’s aspirational goals into actionable steps, the CSDE will improve the quality of execution and systematically manage, monitor, and deliver on the Board’s Five-year Comprehensive Plan. For each Board goal, the CSDE developed delivery plans that include:

- Up to three strategies that are specific, measurable, ambitious, realistic, and time-limited.
- Specific activities affiliated with each strategy.
- “Delivery chains,” including the specific people and/or organizations necessary to deliver the activities affiliated with the strategies.
- Appropriate metrics with which to evaluate progress toward the goal.
- Roles and routines to keep the CSDE focused on achieving the goal:
  - roles include goal owner, strategy lead, delivery plan facilitator;
  - routines include use of the assessment of progress tool, planning meetings, updates to the Commissioner and the State Board of Education.

## Background on Board Goal 1 and Strategy

**Goal #1 of the State Board Comprehensive Plan is “Ensuring that students’ non-academic needs are met so that they are healthy, happy, and ready to learn.” The team identified the following powerful strategies to support some of Connecticut’s most vulnerable students:**

### Strategy 1:

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Description: Improve educational outcomes for students in alternative settings by implementing the *Guidelines for Alternative Education Settings*. Effective implementation will positively impact school climate and the overall well-being of students, leading to improved attendance and eventually improved graduation rates.

Definition of Success: 100% of alternative education settings will understand and implement the content provided in the *Guidelines* in a culturally responsive manner to improve program design and contribute to increased attendance and graduation rates.

#### Activities:

- Initiated a series of five annual “Community of Practice” meetings for alternative education leaders. Meetings are held in partnership with the Connecticut Association of Schools (CAS) and are focusing on the *Guidelines*, improving attendance, trauma sensitive schools, reducing exclusionary discipline, and family engagement.
- Developed and disseminated *Standards for Educational Opportunities for Students Who Have Been Expelled* and *Alternative Educational Opportunities for Students Who Have Been Expelled: Best Practice Guidelines for Program Implementation* in 2018.
- Collaborated with the Turnaround Office to ensure that alternative schools and programs in the Opportunity Districts are addressed in the Turnaround efforts.
- Developed a partnership with Attendance Works to support the goal of reducing chronic absenteeism in the alternative settings.

Impact: Improved student engagement as evidenced by increased attendance rates.

Metric: By June 2021, the chronic absenteeism rate for alternative schools and settings will be below 40%.

2018-19 Sub-Target: Reduce the chronic absenteeism rate from 66.3% to 54.3% by June of 2019.

2018 Outcome: School year 2017-18 was unique in a number of ways, which led to an increase in chronic absenteeism statewide. The factors are explained in more detail in the chronic absenteeism section of Strategy 2 below, but include a high number of weather-related school closings, family vacations taken during school days, and housing instability among displaced students. Consequently, from June 2017 to June 2018, chronic absenteeism in the alternative programs also increased by 6% from 60.3% to 66.3%.

### Strategy 2:

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Description: Implement tiered systems of support, guidance, and professional learning in areas of attendance, school discipline, restorative and trauma-informed practices that remove barriers to success and maximize student potential.

Definition of Success: Improved attendance, reduction of suspensions and expulsions, utilization of trauma-informed practices and improved coordination of services for students.

#### Activities:

##### Chronic Absenteeism

- Convened a *Chronic Absence Regarding Students with Disabilities Work Group* with representation from state agencies, local school districts, stakeholders and advocates, to develop guidance for districts to reduce chronic absence in students with disabilities, which continues to have the highest level of chronic absence among student subgroups.
- Engaged Attendance Works, to support the Opportunity Districts in developing and strengthening their District Attendance Teams. The goal of this partnership is to have highly-effective District Attendance Teams in place in each of the districts with a focus on accurate data driven implementation strategies.

## Discipline

- Developed the *Evidence-Based Practice Guides for school climate*, which includes sections on reducing both exclusionary discipline and chronic absenteeism. The guides are intended to inform district and school decision-making regarding instructional and student support programming and to optimize the use of local, state and federal school improvement funds.
- Identified nine charter schools that had exclusionary school discipline rates of 20% or more. Provided the charter schools with training to develop a systemic discipline protocol to address philosophy, policy, systems implementation, data and practice in each school.
- Co-sponsored a faith-based conference and presented information to community providers and families regarding how to use EdSight data to inform decision-making on discipline.

Impact: Increased attendance and positive impact on graduation rates.

Metric: By June 2021, reduce the statewide chronic absenteeism rate to 6.5%.

By June 2021, reduce the statewide out-of-school suspension (OSS) rate to 4.5%; reduce the number of OSS' in Grades K-2 from 629 in 2016-17 to 80, and reduce the number of PreK OSS' to zero.

### 2018-19 Sub-Targets:

- Reduce the chronic absenteeism rate from 10.7% to 8.0% by June 2019.
- Reduce the statewide OSS rate from 6% to 5.5%; reduce the K-2 OSS number from 479 to 329; and reduce the PreK OSS number to zero.

2018 Outcomes: A number of factors occurred during 2017-18 that had a negative effect on chronic absenteeism numbers statewide.

- An unusually high number of weather-related school closings, over two weeks in some cases, extended the school year in districts into late June, which caused some students to exceed their 18-day chronic absenteeism threshold.
- Many districts report that families took extended vacations during regular school days, resulting in multiple days or even week of absence.
- Connecticut schools enrolled over 2000 displaced students during 2017-18. During their transition to the state, many families faced housing insecurity and high rates of mobility.

As a result chronic absenteeism in the state rose by 0.8% from 9.9% to 10.7%.

Discipline data from 2017-18 is not yet available.

## **Strategy 3:**

Description: Support student academic achievement and school improvement through effective school, family and community partnerships.

Definition of Success: Families, districts, schools and community partners are able to cultivate and sustain active, respectful, effective and equitable partnerships that foster school improvement, link to educational objectives, and support children's learning and development.

### Activities:

- Completed Connecticut's new framework and definition for family engagement, "Full, Equal and Equitable Partnerships with Families."
- Conducted a four-session webinar series on "High-Impact Family Engagement for Promoting Equity and Student Success" and a four-session on-line summer book group for practitioners using "Powerful Partnerships: A Teacher's Guide to Engaging Families for Student Success" serving over 300 participants.
- Collaborated with the Turnaround Office to support 25 schools in Opportunity Districts to conduct an assessment of how welcoming their schools are for families and to create an action plan for increasing family engagement.

- Produced materials to build educators’ capacity to engage families including, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Evidence-Based Practice Guide on Family and Community Engagement, a one-pager on evidence-based family engagement practices for the Commissioner’s Back-to-School meeting, an article on tools for linking family engagement to student learning for the Performance Office’s newsletter, and a section on family engagement for the Talent Office’s Resource Guide for New Administrators.
- Continued the Commissioner’s Roundtable for Family Engagement featuring discussions on understanding performance and accountability and high-impact family engagement. Also, continued Friday CAFÉ monthly discussion and networking sessions for professionals working in family engagement serving nearly 500 participants in 2017-18.

Impact: Evidence from research indicates that when families are engaged, students have higher grades and test scores, better attendance, and higher rates of homework completion. These students also enroll in more challenging classes, have better social skills and behavior, and are more likely to graduate and go on to college.

Metric: Superintendent survey results: Respondents to the initial survey of superintendents in May 2018 indicated that an average of 5.8 family engagement practices were taking place (out of a possible 9) with a range of 4.4 to 7.2. By 2021, districts will increase the average number of family engagement practices from 5.8 to 7.7.

2018-19 Sub-Target: Results from the superintendent’s survey will be used to provide focused guidance to districts in using evidence-based practices related to family engagement. This effort will lead to an increase in the average number of family engagement practices implemented in each district. The goal for the year is to increase the average number of family engagement practices from 5.8 to 6.4 by June of 2019.

**Goal Progress Update**

Assessment Framework Ratings

Using a progress assessment framework and rubric to evaluate the likelihood of success on Goal # 1, the goal leader and strategy leads rated each strategy for (1) quality of planning; (2) capacity to drive progress; and (3) evidence of implementation progress.

The summary rating for progress on Goal 1 at the time of the Commissioner’s Stock Take meeting on October 9, 2018, is below.

<b>Assessment Framework Rating Template</b>		
Goal 1: Supports of Students' Non-Academic Needs		
Area of Focus	Overall likelihood of success	Summary rationale
Alternative Settings		The goal is to reduce chronic absenteeism from over 60% to under 40% over the next four years. This is a 33% reduction in the number of chronically absent students in alternative settings. Reaching the goal received a green rating because the goal is ambitious, yet achievable. The 2017-18 CoPs went well and positive momentum has developed. However, many students in alternative settings miss a large number of school days. In some cases a student's attendance may improve dramatically and the student may still be chronically absent. Coordinating with the Turnaround Office to work with the alternative schools and programs in the Opportunity Districts provides a great increase in capacity focused on the alternative schools and programs and should lead to positive outcomes. Although the chronic absenteeism increased by 6% from 2017 to 2018, many important initiatives are in place that will improve attendance in the alternative settings by 2021.

Next Generation Student Supports		These are two high priority areas that have received a great deal of attention at all educational levels. There is a focus on reducing absenteeism and exclusionary discipline and awareness of these issues is creating momentum and driving actions that will lead to reaching the goals. Additionally, the change in state statute regarding the decriminalizing of truancy has increased the awareness in districts with high numbers of students who are truant. The rate of chronic absenteeism increased statewide by 0.8% from 2017 to 2018. There are several factors that account for this increase such as a high number of snow days and light attendance during the make-up days in late June.
Family and Community Engagement		Efforts to improve family and community engagement are well underway, including the Commissioner's Roundtable for Family and Community Engagement. This strategy received a green rating because we believe that over time and through strategic collaboration districts' capacity to engage families will be dramatically improved.
Overall likelihood of achieving our goals		It is likely that the three OSSOE strategy profiles will be successfully implemented given the quality of planning, capacity, and progress made to date. The overall likelihood of success is rated as green because in spite of the setbacks related to chronic absenteeism, we have increased our efforts and are confident that we will meet all targets by 2021.

**Next Steps**

- Continue to collaborate with the Turnaround Office to support the implementation of the Goal 1 Strategy Profiles in the Opportunity Districts.
- Implement the year-two activities of the strategy profiles.
  - Alternative Schools
    - Continue the partnership with CAS to provide five Community of Practice meetings for leaders of alternative schools/programs focusing on improving attendance, reducing exclusionary discipline, family engagement, and developing trauma sensitive schools.
    - Develop leading and lagging indicators to provide a more nuanced way to track attendance in alternative schools and programs.
  - Next Generation Student Supports
    - Contract with Attendance Works to partner with CSDE to support the development of attendance teams and develop Peer Learning Network in the Opportunity Districts to reduce chronic absenteeism.
    - Attend the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS) executive board meeting to facilitate a discussion with superintendents regarding chronic absenteeism.
    - Train cross-agency team to implement tiered support model.
    - Recognize schools making significant headway in reducing chronic absenteeism and exclusionary discipline.
    - Expand diversionary supports and provide guidance for districts on alternatives to suspension including restorative practices.
  - Family and Community Engagement
    - Provide “Welcoming Schools” training to 25 schools in the Opportunity and Alliance Districts.
    - Create webinars for school principals and school office staff.
    - Develop a family training module to assist families to engage with their schools.
    - Provide additional CSDE technical assistance regarding home visits as a family engagement strategy.

- Communicate statewide on the first family engagement survey results and provide guidance to districts on a monthly basis.
- Celebrate and recognize exemplary work related to family engagement at the school and district levels.
- Attend a CAPSS executive board meeting to facilitate a discussion with superintendents regarding family engagement.

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