



# 2012 EDUCATION POLICY & PROGRESS REPORT

A REPORT BY THE  
CONNECTICUT COUNCIL  
FOR EDUCATION  
REFORM (CCER)

# FOREWORD

As parents, we hope our children will learn, grow and have opportunities greater than we ourselves could have imagined. We all rest easier knowing that our children are receiving an education that celebrates their uniqueness, prepares them to be productive and inspires them to want to make a positive difference in the world.

G.K. Chesterton said, “Education is simply the soul of a society as it passes from one generation to another.” Indeed, we recognize that our children, prepared or not, will transform our society. The society members and leaders that they become will depend, in large part, upon the quality of education they receive during their formative years. For this reason and many others, the Connecticut Council for Education Reform remains committed to ensuring that each child in Connecticut has access to an exceptional education, without exception.

As Connecticut citizens who embrace the possibilities of the 21st century, we find ourselves faced with a harsh reality: for all of the apparent richness and opportunity of our vibrant society, our public school system is not providing a strong foundation for many of our students’ futures. Too many young people in Connecticut exit the educational system only to find doors to educational opportunities and promising careers not open to them.

This year, in 2012, with the leadership of Governor Dannel P. Malloy, Education Commissioner Stefan Pryor and many others, we took stock of those strategies that showed the greatest evidence of improving public education, and we took action accordingly. By passing comprehensive education reform legislation in Public Act 12-116, Connecticut lawmakers and citizens took a giant step forward. The new law contains over thirty recommendations made by the bi-partisan Connecticut Commission on Educational Achievement, which intensively studied what needed to be done to help narrow the achievement gap in our state. For this landmark education bill and other reforms passed by Connecticut’s legislators and the State Board of Education, our state leaders should be proud of a critically important accomplishment.

We are tremendously grateful to those who work tirelessly in our public education system to ensure that every child has an education that successfully prepares them for the 21st century and beyond. As we work to support them in making these laws a reality in the classrooms and communities across Connecticut, we invite you to learn more about your local schools and find out how you can help them support the learning needs of the children who enter their doors every day.

At the Connecticut Council for Education Reform, we have great expectations for Connecticut’s public education system. Our future leaders are counting on all of us to work together to see that they are fulfilled.

Sincerely,



**Steven J. Simmons**  
Board Chair and Former Chair  
Connecticut Commission on Educational Achievement



**Rae Ann Knopf**  
Executive Director

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# INTRODUCTION

In October 2010, the Connecticut Commission on Educational Achievement (CCEA), issued a report outlining six major areas of policy focus covering sixty-seven individual recommendations that collectively represent a bold vision for how to significantly narrow Connecticut's achievement gap, while raising academic outcomes for all students. The recommendations outline specific ways to reform Connecticut's Pre-K to 12 education system in the areas of increasing accountability throughout the system, setting high expectations for all students, fostering excellent teachers and leaders, developing efficient and transparent ways of funding education, and turning around chronically low-achieving schools.

Whereas Connecticut was once regarded as a laggard in education reform, less than two years after the release of the CCEA's report, the progress that Connecticut has made towards meaningful education reform is remarkable. Through legislation, executive appointment, and State Board of Education action, almost half of the CCEA's recommendations have been enacted since 2010. This report serves to measure the progress towards meaningful education reform that has been made in Connecticut against the policy recommendations put forth by the CCEA in 2010 and to highlight important next steps for moving forward.

## PROGRESS TO DATE

One major step to assure the implementation of the CCEA's recommendations was the establishment of the Connecticut Council for Education Reform (CCER) in 2011. CCER is a statewide non-profit education organization that works on behalf of business

and civic leaders in support of comprehensive education reforms designed to close the achievement gap, while raising academic outcomes for all students. CCER has adopted the full policy agenda of the CCEA and serves to facilitate the implementation of the CCEA's policy recommendations. Also in 2011, reform-minded members were appointed to the State Board of Education and legislation was enacted that included a handful of the Commission's recommendations.

In 2012, proclaimed by Governor Dannel Malloy to be "The Year of Education Reform," the Governor and Commissioner of Education Stefan Pryor led the charge at the start of the legislative session by putting forth a comprehensive education reform package. CCER viewed this ambitious and long-term vision for education reform very positively.

Through the legislative process, the Governor's original plan was changed in many ways but the resulting act, Public Act 12-116 (P.A. 12-116), was a substantial education reform package that addressed many of CCER's recommendations in the areas of increasing accountability, setting high expectations, fostering great teachers, developing efficient and transparent ways of funding education and turning around the lowest-achieving schools. Education reform

also had many supporters in the legislature as P.A. 12-116 passed the Senate on a 28 to 7 vote, was unanimously passed by the House of Representatives, and was signed into law by Governor Malloy on May 15, 2012.

In this same period, the State Board of Education approved a reorganization of the State Department of Education, adopted



Collectively, we are saying that the old way of doing business no longer applies here in Hartford, when it comes to education. We are saying that it's going to take everyone—parents, great teachers and administrators working together to achieve meaningful results for our kids.

*Governor Dannel P. Malloy*



new educator evaluation guidelines and established the Educator Preparation Advisory Council, which is charged with advising the Board in developing a system to approve and regulate the state's educator preparation programs.

In acknowledgement of, and to further, Connecticut's progress towards education reform, on May 29, 2012, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan announced that Connecticut's application for a waiver from the requirements of the 2001 No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation, had been approved.

## THE FIRST STEPS IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

Despite these unprecedented successes, CCER recognizes that these are just the first steps in transforming Connecticut's education system.

The 2011-2012 Connecticut Mastery and Academic Progress Test, and the 2011 National Assessment of Educational Progress scores, show that Connecticut's achievement gap

remains the largest in the country and that the gap continues to exist across the state—from rural to urban districts. However, as Massachusetts and other states have demonstrated, states that have aggressively enacted similar reforms have made significant progress in improving student achievement.

The passage of P.A. 12-116 and the approval of Connecticut's NCLB waiver marked the starting point for the State Board of Education, State Department of Education and Connecticut's local boards of education, administrators and teachers to begin the implementation phase of reform in earnest. The months and years ahead will be focused on the critically important work of ensuring that the provisions of P.A. 12-116 and the NCLB waiver are implemented in a high-quality manner throughout the state and result in improved academic outcomes for all students.

This report serves to highlight the policies that have been adopted in Connecticut to help ensure that all students receive a high-quality education, and greatly narrow our state's achievement gap.

**“It is inspiring to see the collective commitment to putting the needs of students ahead of the needs of adults and getting everyone focused on a common agenda. And now the entire state of Connecticut is poised to do the exact same thing.”**

*Secretary of Education Arne Duncan*

# DEMAND ACCOUNTABILITY

## CCER's RECOMMENDATIONS

**Appoint strong and innovative leaders to the State Board of Education who are held accountable for narrowing the achievement gap.**

**There shall be a reconstituted SDE, with a new Commissioner of Early Childhood Education and Care and a Commissioner of Higher Education.**

**Below the Commissioner of Education, create two new offices whose heads will report directly to the Commissioner, and that reorganizes existing functions. One office shall lead school turnaround efforts and one shall supervise all educator preparation functions.**

## ACTIONS TAKEN

In February 2011, Governor Malloy named eight new members to the State Board of Education, who represent education practitioners and include members of the business and higher-education sectors.<sup>2</sup>

In 2011, legislation created a coordinated system of early education and care, and established a position for a planning director to develop and implement the system.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, in January 2012, the State Board of Education approved a reorganization of the State Department of Education.<sup>4</sup> Although the combination of the legislation and department reorganization do not exactly match CCER's recommendations, they address the two areas of concern: one, establishing a high standard of care for all early childhood settings; and two, developing teacher and school leader talent.

Also in 2012, the State Board of Education created the Educator Preparation Advisory Council (EPAC). The EPAC is charged with advising the Board in developing a system to approve and regulate Connecticut educator preparation programs. The EPAC will also advise the Board on the quality of the state's teacher preparation programs. The EPAC Co-Chairs will report their recommendations to the State Board of Education by April 2013.<sup>5</sup>

The reorganization of the State Department of Education includes a Chief Turnaround Officer who will oversee an office that is charged with identifying, and intervening in, Connecticut's low-performing districts and schools.<sup>6</sup> In addition, the reorganization established a Chief Talent Officer position. The Chief Talent Officer is responsible for overseeing all teacher and school and district leader programs, including certification, preparation, evaluation, and professional development and support plans.<sup>7</sup>

## STRENGTHEN STATE LEADERSHIP AND DRIVE ACCOUNTABILITY FOR EDUCATIONAL CHANGE.

### CCER'S RECOMMENDATIONS

**Address the critical need for an entity outside of government to track reform progress, document and share best practices, and report regularly to the public. This entity shall be directed by a diverse group of leaders, including business and philanthropic leaders, parents and educators.**

**Significantly improve data collection, analysis and public reporting to support Connecticut's education accountability process and to address PK-12 achievement gaps and challenges.**

### ADDITIONAL NOTABLE PROGRESS

*One of CCER's original recommendations called for the establishment of a Secretary of Education position to increase alignment from the early education through higher education systems. While a Secretary of Education position was not established, legislation that passed in 2011 called for the consolidation of all early childhood programs under the State Department of Education and established the Board of Regents for Higher Education to increase the efficacy of the higher education governance system. The Board of Regents collaborates with the Department of Education on initiatives such as the P-20 and the Interoperability System Council, which supports the linking of data between the early childhood, K-12 and higher education systems, as well as the workforce sector. Further, as evidenced by the 2012 legislative session, an unprecedented level of collaboration and communication now exists between the Governor's office and the Commissioner of Education.*

### ACTIONS TAKEN

In 2011, the Connecticut Council for Education Reform (CCER) was born out of the Connecticut Commission on Educational Achievement. CCER's mission is to represent the business and civic voice in facilitating the implementation of comprehensive reforms to significantly narrow Connecticut's achievement gap, while raising academic outcomes for all students.<sup>8</sup>

The 2012 reorganization of the State Department of Education established a Chief Performance Officer to complete Connecticut's data infrastructure and compile data to identify opportunities and problems.<sup>9</sup>

### IMPORTANT NEXT STEPS

Connecticut needs a uniform, well-functioning, and responsive data system that captures individual student progress over time and drives decision-making at the student, classroom, school, district, and state level. Such a data system will be instrumental in supporting Connecticut's new multi-tier accountability, and teacher and administrator, evaluation systems. Timely data should be accessible online for all levels of stakeholders, from parents to policy makers.

# HIGH EXPECTATIONS

## CCER's RECOMMENDATIONS

**Provide sufficient funding for all low-income three- and four-year-olds statewide to attend a high quality preschool program, with new funding structured as "scholarships.**

**The SDE will assess and report annually to the public on the quality and effectiveness of all preschool programs receiving government funding and those not receiving funding that request a rating.**

**Require that all students in Grades 1 and 2 with assessment scores that indicate they are far behind in reading or math and in Grades 3-5 with CMT scores below basic in reading or mathematics participate in a customized learning experience inclusive of summer school options.**

## ACTIONS TAKEN

P.A. 12-116 establishes funding for 1,000 additional slots in early childhood education programs,<sup>10</sup> the majority of which will be located in low-performing districts.<sup>11</sup>

In 2011, legislation established a plan for building a system of early care and education and childhood development.<sup>12</sup> P.A. 12-116 requires the development of a quality rating and improvement system for early childhood education programs in Connecticut.<sup>13</sup>

P.A. 12-116 requires the State Department of Education to develop a reading assessment to identify students in Grades K-3 who are below proficiency in reading.<sup>14</sup> P.A. 12-116 also requires the Commissioner to select five low-performing elementary schools for intensive reading intervention strategies developed by the State Department of Education. Students who attend these schools and are reading below level at the end of the school year will be required to enroll in an intensive summer reading program.<sup>15</sup>



**SET HIGH EXPECTATIONS FOR ALL STUDENTS.  
PROVIDE CURRICULA AND SUPPORT SO  
ALL STUDENTS CAN REACH THEM.**

**IMPORTANT NEXT STEPS**

While the establishment of 1,000 additional Pre-K slots is a step in the right direction, an estimated 8,000 three- and four-year-olds in CT will still be in need of high-quality preschool. Sufficient funding for all low-income three- and four-year-olds to attend a high-quality preschool program should be phased in over time in Connecticut. Furthermore, the Commissioner should act on his authority to require all-day Kindergarten in the districts that are designated as low-achieving districts and Education Reform districts.

The State Department of Education should audit districts' new curriculum and instructional programs for uniform quality and rigor to ensure consistency in the implementation of curricula based upon the Common Core Standards.

In light of the new computer-based assessments to be implemented in 2014-2015, districts should be required to utilize online interim assessments, to proactively identify students early who are academically behind, and provide academic interventions. Students who do not achieve a passing score should be supported with in-school interventions and extended learning opportunities to successfully retake the assessment. Each high school student should be required to pass the statewide assessment before being awarded a high school diploma.

# FOSTER LEADERSHIP

## CCER's RECOMMENDATION

**Train principals in the use of the new student and teacher data systems as well as new evaluation systems with ample opportunities for practice.**

## ACTION TAKEN

P.A. 12-116 requires administrators who will serve as evaluators in the evaluation pilot districts to be trained in conducting observations and to begin training in the summer of 2012.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, when the evaluation system is adopted as a statewide model, training will be provided for all evaluators.<sup>18</sup>





## ATTRACT, DEVELOP AND EMPOWER THE MOST EFFECTIVE LEADERS FOR OUR SCHOOLS.

### IMPORTANT NEXT STEPS

Educational leadership is the second most important factor in student achievement. However, in 2011, 5% of Intermediate Administrator positions in Connecticut were not filled due to a lack of qualified applicants. Further, the Intermediate Administrator position is again a designated shortage area for the 2012-2013 school year. These facts underscore the significant amount of work that remains to be done to build a comprehensive and effective statewide system to attract, develop and retain effective school and district leaders in Connecticut.

To broaden the pool of effective school and district leaders, Connecticut should grant automatic reciprocity to administrators who have demonstrated success as an administrator in another state and create administrator Alternative Route to Certification (ARC) programs for individuals with varied professional backgrounds that have appropriate instructional leadership experience.

To improve the administrator preparation and certification process, improvements are needed in the coursework and certification requirements for superintendents and principals. The requirements should stress educator instructional leadership qualities, meaningful evaluations and field experiences under highly effective mentors. Particular emphasis should be placed on developing urban school leaders, including the creation of an Urban Leadership ARC and expansion of Connecticut's Urban School Leaders Fellowship.

To support the successful statewide implementation of teacher and administrator evaluation systems in the 2013-2014 school year, the State Department of Education and district leaders must ensure that school administrators and evaluators receive the necessary training to follow the evaluation procedures established by each district.

In light of the new administrator evaluation system to be implemented statewide in the 2013-2014 school year, principal compensation should be based upon whether a principal has met his or her annual goals, and additional compensation should be offered for highly effective principals who agree to transfer to the lowest achieving schools. Additionally, superintendents should be required to establish and report to the public on annual student performance goals. A superintendent's ability to meet these annual student performance goals should be a required factor in his or her annual evaluation.

# EXCELLENT TEACHING

## CCER's RECOMMENDATIONS

**Restructure teacher preparation programs so that candidates demonstrate content knowledge and instructional skills in order to graduate with a teaching degree. Refine teacher certification requirements to ensure all PK-12 teachers have acquired the content knowledge and skills to be effective, especially with low-achieving students. Provide clear coursework guidelines and expectations.**

**Require teacher candidates to have more in-classroom field experiences and practical courses with at least one field experience in a high-poverty school with an effective teacher.**

**Institute K-12 data systems capable of linking student, teacher, course and administrative data for use in instructional improvement and performance evaluation. Provide incentives to support districts in utilizing these systems prior to 2013.**

## ACTIONS TAKEN

In 2012, the State Board of Education created the Educator Preparation Advisory Council (EPAC). The EPAC is charged with advising the Board in developing a system to approve and regulate Connecticut educator preparation programs. The EPAC will also advise the board on the quality of the state's teacher preparation programs. The EPAC Co-Chairs will report their recommendations to the State Board of Education by April 2013.<sup>19</sup>

Additionally, Public Act 12-63 established the requirement for future kindergarten teachers to obtain an early childhood nursery through grade three endorsement.<sup>20</sup>

P.A. 12-116 requires teacher preparation programs to provide a minimum of four semesters of field training to teacher candidates. These can be classroom clinical, field, or student teaching experiences.<sup>21</sup>

The 2010 legislation that established the Performance Evaluation Advisory Council (PEAC) also tasked PEAC with assisting the State Board of Education in developing a data collection and evaluation support system.<sup>22</sup> This data system will be key as the State Department of Education starts its pilot evaluation system.



## ENSURE STUDENTS, ESPECIALLY LOW-INCOME STUDENTS, HAVE WELL-TRAINED AND HIGHLY EFFECTIVE TEACHERS WITH EFFECTIVE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES.

### CCER'S RECOMMENDATIONS

**Grant teachers a specific period of time for improvement, if needed, based on an individualized professional improvement plan as part of this process.**

**Revise the standards and process for dismissal to permit timely action and contract termination, unless such action is arbitrary, with student needs as a dominant component.**

**Provide additional support and mentoring for teachers in these (lowest achieving) districts to improve instructional practice.**

**Provide teachers with opportunities for effective mentoring, professional development and collaboration to improve instructional practice. Adequate funding must be provided.**

### ACTIONS TAKEN

P.A. 12-116 requires the State Board of Education to adopt guidelines for the “creation of individual teacher improvement and remediation plans for teachers whose performance is developing or below standard.”<sup>23</sup>

P.A. 12-116 changed the dismissal process to streamline hearings for teachers facing dismissal as a result of ineffectiveness. The timeline for the arbitration process was shortened, the number of arbitrators was reduced from three to one and limitations were placed on both the hearing time (12 hours total) and the scope of hearings (to whether the evaluation process was followed and evaluation results were reasonable based on the evidence provided).<sup>24</sup>

P.A. 12-116 established a conditional funding grant of approximately \$40 million in additional Education Cost Sharing funds for the 30 Alliance Districts (the lowest-achieving school districts). In order to receive this conditional funding, each Alliance district must submit an Education Reform Plan that focuses on differentiated supports and interventions targeted at improving student achievement. Strategies in the plan must include, but are not limited to, literacy programs with a focus on standards and instruction, a talent strategy and teacher development.<sup>25</sup>

P.A. 12-116 requires local boards of education to provide teachers with no less than 18 hours of professional development a year. The preponderance of this professional development must be in small groups and focus on improving instructional practice.<sup>26</sup> This is a significant shift from the continuing education units which have not been as individualized. Finally, this legislation added a requirement that the Commissioner outline how mentor teachers will train other teachers in reading instruction, by July 1, 2013.<sup>27</sup>

## CCER's RECOMMENDATIONS

**The ability of school districts to impose additional training requirements and to terminate ineffective teachers must be tied to teacher evaluations, with the preponderant emphasis on student achievement and without regard to how long a teacher has been teaching.**

**Require school districts to institute a teacher evaluation system where preponderant weight is given to growth in student achievement, in addition to other factors such as classroom practice observations and lesson planning.**

**Require all elementary and special education teachers to pass the Foundations of Reading and Math assessments.**

## ACTIONS TAKEN

P.A. 12-116 identified “ineffectiveness” as grounds for teacher dismissal, following the development and implementation of teacher improvement and remediation plans that are in line with the evaluation guidelines.<sup>28</sup> Under the new evaluation guidelines, up to 45% of teacher and administrator evaluations will be based on indicators of student learning.<sup>29</sup>

In February 2012, the Performance Evaluation Advisory Council (PEAC) established teacher and administrator evaluation guidelines and a four-level performance rating system to serve as the model for teacher evaluation systems statewide.<sup>30</sup> In June 2012, the State Board of Education unanimously adopted the PEAC guidelines. Under these guidelines, indicators of student learning comprise up to 45% of the evaluation, half of which must be based upon the state standardized test or another valid assessment that measures student learning, and the remainder of which may be made up of a maximum of one standardized test and a minimum of one measure that is not a standardized test.<sup>31</sup> The remaining 55% is based on the observation of a teachers practice (40%), parent or peer feedback (10%) and whole-school student learning or student feedback (5%).

P.A. 12-116 requires the Commissioner to administer a teacher evaluation and support pilot program, using the PEAC guidelines and performance categories in the 2012-2013 school year.<sup>32</sup> Sixteen districts are participating in the initial pilot, with statewide implementation to follow.<sup>33</sup>

In 2011, legislation established the requirement that all elementary education teacher candidates pass a State Board of Education approved math assessment in order to obtain an elementary education certificate.<sup>34</sup>

P.A. 12-116 requires all certified employees who hold an initial, provisional or professional educator certificate with an early childhood nursery to third grade or an elementary endorsement, to take the foundations of reading practice assessment.<sup>35</sup> Local boards of education must annually report the practice exam results to the State Department of Education.<sup>36</sup>

P.A. 12-116 also requires teachers to pass the Foundations of Reading assessment to obtain a comprehensive special education or remedial reading and language arts endorsement.<sup>37</sup>

### IMPORTANT NEXT STEPS

While significant strides have been made towards ensuring that Connecticut's students have well-trained and highly effective teachers that are provided with meaningful professional development opportunities, a substantial amount of work remains to be done in this area.

Instituting a data collection and reporting system on the graduates of teacher preparation programs will further improve the quality of and diversity within our teacher preparation programs. Teacher preparation program approval should be based on the ability to produce effective teachers and new teacher Alternative Route to Certification (ARC) programs should be established.

Should workforce reductions be necessary, in addition to seniority, teacher effectiveness and evidence of successful training in a school's special theme and instructional needs must also be considered. These decisions must be made at the school-level, not the district level.

With new information on the effectiveness of teachers, to ensure that Connecticut recognizes and retains effective teachers, teacher compensation should be restructured to include career levels, with increasing pay and performance bonuses. Additionally, data on the distribution of effective teachers, without the use of individual names, should be public information.

# INVEST INTELLIGENTLY

## CCER's RECOMMENDATIONS

**Adopt a standard, common chart of accounts statewide to allow per pupil expenditures to be reported at the state, district and school levels.**

**Reviews of districts should regularly include a component to determine how funds are distributed to individual schools and programs and a system for analyzing effectiveness of programs funded.**

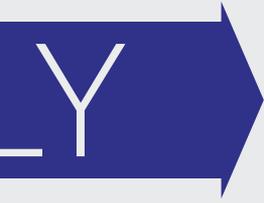
**Commission pilot programs and an independent study to demonstrate how districts could benefit from various levels of shared services or consolidation.**

## ACTIONS TAKEN

P.A. 12-116 requires the State Department of Education to develop a uniform system of accounting for school revenues and expenditures.<sup>38</sup> For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2015, all boards of education, RESC's, and state charter schools must implement and file financials to the State Department of Education using the common chart of accounts.<sup>39</sup>

P.A. 12-116 permits the Office of Policy and Management (OPM) to audit the annual financial reports for any board of education, RESC, or state charter school.<sup>40</sup>

P.A. 12-116 requires the State Department of Education to report on issues relating to small districts, including a study of financial incentives for consolidation by January 2013.<sup>41</sup>



## PROVIDE AN EFFECTIVE, TRANSPARENT WAY OF FUNDING PUBLIC EDUCATION.

### CCER's RECOMMENDATIONS

**Offer training on the specific benefits of shared services or consolidation for boards of education and district leaders.**

### ACTIONS TAKEN

P.A. 12-116 grants the Commissioner the authority to provide grants for technical assistance and regional cooperation for district cost-saving strategies.<sup>42</sup> \$100,000 was allocated for grants to support boards of education that develop a plan to implement significant cost-saving strategies.<sup>43</sup>

### IMPORTANT NEXT STEPS

The education funding measures addressed in P.A. 12-116 will result in a clearer understanding of how, and how effectively, current education dollars are being spent. To further allocate funds to best meet student needs, students with the same needs should receive the same level of funding regardless of the public school they attend. Therefore, a new weighted student-funding formula that is based on an appropriate level of weights for different student needs (i.e., free and reduced lunch status, Special Needs, English Language Learner) should be developed and funds distributed accordingly.

Further, to maximize and increase funding that is aimed at improving achievement for low-performing students and to drive innovation in our schools, the State Department of Education should intensify its efforts to examine and reallocate existing categorical funds and obtain federal and private grants.

# TURNAROUND SCHOOLS

## CCER's RECOMMENDATIONS

**Build accountability for transforming schools at district/school leadership levels with clearly articulated commitments from and accountability to the SDE School Turnaround Office.**

**Within the next year, adopt a new multi-tier accountability and intervention framework to ensure that all schools and districts have the support they need to attain high student achievement.**

**Create a new Turnaround Office that reports to the Commissioner. The Turnaround Office will have discretion over hiring decisions and the authority to contract out for staffing and support needs.**

## ACTIONS TAKEN

Connecticut's successful No Child Left Behind waiver allows the State Department of Education to replace its old accountability system. The new accountability system will direct resources, interventions and supports to meet the specific needs of low-performing groups of students in every school and district across the state.<sup>44</sup>

P.A. 12-116 requires the State Department of Education to develop a performance management plan that classifies schools and districts on a 1-5 scale, based on their school and district performance index. The performance management plan clearly articulates commitments from, and accountability to, the State Department of Education for schools at each tier. For schools and districts in the three lowest tiers P.A. 12-116 prescribes specific intervention authorities of the Commissioner and State Department of Education, including the designation of schools as Commissioner's Network schools.<sup>45</sup>

P.A. 12-116 also established a conditional funding grant of approximately \$40 million in additional Education Cost Sharing funds for the 30 Alliance Districts (the lowest-performing school districts). In order to receive this conditional funding, each Alliance district must submit an Education Reform Plan that focuses on differentiated supports and interventions targeted at improving student achievement. These plans must include, but are not limited to, developing literacy programs with a focus on standards and instruction and talent strategy and teacher development.<sup>46</sup>

The reorganization of the SDE includes a Chief Turnaround Officer who will oversee an office that is charged with identifying and intervening in Connecticut's low-performing districts and schools.<sup>47</sup>

## IMPROVE OUR LOWEST-ACHIEVING SCHOOLS THROUGH GREATER AUTHORITY, ACCOUNTABILITY AND MORE TIME FOR LEARNING.

### CCER'S RECOMMENDATIONS

**Authorize the Turnaround Office to create public-private partnerships to increase capacity, innovation and financial support for school transformation.**

**Maximize instructional time in the existing school day and provide the authority to lengthen the school day and school year for the lowest achieving 5% of schools.**

### ACTIONS TAKEN

P.A. 12-116 allows the State Department of Education to accept private donations to fund an incentive program, managed by the Commissioner, for schools that both increase the number of students reading at goal by ten percent and share their best practices.<sup>48</sup> Additionally, the legislation granted the Commissioner the authority to identify schools to participate in a pilot study for early literacy, with the authority to accept funding from private sources.<sup>49</sup>

P.A. 12-116 requires the State Department of Education to establish a performance management plan, in which the Commissioner may require local boards of education to provide greater oversight of a category three or low-achieving school or district. This oversight can include the development of plans to provide early education opportunities, summer school, extended school day or year programming and weekend classes.<sup>50</sup>

Additionally, Alliance districts seeking conditional funding grants must apply to the State Department of Education with a plan that addresses additional learning time, including extended day or school year programming.<sup>51</sup> Turnaround plans for Commissioner's Network schools are required to include the "effective use of time, as evidenced by the redesign of the school day, week or year to include additional time for student learning."<sup>52</sup>

P.A. 12-116 also requires the Commissioner to select five low-performing elementary schools for intensive reading intervention. Students who attend these schools and are reading below level at the end of the school year will be required to enroll in an intensive summer reading program.<sup>53</sup>

P.A. 12-116 notwithstanding, statute 10-223 authorizes the Commissioner to require full-day Kindergarten, extended school days or year, or tutoring services in a district or elementary school that fails to make adequate yearly progress for two years.<sup>54</sup>

## CCER's RECOMMENDATIONS

**Provide superintendents and principals with authority on staffing, scheduling, and funding by removing barriers that inhibit dramatic change.**

## ACTIONS TAKEN

P.A. 12-116 established the Commissioner's Network, which provides the State Department of Education with the flexibility and resources to intervene in and turnaround twenty-five of Connecticut's lowest-performing schools within the next three years.<sup>55</sup> Turnaround committees, comprised of administrators, parents, teachers and the Commissioner, will develop turnaround plans that include transformative strategies to establish or maintain:

- » Policies and programs to attract, support and retain effective leadership and teaching staff, including reassignment of staff and mutual consent work agreements.
- » Strategic use of data and time, including extending the school day and year.
- » Details on how the plan differs from previous turnaround efforts and how it will modify or remove legal, bureaucratic, staffing and resource constraints.<sup>56</sup>

## IMPORTANT NEXT STEPS

Substantial progress has been made towards establishing policy conditions that enable the turnaround of Connecticut's lowest-achieving schools and districts. The State Board of Education and Department of Education must aggressively implement all available strategies available under the new legislation to turnaround low-achieving schools and districts. Extra vigilance will be required to ensure that the pace of implementation is intense and sustained over time. Further action may be needed to strengthen the State Board of Education and Department of Education's authority to aggressively intervene if the current approaches are found to be inadequate.

Additional work is needed in the area of granting significant latitude to form charter, magnet and other innovative school models in partnership with external organizations with a demonstrated record of school improvement.

# CONCLUSION

**T**here is no question that Connecticut has made significant strides in adopting reform-oriented educational policies since the CCEA issued its report in October 2010. The Connecticut Council for Education Reform and members of the business and civic community are encouraged by what this means for our students, families and Connecticut's prospects for a bright and healthy future.

The question now turns to how Connecticut's State Board of Education, State Department of Education, local boards of education, educators and administrators will fulfill their responsibilities in implementing new policies and practices according to the prescribed timelines. Successful implementation of these policies is critical to the students impacted, whose lives will be shaped by their educational experiences. It is an absolute necessity to ensure a vibrant future for Connecticut.

To support these efforts, the Connecticut Council for Education Reform will track the implementation of these policies through regular updates and the publication of progress reports, identify and champion successes and best practices, and continue to support policy reforms that will further propel Connecticut towards higher student attainment.

While there is still a considerable amount of work to be done, Connecticut has made significant advances due to the courageous actions of elected officials, educators, business and community leaders, parents, students and concerned citizens. Only through their collective and ongoing efforts will Connecticut continue to make strides towards closing the state's achievement gap, while raising academic outcomes for all students.



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