

Gov. Malloy's Education Initiative For Low-Achieving Schools

THE COMMISSIONER'S NETWORK

The Commissioner's Network is a system of state supports and interventions designed to improve chronically low-performing schools. The Network will serve as a vehicle for innovative initiatives, a platform for the sharing of best practices, and a model for other schools and districts throughout the state.

State's new Turnaround Team will design and support the Commissioner's Network

The State Department of Education's newly-created Turnaround Team will lead the framing and administration of intervention and support strategies in the Commissioner's Network. This office will seek out best practices from within the state and across the country, and will work to promote the implementation of high-quality school models in the Commissioner's Network.

Commissioner's Network schools will be operated by such entities as universities, Regional Educational Service Centers, non-profits, charter management organizations, CommPACT, and other providers with proven school designs and track records. All operators will enter into management agreements with the School Turnaround Office that, among other features, specify student achievement and retention goals and terms and may phase in the turnaround's implementation over time.

With \$24.8 million in new funding, the Commissioner's Network will transform up to 25 schools over the next two years. A subset of these schools will join the Network in the fall of 2012-13, as the State Education Department's Turnaround Team builds its capacity to intervene in more schools in later years.

Schools will be selected for the Commissioner's Network based on low student achievement and lack of progress. However, schools with mitigating circumstances – including schools designed to serve special student populations and schools currently in the midst of intensive interventions – will be given special consideration before being selected for the Network.

Network Schools will be administered by either the district or the Turnaround Team

Several factors will be considered when devising particular strategies to turn around struggling schools including home districts' overall capacity, track record for improvement, and the number of low-performing schools in the district. In some cases, home districts will lead the turnaround efforts in partnership with the State's Turnaround Team. These schools may retain district governance, with the Department providing resources, flexibility, and support for turnaround strategies spelled out in agreements with the local district. For schools whose home districts are experiencing lagging performance or lower capacity, among other factors, the Department may exercise authority to serve as a temporary trustee – administering turnaround strategies directly. The goal for these schools will be to lift their performance and return them to local district governance within a few years.

Commissioner's Network Schools will improve student learning

The Commissioner's Network will drive academic achievement and growth for students. Network schools will:

- Increase financial support and capacity: The State Education Department will provide startup resources drawn from the Governor's \$24.8 million allocation to enable the ramp-up of new strategies in the first year of the turnaround. The turnaround efforts in Commissioner's Network schools will be supported by the Department's Turnaround Team and by the expertise of operators with records of success.

- Ensure effective teachers and leaders: Commissioner's Network schools will innovate in the area of compensation to attract, retain, support, and advance the most talented teachers and leaders – professionals who can help create a new culture in the schools that need them most. These schools will offer increased compensation to attract talented professionals and will make staffing changes with a mutual consent approach. Resources for this purpose will also be drawn from the Governor's \$24.8 million allocation as well as other sources. Teachers who are currently employed at these schools may reapply for their position in the school; otherwise, they may request a new assignment in the district based on their qualifications, skills, and expertise. Regarding staffing at Network schools: priority will be given to teachers who work within the school's home district. Network schools will also pilot a teacher career ladder linked to the new evaluation framework.
- Restructure schools to meet student needs: Commissioner's Network schools may provide more learning time, including extended school day and extended school year programming.
- Employ a Community School approach: Commissioner's Network schools may establish or strengthen wraparound services for students with links and referrals to health and social service providers. They will invite the involvement of parents and community representatives in forming the community school and school-linked service models.

REWARD SCHOOLS

In order to recognize outstanding performance and progress, Connecticut will recognize schools that achieve the strongest performance and the greatest growth with traditionally underperforming subgroups including racial and ethnic minorities, low-income students, English language learners, and students with disabilities. Schools that sustain the highest performance and growth over a three-year period will receive grant awards coupled with a responsibility to partner with lower-performing schools that serve similar populations to share their successful practices.

NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND WAIVER

These steps will support Connecticut's effort to qualify for a waiver from the federal requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act. States seeking this flexibility must, among other reforms, introduce measures to intervene in and improve their lowest performing schools and reward schools that are models of success for others. The Connecticut State Department of Education plans to apply for this waiver on February 21, 2012, and invites you to read the proposal and provide feedback on their website or attend upcoming Information and Public Comment sessions. Visit www.sde.ct.gov for more details.

THIRD GRADE READING FOCUS:

Connecticut's goal of preparing all students for college and career must begin with the assurance that students learn to read proficiently by grade three. The state will provide \$300,000 for a pilot program to prepare students to read proficiently by third grade.