

ReadyCT Policy Priorities 2020-21

ReadyCT is committed to advancing academic excellence and career-connected learning for all public school students in Connecticut through collaboration with business, civic, and education leaders.

In addition to the challenges posed by COVID-19, four key considerations drive the ReadyCT policy agenda: (1) a focus on talent; (2) coherence and alignment; (3) sustainability and long-term impact; and (4) Connecticut's fiscal reality.

These considerations inform the four ReadyCT policy priorities below, centered on literacy instruction, career pathways, dual-enrollment, and remote learning.

1. An Evidence-Based Approach to Ensuring All Students are Adequately Prepared in Core Foundational Academic Skills, with a Focus on Literacy. Reading is essential, yet only 41% of Connecticut's eighth graders hit the proficient mark in reading per recent NAEP score results. A contributing factor to this is grounded in curriculum choices; some districts are not teaching careading through phonics despite research that proves phonemic instruction is the most effective form of instruction. Failure to correct this can result in life-long impairment to our students.

What's needed:

- Empowering the CSDE with statewide oversight of literacy curriculum (in-service and ed prep) to ensure literacy instruction in Connecticut is driven by phonics.
- Establishing stronger, more enforceable literacy requirements at certain milestone points (e.g., 3rd grade).
- Increasing transparency to determine the effectiveness of turnaround school focused funding (such as Alliance District and Commissioner's Network grants) and selected curricula relative to student progress on key literacy milestones.

2. Increased Access to High-Quality Career-themed Pathways at Comprehensive and Technical Middle and High Schools. Students must have low-stakes exposure to career options with applied, project-based learning. And students *want* it; there are 3x more students who wish to enroll in the CTECS system than there are spaces. [Research](#) shows that high-quality and specialized technical education in high school can make a significant difference, especially in the lives of male students who might be otherwise disengaged from school. By thoughtfully aligning technical instruction to regional workforce needs, and by modifying teacher certification requirements, we can position students from all districts for quality career opportunities in Connecticut. **The Governor's Workforce Council Education + Training Committee is also working to advance this priority.**

What's needed:

- A pilot to allow students to graduate with a professional pathway credential that also provides college credit, which is transferable to the college system or, at a minimum, allowing for the creation of a Seal for Career Readiness that students can obtain (similar to the Seal of Biliteracy).

- Modifying the Next Generation Accountability System to better emphasize the importance of career readiness.
- Adding more expansive language in the Student Success Plan (SSP) statute about career exposure and experience; elevating the quality and usage of the SSP.
- Creating incentives for schools to offer students work-based learning experiences and educators externship experiences.
- Expanding the existence of career technical education centers throughout the state by modifying existing comprehensive high schools that have decreasing student populations or, at a minimum, offering a “second shift” of the school day at technical schools so more comprehensive high school students can access these resources.
- Ensuring that all technical schools are able to update their offerings and provide market-driven and industry-informed curricula and programming.
- Modifying teacher certification requirements to address a dearth of skills-based teaching talent.
- Developing more robust and relevant career readiness training for school counselors.

3. Ensure Access to Rigorous, Transferable Dual Enrollment Offerings to More Students, with a Focus on Alliance Districts. Dual enrollment courses provide high school students with access to more rigorous coursework that also qualifies for college course credit. This can ultimately elevate the academic experience for students while simultaneously decreasing the debt that a student incurs in the long run; however, dual enrollment offerings can vary in terms of quality and alignment.

What’s needed:

- Ensuring dual enrollment offerings are aligned with high-demand industry areas and are offered more widely across districts; consider incentives that could drive this.
- Increasing transparency and adequate display of dual enrollment offerings and transfer/articulation information.

4. Study of and Investment in Remote Learning Models. Last March 2020, COVID-19 forced districts nationwide to leverage technology in new and unexpected ways. Amid challenges, there were some successes. Connecticut must capitalize on all remote learning lessons in ways that support equitable, cost-effective, and high-quality instruction for all students regardless of ZIP code.

What’s needed:

- A system of metrics to hold districts accountable for remote learning access and equity, now and in the future.
- A study that examines the efficacy of remote learning and/or hybrid learning and the potential to leverage technology for teaching in other scenarios and/or rethinking the delivery of instruction (e.g., weather-related school closures, building/structure emergencies, project-based learning, flexible student groupings, increased access to coursework/expertise, rethinking the role of the teacher and related certification).
- An examination of public education requirements, including what defines a “school day,” as technology and remote instruction provide new opportunities for the delivery of learning.