



Connecticut's Charter Schools

Best Practices Annual Report 2019 - 2020

Charter School Office
State Department of Education
450 Columbus Blvd. | Hartford, CT
Phone: 860-713-6573





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Photographs throughout the report were retrieved from websites of Connecticut's charter schools.

Connecticut's Charter Schools

In 1996, Connecticut's General Assembly and Governor enacted legislation establishing charter schools in the state and empowering the State Board of Education (SBE) as the sole authorizer of charter schools. As non-sectarian public schools, charter schools represent innovative school models utilizing diverse, research-based educational methods. There are 22 charter schools statewide. Located in 10 host districts, these schools serve over 10,800 students.

Connecticut has both state and local charter schools. A local charter school is a new school or part of a public school that is converted into a charter school and is approved by the local board of education and the SBE. As independent local education agencies, charter schools are granted significant autonomy in exchange for strict accountability and high expectations for school performance.

Every year, charter schools prepare and submit to the Connecticut State Department of Education

(CSDE) annual reports summarizing school progress, strategies, and results aligned to the CSDE's performance framework for charter schools. The annual reports also include certified financial audit statements of all revenues. The CSDE subsequently prepares a best practices report, providing data on the status and achievement of Connecticut's charter schools and identifying innovative and impactful practices.



Charter Schools Statewide

Amistad Academy

New Haven, CT

Achievement First Bridgeport Academy

Bridgeport, CT

Achievement First Hartford Academy

Hartford, CT

Booker T. Washington Academy

New Haven, CT

Brass City Charter School

Waterbury, CT

Capital Preparatory Harbor Charter School

Bridgeport, CT

Common Ground High School

New Haven, CT

Elm City College Preparatory School

New Haven, CT

Elm City Montessori School*

New Haven, CT

Explorations Charter School

Winsted, CT

Great Oaks Charter School

Bridgeport, CT

Highville Charter School

New Haven, CT

Integrated Day Charter School

Norwich, CT

Interdistrict School for Arts & Communication

New London, CT

Jumoke Academy

Hartford, CT

New Beginnings Family Academy

Bridgeport, CT

Odyssey Community

Manchester, CT

Park City Prep Charter School

Bridgeport, CT

Side By Side Charter School

Norwalk, CT

Stamford Charter School for Excellence

Stamford, CT

Stamford Academy

Stamford, CT

The Bridge Academy

Bridgeport, CT

* Local charter school

Charter School Performance Standards

The CSDE's charter school performance framework holds charter schools accountable for impact and results in four key areas: **school performance; stewardship, governance, and management; student population; and legal compliance.**

These four performance standards are consistent across all charter school accountability systems and processes, including

the initial application and granting of the charter, annual reporting, and charter renewal. The best practices highlighted in the following sections of this report represent promising practices across Connecticut's charter schools in these areas.

The Performance Standards are clearly defined on page 4.



STANDARD 1: SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

Is the school a successful model resulting in strong student outcomes and a positive school climate?



STANDARD 2: STEWARDSHIP, GOVERNANCE, AND MANAGEMENT

Is the school financially and organizationally healthy and viable?



STANDARD 3: STUDENT POPULATION

Is the school promoting equity by effectively attracting, enrolling, and retaining students, particularly among targeted populations?



STANDARD 4: LEGAL COMPLIANCE

Is the school acting in compliance with applicable laws and regulations?



Performance Standards Definitions

STANDARD 1: SCHOOL PERFORMANCE *

Based on Connecticut's Next Generation Accountability System launched in the 2014-15 fiscal year, the accountability system is a broad set of 12 indicators that helps tell the story of how well a school is preparing its students for success in college, career, and life. The system moves beyond test scores and graduation rates and instead provides a multifactor perspective of performance that will incorporate student growth over time. *For the 2019-2020 school year, the U.S. Department of Education waived statewide assessment, accountability and reporting requirements in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) due to widespread school closures related to the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19). In light of this, charter schools are not featured under Standard 1 School Performance for the 2019-2020 year.

STANDARD 2: STEWARDSHIP, GOVERNANCE, AND MANAGEMENT

Financial Management - The school materially complies with applicable state and federal laws, rules and regulations relating to financial management and oversight expectations as evidenced by an annual independent audit.

Financial Reporting and Compliance - The school materially complies with applicable state and federal laws, rules and regulations relating to financial reporting and compliance requirements (e.g., submits reports on time, annual inventory of current assets and review of appropriate financial controls).

Financial Viability - The school demonstrates strong short and long-term fiscal viability evidenced by ability to meet enrollment projections; reasonability and certainty of revenue projections and funding sources; margins and cash flow; and debt levels.

Governance and Management - The school materially complies with applicable state and federal laws, rules and regulations relating to governance by its board, including training related to charter school governing council responsibilities during the term of the charter.

School Facility - The school materially complies with applicable state and federal laws, rules and regulations relating to the school facilities, grounds, and transportation. Viable certificate of occupancy or other required building use authorization, health, safety and fire code requirements and maintaining and documenting requisite insurance coverage.

STANDARD 3: STUDENT POPULATION

Recruitment and Enrollment Process - The school materially complies with applicable state and federal laws; rules and regulations relevant to student populations; fair and equitable enrollment and recruitment processes; and transparent and open access.

Waitlist and Enrollment Data - The school's enrollment variance equals or exceeds 95 percent in the most recent year.

Demographic Representation - The student body reflects the demographics of the target population and/or surrounding communities. There is strong evidence of efforts to attract, enroll and retain special populations.

Family and Community Support - The school maintains strong parent satisfaction and community support.

School Culture and Climate - The school maintains clear policies and consistent implementation of policies (e.g., ongoing behavior intervention monitoring, low frequency of suspensions and/or expulsions).

Performance Standards Definitions

STANDARD 4: LEGAL COMPLIANCE

Open Meetings/Information Management - The school materially complies with applicable state and federal laws, rules and regulations relating to the maintaining and handling of information; all Governing Board meetings are open and accessible to the public; proper and secure maintenance of education records and regulations; proper transference of student records; proper and secure maintenance of testing material.

Students with Disabilities - Consistent with a state charter school's status as a Local Education Agency (LEA), the school materially complies with applicable state and federal laws, rules and regulations, (including but not limited to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Americans with Disabilities Act, Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.) § 10-66ee(d)(3), and the school's policies and procedures governing the education of students with disabilities) relating to the education of students with identified disabilities and those suspected of having a disability. A state charter school is a LEA, except that state law designates the LEA of the child's residence responsible for the identification of student eligibility for special education services and determination of the special education services to be provided, pursuant to IDEA for students attending a charter school.

English Learners - The school materially complies with applicable state and federal laws, rules and regulations, (including but not limited to Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act [ESEA] as amended by Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), U.S. Department of Education authorities, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974 (EEOA)) relating to requirements regarding English Learners (ELs). Required policies related to the service of EL students.

Rights of Students - The school materially complies with applicable state and federal laws, rules and regulations relating to the rights of students, including but not limited to, appropriate handling of student information, due process protections, and State nondiscrimination laws.

Teacher/Staff Credentials - The school materially complies with applicable state and federal laws, rules and regulations, relating to state certification requirements as modified by any waivers that have been granted. C.G.S. § 10-66dd, Regulations CT State Agencies § 10-145d-401.

Employee Rights - The school materially complies with applicable state and federal laws, rules and regulations, relating to state certification requirements as modified by any waivers that have been granted. C.G.S. § 10-66dd, Regulations CT State Agencies § 10-145d-401.

Charter School Performance

Connecticut charter schools account for a fraction of the state's total student population. Many of Connecticut's charter schools maintain wait-lists of hundreds of students, demonstrating strong demand for charter schools that outpaces the sector's capacity to serve interested students and families. In 2019, over 6,190 students sought enrollment and were wait-listed. Charter schools account for approximately two percent of the state's public schoolchildren.

Connecticut's Next Generation Accountability System launched in the 2014-15 school year, a system developed under ESEA Flexibility included as part of Connecticut's state plan under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The accountability system is a broad set of 12 indicators that helps tell the story of how well a school is preparing its students for success in college, career, and life. The system moves beyond test scores and graduation rates and instead provides a multifactor perspective of performance that will incorporate student growth over time.

As part of the Next Generation Accountability System, all public schools, including charter schools receive a report that provides a picture of how the school measures on all 12 of the indicators. The data will provide a more comprehensive holistic picture of student and school performance.

Connecticut charter schools continue to provide public school choice options for students and their families.

*Connecticut's charter schools currently serve over 10,800 students.
A total of 85 school districts have students enrolled in charter schools.*

Of the 22 charter schools that conducted a lottery for the 2019-20 school year, over 6,190 students were wait-listed. In the 2018-19 school year, 6,136 students were wait-listed.

Please visit the CSDE's Charter School Office [website](#) for additional best practices and to access schools' annual reports.



Stewardship, Governance, and Management: Charter School Best Practices

Best Practice #1: Great Oaks Charter School, Bridgeport

The Great Oaks Charter School's (Great Oaks) Board of Directors is actively engaged in the governance of the school and spearheads efforts to promote the best interests of the school's students by implementing practices that monitor and support the school's financial viability. Each week the board chair and vice-chair hold a scheduled conversation with the school leader for a status report of the school's educational program, operations and finance. Each month prior to the regular board meeting, the Finance Committee meets to discuss and review the school's financial health, monitor spending and revenue, and compare both to what was expected. A weekly cash-flow and pending transaction meeting occurs to allow for more controlled spending practices and real-time updates.

In the 2019-20 year, the Board's efforts allowed the school to begin operating in a contemporary facility located within a newly-developed complex. In addition to providing Great Oak's students with a modern facility where they have ample space for engaging programming, the new location provides the school's board and leadership with a greater sense of predictability and continuity in future facility costs.

Best Practice #2: Odyssey Community School, Manchester

Odyssey Community School has added two new seasoned professionals to its Central Office team in an effort to strengthen its processes in the areas of stewardship, governance and management. The school's business manager, a Connecticut-certified School Business Official, possesses an extensive accounting background and municipal finance experience both at the town and school level. The new Executive Director comes to Odyssey with 39 years of public education teaching experience, including time as a school principal and district superintendent of schools. Subsequently, these two school stakeholders have begun the work of assessing the needs and strengths of the existing business and human resource systems, which may ultimately lead to the realignment of the school's operational systems. To complement this work, a monthly Board of Directors financial reporting system and a budget process, including various stakeholders and board approval, has been instituted.

Additionally, Odyssey continues to seek opportunities for private funding and explores partnering with other charters to advance its goals.

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Student Population: Charter School Best Practices

Best Practice #3: Common Ground High School, New Haven

Common Ground High School's enrollment data and recruitment efforts reflect a commitment to recruit a diverse student body. For the 2019-2020 school year, demographic data showed 37.7 percent of students were Black or African American, 40.4 percent were Hispanic/Latino, 24.7 percent were eligible to receive special education services, and 63.2 percent were designated as receiving free or reduced lunch. Moreover, the student body was comprised of students who resided in 16 of the surrounding districts. Recruitment efforts are varied and seek to include prospective students from different educational backgrounds while striving to meet the school's goal to overcome racial and geographic isolation. Special populations are targeted through specific efforts such as social media outreach, visits to area K-8 private and public schools, open houses, student shadowing opportunities, bilingual recruitment materials, and providing access to translators during on-site opportunities such as student interviews and shadowing experiences.

Revised recruitment processes include a new recruitment video and a series of postcards that take into account student voice and seek to cast a wide net to overcome isolation barriers. Additionally, recruitment efforts highlight student pathways featured at Common Ground High School and encourage prospective students to pursue pathways that align with their personal passions.

Best Practice #4: Elm City Montessori School, New Haven

Elm City Montessori School's (ECMS) partnerships with local community organizations and the host district are integral to the school's efforts to retain students and their families. ECMS envisions itself as a hub for families that provides on-site access to technology, literacy support, parenting education and support, nutrition and wellness services and connections to community resources. To this end, the school's strategies include: teachers conducting home visits to new students before the start of the school year; the establishment of an active Family-Teacher Organization, School Planning and Management Team and Anti-bias, Anti-racism (ABAR) Collective, hosting Montessori education nights for families to learn more about the Montessori approach, and organizing a range of family-focused social events both at the school and in the community. ABAR, in particular, connects families to local resources and shares antiracism and anti-bias work and training opportunities with community and school stakeholders.

In 2020, Elm City Montessori joined a collaborative cohort, focusing on building and sustaining integrated schools.

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Legal Compliance: Charter School Best Practices

Best Practices #5: Integrated Day Charter School, Norwich

Integrated Day Charter School (IDCS) implements a variety of policies and practices that promote the school's compliance to federal and state requirements in service of its special populations. In addition to supporting teacher planning and the monitoring of students, the school implements a multi-tiered support system protocol to aid students academically, socially, and emotionally. To this end, IDCS has an organized Special Education/Student Support Team, which is headed by the school Special Education Coordinator (SEC) and includes various school stakeholders who partner with Norwich's education professionals, as applicable, to meet students' needs.

The SEC manages the Student Support Team, the Planning and Placement Team, Individual Education Plans, 504 meetings and plans, and student counseling needs and plans. The school English Learner teacher, a member of the Special Education/Student Support Team, provides language support services, which may include small-group instruction and/or in-class support, in response to students' performance on the state Language Assessment Scales (LAS) Links as well as various formative assessments.

The school's 2019-2020 LAS Links Growth Report average percentage of target achieved in literacy of 74.9 percent and the percent of average percentage of target achieved of 56.0 percent on the oral component exceeded the state average of 60.4 percent average percentage of target achieved in literacy and 57.6 percent average percentage of target achieved on the oral component.

Best Practices #6: Capital Preparatory Harbor Charter School, Bridgeport

In an effort to comply with all applicable state and federal laws, Capital Preparatory Harbor School regularly seeks the support of legal counsel and outside consultants. Additionally, the school implemented changes in the 2019-2020 school year to ensure compliance. Examples include the adoption of revised Scholar and Family Handbook, Employee Handbook, and Fiscal Policies and Procedures. To assist in meeting the needs of special populations served by the school, the following additional staff have been hired: Assistant Superintendent, certified special education Illuminators (teachers), social worker and EL Illuminator (teacher).

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