

**CONNECTICUT STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
TURNAROUND OFFICE**

Commissioner's Network

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is the “Commissioner’s Network”?

A: The Commissioner’s Network (Network) established by the Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.) Section 10-223h (2016) represents a commitment between local stakeholders and the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) to dramatically improve student achievement in 25 low performing schools.

Q: What is the purpose of the Network?

A: The Network offers new resources and authority to empower teachers and school leaders to implement research-based strategies in schools selected by the CSDE Commissioner. Network schools remain part of their local school districts, but the districts and the CSDE secure school-level flexibility and autonomy for the schools in exchange for heightened accountability.

Q: How are schools selected for the Network?

A: Under the statute, the Commissioner is authorized, within available appropriations, to select, for participation in the Network, not more than 25 schools in any single year that have been classified as Category Four school or Category Five school pursuant to C.G.S. §10-223e. The Commissioner may select not more than five schools in any single school year from a single school district to participate in the Network. Schools are accepted into the Network for a minimum of three years. The Connecticut State Board of Education may allow schools to continue in the Network for an additional year, not to exceed two additional years, if necessary.

Q: Do schools remain part of their local district?

A: Yes. Schools remain part of their local school district while designated a Network school, but schools will have the necessary autonomy to implement transformative strategies for a minimum of three years. The Connecticut State Board of Education may allow schools to continue in the Network for an additional year, not to exceed two additional years, if necessary.

Q: Once a school is selected, what is the role of the local or regional board of education?

A: After the Commissioner initially selects a school for possible participation in the Network. The state provides for a planning year during which time the district prepares a Turnaround Plan. The local board of education establishes a Turnaround Committee pursuant to C.G.S. §10-223h(b). Following the establishment of the Turnaround Committee, the CSDE shall conduct, in consultation with the local board of education, the School Governance Council, and the Turnaround Committee, an operations and instructional audit of the school in accordance with C.G.S. §10-223h(c). Once the audit is performed, the Turnaround Committee shall develop a Turnaround Plan for the school by completing its application. As stated in C.G.S. §10-223h(d), if the Turnaround Committee does not develop a Turnaround Plan, or if the Commissioner determines that a Turnaround Plan developed by the Turnaround Committee is deficient, the Commissioner may develop a Turnaround Plan for the school.

Q: Which schools are currently participating in the Commissioner’s Network?

A: Ten schools are currently participating in the Network. A list of these schools is available on the CSDE Commissioner’s Network webpage: <https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Commissioners-Network/Commissioners-Network>.

Q: Have additional districts expressed an interest in participating in the Network?

A: Yes. In February 2017, CSDE gave districts with eligible schools an opportunity to express their interest to participate in a planning year for possible entrance in to the Network for the 2018-19 school year.

Q: Will there be future opportunities for districts to express their interest in the Network and for the State to select schools for the Network?

A: Yes. CSDE will provide additional opportunities for districts to express their interest in having eligible schools join the Network.

Q: Once a district expresses an interest in joining the Network, what are the next steps?

A: After the Commissioner initially selects a school to participate in a planning year for the Network, the local board of education shall establish a Turnaround Committee pursuant to C.G.S. §10-223h(b). Following the establishment of the Turnaround Committee, the CSDE shall conduct, in consultation with the local board of education, the School Governance Council, and the Turnaround Committee, an operations and instructional audit of the school in accordance with C.G.S. §10-223h(c). Once the audit is performed, the Turnaround Committee shall develop a Turnaround Plan for the school by completing its application. As stated in C.G.S. §10-223h(d), if the Turnaround Committee does not develop a Turnaround Plan, or if the Commissioner

determines that a Turnaround Plan developed by the Turnaround Committee is deficient, the Commissioner may develop a Turnaround Plan for the school.

Q: Who serves on a district’s Turnaround Committee?

A: The Committee is composed of a parent and administrative representative selected by the local board of education, two teachers and a parent representative selected by the local teachers’ union, the superintendent of schools, or his or her designee, and the Commissioner, or his designee. The superintendent is a non-voting ex-officio member who serves as chair of the committee. As necessary, the committee may involve other non-voting participants to assist in their work and deliberations. Turnaround plans developed and supported by the consensus of the Committee may be submitted to CSDE for consideration. If such a plan is not submitted or if the plan is deficient, a Commissioner-developed plan may be implemented.

Q: What must be included in a turnaround plan?

A: The Turnaround Committee, in consultation with the School Governance Council, shall develop the Turnaround Plan in accordance with C.G.S. §10-223h (d) and the guidelines issued by the Commissioner. Accordingly, the Turnaround Plan must:

1. Provide a rigorous needs analysis informed by the operations and instructional audit.
2. Identify an evidence-based turnaround model, aligned to school needs and growth areas.
3. Provide robust strategies to secure, support, develop, evaluation, and retain top talent.
4. Summarize the school’s academic model, including curricula, assessments, and data-driven instruction.
5. Outline a comprehensive approach to build a positive school culture and climate.
6. Develop operational structures to effectively utilize time and resources.

Q: May turnaround plans include the support and involvement of partner, non-profit organizations?

A: Yes. Network schools may be supported by a regional educational service center, a public or private institution of higher education located in the state, or, in select instances, an approved not-for-profit educational management organization. For example, New Britain High School has partnered with High Schools that Work.

Q: May turnaround plans propose changes to teachers’ workday and year?

A: Yes. Turnaround plans may include proposals that change the hours and schedules of teachers and administrators at such school, the length and schedule of the school day, the length and calendar of the school year, the amount of time teachers shall be present in the school beyond the regular school day and policies regarding the hiring or reassignment of teachers or administrators including approaches such as election to work. If provisions of the Turnaround Plan alter the collective bargaining agreements applicable to the administrators and teachers employed by the local board of education, the local board of education and the exclusive

bargaining unit for the affected certified employees shall negotiate concerning such provisions in accordance with C.G.S. §10-153s.

Q: Are there additional resources available for Network schools?

A: Yes. The Commissioner shall provide funding, technical assistance and operational support to schools participating in the Network. In addition, the Commissioner may provide financial support to teachers and administrators working at Network schools.

Q: What is the role of the State Board of Education?

A: Before a school can officially enter the Commissioner's Network, their plan must be approved by the State Board of Education.

Q: Who should I contact for additional information?

A: Please contact Desi D. Nesmith, Chief, Turnaround Office, CSDE: 860-713-6760; desi.nesmith@ct.gov. Please visit our website for additional information: <https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Commissioners-Network/Commissioners-Network>.