



# NEWS

CONNECTICUT STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

DR. DIANNA R. WENTZELL, COMMISSIONER

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## **EDUCATION COMMISSIONER LAUNCHES ‘EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE’ TOUR WITH ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION ON CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM IN NEW BRITAIN**

(Hartford, CT) – Commissioner of Education Dianna R. Wentzell launched an “Equity and Excellence” tour Friday with a visit to a New Britain school to discuss chronic absenteeism, one of the major priorities outlined in the State Board of Education’s new five-year comprehensive plan. The tour will stop at schools throughout the state this fall to highlight different priorities laid out in the plan, which seeks to ensure equity and excellence for all Connecticut students.

On Friday, Commissioner Wentzell was joined by Jill Spineti, president of The Governor’s Prevention Partnership, as well as New Britain school district and community leaders for a brief tour and roundtable discussion at Vance Village Elementary School, which is implementing strategies that are effectively addressing chronic absenteeism.

“It is critical that we all understand the importance of daily school attendance. Even in the early grades, lost time in school can put students at risk of becoming disengaged or dropping out of school down the road,” said Commissioner Wentzell. “Our five-year comprehensive plan makes combatting chronic absenteeism a priority as we seek to ensure equity and excellence for all Connecticut students. Schools like Vance Village Elementary School show us that when we maintain high expectations for every student and create engaging, diverse, and welcoming learning environments, our students show up and perform well academically.”

“Quality youth mentoring is proven to increase attendance, and students who meet regularly with their mentors are 52 percent less likely than their peers to skip a day of school,” said Spineti. “Our priority is to provide effective resources and assistance for starting or expanding a school-based mentoring initiative, or aligning an existing program with ongoing efforts to address chronic absenteeism.”

“We are honored that Commissioner Wentzell and President Spineti have chosen to visit with us here in New Britain. We look forward to discussing the Comprehensive Plan and the all of the great things we are doing to reduce chronic absenteeism,” said New Britain Superintendent Nancy Sarra. “Recently, we were awarded the New York Life Foundation Excellence in Summer Learning award by the National Summer Learning Association. This is tied to our Summer Enrichment Experience Program, which is just one of our programs that has helped in a tremendous way in regards to chronic absenteeism.”

The State Board of Education's Five-Year Comprehensive Plan for Education was developed after a lengthy and comprehensive community engagement effort that included input from community based and philanthropic organizations, professional associations, higher education, parents and students, and the business community.

"We relied heavily upon input from families, educators, and other stakeholders to develop the Five-Year Comprehensive Plan. Members of our local communities freely gave of their time in order to ensure the ideas included in our plan represented the diverse viewpoints within our state," said Commissioner Wentzell. "These stakeholders' ideas laid the groundwork for our path toward making equity and excellence in education a reality for every child."

The Comprehensive Plan provides a roadmap for the State Department of Education to achieve its equity goals by maintaining high expectations for every child, training and supporting great teachers and leaders, and ensuring every public school is diverse and welcoming.

"We have identified several areas where we are shifting our focus to fulfill our promise of an excellent public education for every Connecticut child. One of those focus areas is chronic absence," said Commissioner Wentzell. "We want every public school student in our state to be in school and engaged. That means we have to work with families, educators, and community stakeholders to decrease the number of days that students are out of school."

Chronic absence is defined as missing 10 percent or more days of school for any reason, including excused absences, unexcused absences, suspensions, and other disciplinary actions. Nearly 10 percent of Connecticut Public School students were chronically absent during the 2015-16 school year, and rates were significantly higher in many communities.

Chronic absence is inextricably linked with student performance, and students who are chronically absent are less likely to read on grade level, are less likely to perform well academically, and are at a greater risk for dropping out of high school. Risk factors for chronic absence include poverty, homelessness, chronic health conditions, frequent moves, and disabilities.

The SDE has recently taken concrete steps to address chronic absence. The state is expanding restorative justice programs, such as the Connecticut School-Based Diversion Initiative, and positive behavioral interventions and supports. Additionally, districts are increasing utilization of the Department of Children and Families' Emergency Mobile Psychiatric Services to respond to mental health crises.

Vance Village Elementary School in New Britain is implementing strategies that are effectively addressing chronic absenteeism. The school's rate of chronic absence remains around 10 percent, which is on par with the state average. Additionally, Vance has significantly reduced the numbers of in-school and out-of-school suspensions from the 2012-13 school year to the 2014-15 school year. In-school suspensions fell from 60 incidents to 36, and out-of-school suspensions dropped from 47 to 16.

For more information and resources about chronic absence visit [here](#).

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