



EDUCATION REFORM UPDATE

Alliance District Application Approvals

Public Act 12-116, An Act Concerning Educational Reform, created the Alliance District program with the goal of providing new resources to the districts in greatest need – provided they embrace key reforms to position their students for success. To achieve this, the law establishes a process for identifying 30 Alliance Districts – the districts with the lowest district performance index scores statewide – and allocates to these districts \$39.5 million in increased Education Cost Sharing (ECS) funding in the upcoming fiscal year. Each district’s receipt of its designated allocation is conditioned upon district submission, and Connecticut State Department of Education approval, of an Alliance District Plan for the expenditure of the new increment of conditional funds in the context of the district’s overall strategy to improve academic achievement.

November 20, 2012

HARTFORD, CT – Governor Dannel P. Malloy and Commissioner of Education Stefan Pryor today announced that Alliance District applications from Middletown and Norwich have been finalized and approved by the State Department of Education. Each school district is now eligible to receive additional Education Cost Sharing (ECS) funds to support the reform plan proposed by the district to increase student achievement. The size of each district’s Alliance allotment is determined by the ECS formula.

“For too long, the formula for turning around struggling schools followed one guiding principle - increased funding,” said Governor Malloy. “While there are many schools throughout the state that would benefit with increased resources, we can’t simply continue to throw good money after bad. Thanks to the creation of Alliance Districts, increases in funding must now come with a plan for turning around schools and increasing student performance. Our state may have the nation’s largest achievement gap, but thanks to our reform effort, we now have the tools we need to make sure that all of our children can succeed.”

Commissioner Pryor said, “I want to congratulate the leadership teams of these districts – including the superintendents and central office staff, as well as the teachers and other stakeholders who contributed to the formation of the ideas. At a time when other states are cutting support for public schools, Governor Malloy and the General Assembly have increased Connecticut’s commitment to the school districts in greatest need of support – provided they embrace and implement reforms that will improve student achievement. There are a variety of approaches represented in the proposals put forward by these districts, including talent strategies that support teachers and school leaders, enhancements in

early-grade reading instruction, expanded time initiatives, interventions in low-performing schools, and more.”

Summary Information: Approved Alliance District Applications

The Alliance Districts developed a variety of multi-faceted initiatives for their applications, drawn in many instances from the list of reform strategies set forth (on a permissive basis) in statute. The chart below categorizes the key initiatives that will be undertaken by the twenty-eight Alliance Districts approved to date.

Initiative Type	Talent Development	K-3 Literacy	Extended Time	Common Core	Accountability / Data Systems	Parent and Community	Pre-K / Full-Day Kindergarten
Districts	16	17	11	6	7	7	5

Each district has also allocated funds toward interventions that will begin this year in Focus Schools, as identified through Connecticut’s No Child Left Behind (NCLB) waiver. Districts have begun planning processes for future interventions in Turnaround Schools and Review Schools – also designations emanating from the state’s waiver – for future school years.

Below are summaries of the Middletown and Norwich approved plans. For a full description of the district’s proposal, please examine the district’s application (posted on the Department’s website, click on “Alliance Districts”) or contact district staff.

Middletown: \$796,637

- To raise the quality of instruction for all students, Middletown will implement a district-wide differentiated instruction initiative. The district will deploy six district curriculum coaches, who will deliver targeted, small-group instruction to students in need of academic support. New personnel will also be used to coach the district’s new principals.
- Middletown will implement a reading intervention program, Wilson Reading Foundations, for students in kindergarten through grade two to improve early reading skills and phonics awareness, and provide embedded professional development on the program to staff.
- Middletown will continue aligning its curriculum and instruction to the Common Core State Standards. To support this work, the district will provide high quality reading and mathematics materials, increase opportunities for students to pursue independent learning, and train its educators in new curricula.
- The district will hire a certified dropout prevention interventionist with the aim of increasing its graduation rate and expanding virtual learning opportunities for high-risk students. The district will also facilitate family engagement by hiring a home visitor to assist in the coordination of wraparound services for students and families.

Norwich: \$1,024,982

- Norwich will focus on differentiated instruction to improve outcomes for students in the district’s Focus Schools and two other underperforming schools. The research-based *Success in Sight* school improvement model will be implemented, with trainings to be delivered throughout the school year to all school staff on continuous school improvement and levers to improve student achievement.

- Norwich will develop a teacher evaluation and support system modeled on the state's System for Educator Evaluation and Development (SEED) model that utilizes student performance data, observations, and coaching. Job embedded training will be offered first to new instructional specialists and school principals who, in concert with the district's curriculum coordinators, will then offer afterschool teacher workshops on effective lesson planning and instructional practices to teachers.
- In partnership with the University of Connecticut, the district plans to increase parent engagement by hiring a parent literacy liaison who will ensure school improvement goals are developed and aligned with parent feedback, and that parents of students identified as in need of additional academic support are engaged in their child's learning.
- Through additional training, observations, and mentoring, Norwich will train district personnel in culturally competent teaching practices, enabling teachers to provide instruction responsive to students' values and cultural norms.

Background on Alliance Districts

Application Process

- All 30 designated Alliance Districts submitted applications in August
- The iterative process involves rounds of dialogue between the Department and districts to ensure proposals fulfill program guidelines and goals
- Districts have been asked to revise, expand, focus, and/or clarify components of their proposed plans
- Districts were asked to consult local stakeholders, including the local bargaining unit, and submit plans to their boards of education

Approved Alliance District Plans

- Cohort one (approved September 6, 2012): Ansonia, Naugatuck, and Windsor Locks
- Cohort two (approved September 24, 2012): Bristol, Vernon, and Windsor
- Cohort three (approved October 22, 2012): Bloomfield, Danbury, East Haven, East Windsor, Hamden, Manchester, Meriden, New London, Norwalk, Stamford, Winchester, Windham, and West Haven
- Cohort four (approved October 24, 2012): Waterbury
- Cohort five (approved October 25, 2012): Hartford, Derby, Killingly, and New Britain
- Cohort six (approved November 8, 2012): East Hartford and New Haven
- Cohort seven (approved November 20, 2012): Middletown and Norwich

Alliance Districts, Year Two

- A short timeframe necessitated expedited reviews and approvals for the 2012-2013 school year; a more rigorous process is planned for year two
- The Department of Education has requested that districts commit to working on several priority areas as process shifts to year two, including:
 - School intervention and redesign
 - Evaluation-informed professional development
 - Transition to new accountability system described in Connecticut's approved NCLB waiver
 - Preparation for the Common Core
 - Strategic planning

- Monitoring of Alliance plan implementation

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