

**Connecticut State Board of Education  
Hartford**

**To Be Proposed:**  
January 3, 2024

**Resolved,** That the State Board of Education, pursuant to Section 10-223h of the Connecticut General Statutes, approves the continued participation of Derby Middle School, Derby, in the Commissioner’s Network for an additional and final year commencing July 1, 2024, and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action, including, but not limited to, expending such funds as may be necessary to execute and implement the foregoing.

Approved by a vote of \_\_\_\_\_, this third day of January, Two Thousand Twenty-Four.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
Charlene M. Russell-Tucker, Secretary  
State Board of Education

**Connecticut State Board of Education  
Hartford**

**To:** State Board of Education

**From:** Charlene M. Russell-Tucker, Commissioner of Education

**Date:** January 3, 2024

**Subject:** Approval of Commissioner’s Network Extension Year 5, Derby Middle School, Derby

*Executive Summary*

**Introduction**

Public Act 12-116, in part, established the Commissioner’s Network to provide new resources, increased flexibilities, and greater accountability to improve student achievement in some of the state’s lowest performing schools. The Commissioner’s Network is a commitment between local stakeholders and the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) to improve student achievement in up to 25 schools. There are sixteen schools presently participating in the Commissioner’s Network.

The purpose of the Commissioner’s Network is to turn around chronically low-performing schools and improve outcomes for students who attend these schools. Commissioner’s Network Turnaround Plans must include intensive and transformative strategies that are necessary to turn around schools that, to date, have been unsuccessful in their improvement efforts. These plans must reach beyond surface reforms to achieve dramatic and transformative outcomes, address past turnaround efforts, and provide an explanation as to how the proposed interventions will succeed where previous efforts have failed.

Schools are accepted into the Commissioner’s Network for a minimum of three years. Subsection (h) of Section (§) 10-223h of the Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.) establishes that the State Board of Education (SBE) may allow schools to continue in the Commissioner’s Network for up to two additional years if necessary. For the reasons set forth below, Derby Middle School (DMS) in Derby is recommended to remain in the Commissioner’s Network for an additional and final year.

**Background:**

Derby Middle School (DMS) currently serves 291 students in grades six through eight. Fifty-four percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. Twenty percent of the students are identified as needing special education services, and three percent are multilingual learners/English learners (MLs/ELs). Approximately 45 percent of the students are Hispanic, 20 percent are Black, and 27 percent are White.

On April 5, 2019, the CSDE received an *Expression of Interest Form* from the Derby Public Schools (DPS), volunteering DMS for participation in the Commissioner's Network.

On May 23, 2019, the Commissioner of Education initially selected DMS for possible participation in the Commissioner's Network based on the following factors: (a) the district's expression of interest; and (b) the academic and developmental needs of the school's students and the capacity of the district to address those needs. The school was approved for one year of planning to develop a turnaround plan.

Following the initial selection, DMS and the Derby Teacher's Association appointed members to serve on the school's Turnaround Committee, and the CSDE conducted an Operations and Instructional Audit on October 7, 2019. The audit revealed a lack of common vision for effective instruction and school-wide behavior management systems, a low level of instructional rigor, including higher order thinking and effective questioning techniques, inadequate or ineffective assessment and data collection systems, and the need for ongoing and job-embedded professional learning for teachers in data analysis and data-driven decision making.

During the 2019-20 planning year, the school's Turnaround Committee developed the turnaround plan for DMS in accordance with C.G.S. § 10-223h(d). The goal of the DMS Turnaround Plan was to cultivate a strong professional learning community with a focus on rigorous teaching and learning that is student focused. The Turnaround Committee and the DMS staff continue to be committed to creating a cohesive vision, a shared sense of urgency for improvement, and common expectations for high levels of professional performance, perseverance, and continuous growth. The Turnaround Plan included the development of an instructional coaching model to increase teacher capacity and effectiveness, the implementation of a rigorous, standards-aligned curriculum with supports for students through a tiered Scientific Research Based Intervention (SRBI) model, the implementation of the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) model, and the establishment of a school culture focused on achievement as well as creating school structures and systems to maximize instructional time and create extended learning opportunities.

On June 3, 2020, after their turnaround plan was approved by the SBE, DMS officially entered the Commissioner's Network. As noted, schools are accepted into the Commissioner's Network for a period of three years, and pursuant to C.G.S. 10-223h(h), the SBE may allow such schools to continue in the Commissioner's Network for two additional years if necessary.

Since joining the Commissioner's Network, DMS has been provided varied supports by the CSDE. These supports include bi-weekly walkthrough visits by CSDE consultants with school and district leadership, the provision of professional learning sessions multiple times per year through a Netstat Learning Series, and the facilitation of Principal Roundtable discussions with other Commissioner's Network leaders. Additionally, technical support and planning meetings are provided around budget development and implementation, including necessary revisions. Finally, a mid-year audit is conducted each year to provide progress updates and recommendations tied to the approved turnaround plan.

Under the Commissioner’s Network Grant, Derby Public Schools has shared the costs of 3 instructional coaches, 3 interventionists, a parent liaison specialist, and a school climate and attendance specialist.

On May 3, 2023, the SBE approved an additional year for the continued participation of DMS in the Commissioner’s Network.

On November 7, 2023, SBE members Erin Benham and Karen Dubois-Walton joined the CSDE Turnaround Office on a site visit to DMS to observe its progress and engage in discussions around next steps.

### **Improvements:**

- The Next Generation Accountability Report for 2022-23 demonstrates an increase of 2.8 percentage points in DMS’ performance index in ELA, from 56.5 percent in 2021-22 to 59.3 percent in 2022-23.
- The Next Generation Accountability Report for 2022-23 demonstrates an increase of 2.9 index points in DMS’ performance index in science, from 52.4 percent in 2021-22 to 55.3 percent in 2022-23.
- The Next Generation Accountability Report for 2022-23 demonstrates an increase of 8.1 percentage points in DMS’ academic growth in ELA, from 46.9 percent in 2021-22 to 55.0 percent in 2022-23. Additionally, the school’s ELA Academic Growth– High Needs Students increased 8.6 percentage points from 46.9 percent in 2021-22 to 55.5 percent in 2022-23. This data shows that students identified with high needs (55.5 percent) are slightly outperforming non-high-needs students (55.0 percent) in ELA Growth for the 2022-23 Next Generation Accountability index.
- A live Learning Lab continues to be implemented to create a space for staff to explore, investigate, and learn in collaborative ways. Coaches, leadership, and teachers regularly meet and collaborate on improving instructional practices along with unpacking the standards and curriculum.
- An Intervention Lab was created to provide data-driven instruction for students receiving Tier 2 and Tier 3 services.
- Student Success Teams (SST) meet on a rotating schedule around mathematics, reading, and behavioral/social-emotional learning with a focus on high impact teaching strategies (HITS) occurring within the Tier 1 setting. Interventions are tracked and reviewed consistently.
- Coaches are providing targeted supports for teachers in the areas of classroom structures and routines, unpacking curriculum and assessments, and lesson design. Coaches also participate in weekly meetings with the administration to monitor progress on coaching cycles and building teacher capacity.

- DMS revised and continues to review the school schedule to maximize time in core instruction by restructuring the schedule for interventions, the arts, and support services.
- Afterschool programming opportunities for students continue to be provided and developed based on student needs and interests.
- Staff and administration continue professional learning in Harvard Graduate School of Education coursework.
- Staff and administration participated in coursework titled *Articulating the Intangibles of Teaching: Aligning Your Purpose and Practice for Instructional Leadership* (October 2022-November 2022) and *Teachers Mentoring Teachers: Practices for Powerful Professional Communities* (January 2023-March 2023).
- Data continues to support improved outcomes around suspension numbers. In-school and out-of-school suspensions along with expulsions have decreased from 20.4 percent in 2021-22 to 14.4 percent in 2022-23.

### **Continued Areas of Focus:**

- Reducing chronic absenteeism through leveraging wraparound services and outreach efforts to families on the importance of regular school attendance. While the chronic absenteeism rate for all students decreased from 24.1 percent in 2021-22 to 21.1 percent in 2022-23, it is still above the state average of 20.3 percent. The current chronic absenteeism rate is 20.63 percent.
- Improving High Quality Instruction (HQI) in literacy and mathematics, to shift from teacher-centered instruction to student-centered learning.
- Providing professional learning for teachers in purposeful planning for questioning and academic discourse that helps students with clarity, sharing their own thoughts, and building meaning they did not have before. Teachers would benefit from support in planning progression of lessons to scaffold rigor and higher order questioning to develop thinking skills in order to increase students' capacity to engage in complex content and increase cognitive demand.

### **Next Steps:**

During the 2024-25 school year, Derby Middle School will continue strategies that have shown steady improvement over the past four years, abandon those that have not, and target areas requiring further growth and development. The CSDE Turnaround Office will provide intensive monitoring and support as Derby Middle School enters Year 5 of the Commissioner's Network. The Year 5 plan will prioritize the following:

- Continuing to review and refine DMS' instructional coaching model to align with the district strategic planning and improved personalized teacher goals.
- Continuing to quantify the learning experience for DMS students, particularly with a focus on mathematics growth and development for all students.
- Continuing to build the capacity of teachers to analyze data and use data to guide planning and instruction, including the use of real-time data to adjust instruction to meet the needs of students during lessons, in order to improve the alignment of formative assessments and progress monitoring.

- Continuing to review and refine the Scientific Research-Based Intervention (SRBI) process to expand the Multi-Tiered System of Support for students in reading, mathematics, and behavior management. DMS will align the assessment systems to intervention strategies and resources and refine structures to ensure that students receive the appropriate support needed.
- Continuing to focus on improving chronic absenteeism through leveraging wraparound services and outreach efforts to families.
- Continuing to offer professional learning and transfer of practice around engagement, rigor, and discourse through external consultants and continued participation in the Harvard Graduate School of Education coursework.

**Recommendation:**

The CSDE recommends that the SBE approve an additional year commencing July 1, 2024.

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