

IX.C.

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 North End Middle School, Waterbury, 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, North End Middle School, Waterbury

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, North End Middle School (NEMS) in Waterbury is recommended to remain in the Commissioner’s Network for an additional and final year.

Background:

North End Middle School currently serves 692 students in grades six through eight. Eighty-seven percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. Twenty percent of the students are identified as needing special education services, and 18.6 percent are multilingual learners/English learners (MLs/ELs). Approximately 65 percent of the students are Hispanic/Latino, 23 percent are Black, and 6.5 percent are White.

On April 5, 2019, the CSDE received an *Expression of Interest Form* from the Waterbury Public Schools (WPS), volunteering NEMS for participation in the Commissioner’s Network.

On May 23, 2019, the Commissioner of Education initially selected NEMS 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, NEMS and the Waterbury Teachers Association appointed members to serve on the school's Turnaround Committee, and the CSDE conducted an Operations and Instructional Audit on October 2, 2019. The audit revealed a lack of cohesiveness in the school and district vision, mission, and expectations among staff which resulted in inconsistent instructional practices. Additionally, students lacked meaningful engagement in learning tasks and rigor and differentiation was limited.

During the 2019-20 planning year, the school's Turnaround Committee developed the turnaround plan for NEMS in accordance with C.G.S. § 10-223h(d). The goal of the NEMS turnaround plan is to improve teaching and learning by utilizing strategies, methods, and best practices that have proven to be effective in improving the academic performance of students. High quality professional learning, rigorous curricula, and assessments that are aligned with the Connecticut Core Standards, as well as building and maintaining meaningful and productive relationships between students and staff are some of the proven, high leverage strategies that are being implemented. Moreover, participation in the Commissioner's Network supports the professional development of NEMS teaching staff; coaching opportunities in literacy and numeracy; the expansion of the data-driven decision-making process; the additional learning opportunities for students; and the communication of the school vision to the Waterbury community.

On June 3, 2020, after their turnaround plan was approved by the SBE, NEMS 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, NEMS 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, Waterbury Public Schools has shared the costs of the literacy facilitator and an attendance counselor. The school and/or district have aligned funding and expenditures closely with school goals and student needs.

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

On October 5, 2023, SBE members Erin Benham, Elwood Exley, Jr., and Donald Harris joined the CSDE Turnaround Office on a site visit to North End Middle School to observe their progress and engage in discussions around next steps.

Improvements:

- The Next Generation Accountability Report for 2022-23 demonstrates an increase of 1.7 percentage points in NEMS' performance index in mathematics, from 37.8 percent in 2021-22 to 39.5 percent in 2022-23.
- The Next Generation Accountability Report for 2022-23 demonstrates an increase of 1.5 percentage points in NEMS' academic growth rate in mathematics, from 43.8 percent in 2021-22 to 45.3 percent in 2022-23.
- The Next Generation Accountability Report for 2022-23 demonstrates a decrease of 12.3 percentage points in NEMS' chronic absenteeism, from 32 percent in 2021-22 to 19.7 percent in 2022-23.
- The vision for effective instruction has grown over the past four years — with an original focus on core components of instruction, expanding student discourse and increasing student ownership for learning. The implementation of Depth of Knowledge level 2 and 3 questions by NEMS' teachers is required in every content area and is monitored by walkthroughs. NEMS has been providing on and off-site professional development to build teacher capacity to support small group instruction, differentiation, increasing rigor, classroom culture, equity, and other best practices in teaching and learning.
- An afterschool program has been implemented to address the social-emotional needs of identified students in an effort to reduce disciplinary issues and increase students' self-regulation skills.
- Parents have been supported through family learning nights and other programs in an effort to decrease chronic absenteeism and engage parents in their children's education. NEMS holds a RAM FAM Jam every Spring which is a culminating activity for all students, staff, and families. This event brings community partners, school community, and parents together to celebrate the school year, learn about community services, and receive information on how to support their children.

Continued Areas of Focus:

- Continuing to focus on reducing chronic absenteeism through leveraging wraparound services and outreach efforts to families on the importance of regular school attendance.
- Expanding supports for MLs/ELs and their families as strong relationships lead to increased engagement and academic success.
- Providing peer feedback on lesson plans through the Lesson Plan Review Protocol. Content coordinator/administrators are providing feedback to teachers on lesson plans.
- Designing instructional tasks that promote a deeper level of thinking and processing.
- Developing learning targets and success criteria that reflect higher level Depth of Knowledge levels in questioning.
- Planning powerful instructional segments within the instructional block.

Next Steps:

During the 2024-25 school year, North End 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 North End Middle School enters Year 5 of the Commissioner's Network. The Year 5 plan will prioritize the following:

- Decreasing the chronic absenteeism rate through a multi-tiered systems approach. Attendance will continue to be monitored weekly through data and attendance team meetings. Members of the attendance team should participate in statewide trainings on the Learner Engagement and Attendance Program (LEAP) approach to support students struggling with absenteeism and disengagement.
- Building a teacher leadership academy to support the ongoing instructional practice improvements.
- Establishing an instructional practice video library for in-house staff to showcase best practices.
- Implementing lesson study across all departments, including lesson planning and video peer coaching.
- Monitoring the implementation of professional learning and job-embedded coaching through weekly walkthroughs and participating in data team meetings.
- Continuing afterschool programming to support student needs with academics and social-emotional learning.

Recommendation:

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

Prepared by:

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Approved by:

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