

# IX.A.

## Connecticut State Board of Education Hartford

**To Be Proposed:**  
February 14, 2024

**Resolved,** That, pursuant to Section 10-223h of the Connecticut General Statutes, the State Board of Education approves the continued participation of Hartford Public High School, Hartford, 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 fourteenth day of February, 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:** February 14, 2024

**Subject:** Approval of Commissioner’s Network Extension Year 5, Hartford Public High School, Hartford

***Executive Summary***

**Introduction**

Public Act 12-116, now codified as Section 10-223h of the Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.), 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. C.G.S. §10-223h(h) 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, Hartford Public High School (HPHS) in Hartford is recommended to remain in the Commissioner’s Network for an additional and final year.

**Background:**

Hartford Public High School (HPHS) currently serves 709 students in grades nine through twelve. Eighty-two percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. Fifteen percent of the students are identified as needing special education services, and 42 percent are multilingual learners/English learners (MLs/ELs). Approximately 71 percent of the students are Hispanic/Latino, 21 percent are Black, and 5 percent are White. The current principal began her leadership at HPHS in the summer of 2021-22, during the school’s second year in the Commissioner’s Network.

On June 15, 2018, the CSDE received an *Expression of Interest Form* from Hartford Public Schools (HPS), volunteering HPHS for participation in the Commissioner's Network. On September 17, 2018, the Commissioner of Education initially selected HPHS 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, HPHS and the Hartford Federation of Teachers appointed members to serve on the school's Turnaround Committee, and the CSDE conducted an Operations and Instructional Audit on October 11, 2018. The audit revealed several challenges impeding success, including low academic performance scores; low four-year graduation rates; and very high chronic absenteeism rates. Teaching effectiveness, pedagogy, and solid classroom management were lacking as reflected in low rigor, an absence of differentiated teaching strategies, and high levels of disruptions in class. Instructional leadership was deficient, and teachers did not receive regular, actionable feedback. The school lacked a fully functional school attendance team and protocols, and resultant actions were lacking. Student behavior was a significant challenge and there was little evidence of a well-implemented behavior management system.

During the 2018-19 planning year, the school's Turnaround Committee developed the turnaround plan for HPHS in accordance with C.G.S. §10-223h(d). The HPHS Turnaround Plan focuses on the creation of multiple pathways to a student-success model with a strong focus on the social-emotional development of HPHS students. The school structure includes a Freshman Academy for all first-time Grade 9 students and career pathways in Grades 10 through 12. The Turnaround Plan involves the development of a rigorous, standards-based Tier I instructional model with intervention and enrichment support; the adoption of both a Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) model to foster positive interactions and relationships with peers and adults and a restorative approach to discipline; an advisory program; and an alternative program with a work component for over-aged and under-credited students.

Due to the restructuring of the school in which three separate school academy structures were combined into a single unified high school, HPHS was granted an additional planning year in 2019-20. Additionally, the school has experienced leadership turnover since the instructional audit, with three different individuals having held the position of principal since 2018. The school's current leadership team and teachers, however, have started to enact sustainable change in academic performance, staff development, and student engagement.

On May 7, 2020, after their plan was approved by the SBE, HPHS 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, HPHS has been provided with varied supports by the CSDE. These supports include biweekly 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, Hartford 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 HPHS in the Commissioner's Network.

On November 28, 2023, SBE members Erin Benham, Elwood Exley, Jr., and Donald Harris joined the CSDE Turnaround Office and Deputy Commissioner of Education Charles E. Hewes on a site visit to Hartford Public High School to observe their progress and engage in discussions around next steps.

### **Improvements:**

- the Hartford Public High School Allied Health Pathway (HPHS AH), which started in the 2021-2022 school year, was expanded. With the addition of the health sciences instruction for Patient Care Technician (PCT), HPHS has doubled the number of students receiving college-level credits and certifications in the HPHS AH Pathway. HPHS has also added partnerships with local industry and held an entry-level job fair for HPHS AH students who are already Child Adolescent Needs (CAN) certified.
- Improvement of the high school's Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion rate through the coordination of efforts between counselors, college and career specialists, and partners. One hundred percent of students in the HPHS senior class have a post-secondary plan, and 97 percent of qualifying students have a FAFSA ID and are in the process of completing their college applications. Also, HPHS continues to work with eligible students to apply for Aid Application for CT Undocumented Students (AACTUS) and appropriate funding/scholarships.
- HPHS improved student attendance and continues to reduce the chronic absenteeism rate. Although HPHS' chronic absenteeism rate currently holds at 60 percent, which is above the state rate of 19.01 percent, this is a significant decrease from 74 percent in its first year in the Commissioner's Network. Attendance incentive programs have been established as well as the implementation of twilight visits and utilizing social workers to develop plans of support.
- The recruitment and retention of highly qualified staff to expand course opportunities for students. HPHS has added a teaching position to the Engineering and Green Technology (EGT) Pathway and hired a staff member capable of teaching both engineering and computer science classes. Additionally, two HPHS teachers have been trained to utilize the Gaming STEM curriculum that allows HPHS to offer a new gaming class along with a virtual driver's education class.

- The expansion of support of three clinical service partners which include Effective Schools Solutions, The Village for Families & Children, and school-based clinicians at the clinic. This has expanded family services beyond the student and into the homes, which helps improve attendance and provides support for both the family and student.
- The addition of new platforms for student voice includes a monthly newspaper that is developed and published by the HPHS student body, student academic panels to address instructional practice concerns or issues in equity within the classroom, and biweekly open student forums in the library afterschool. Additionally, the student council is now working with the “Owls,” an all-female student organization committed to community service and school improvement projects in the building.

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

- Expanding attendance structures to decrease chronic absenteeism and improve graduation rates through the twilight visits to families, improvement of the attendance culture engagement (ACE) meeting structures, and the provision of timely interventions for student groups and programs.
- Expanding teacher leadership opportunities through administrative coaching, committee work, and professional learning. HPHS is implementing a professional learning pathway for teachers where they choose an area of instructional practice they would like to focus on, such as assessment or student-centered practices.
- Prioritizing professional learning and instructional coaching on using student data to best identify differentiated instructional strategies that provide appropriately challenging targeted small-group instruction in order to have an impact on student outcomes with a focus on improving supports for special populations and programs.
- Continuing to build teacher capacity around providing opportunities to challenge students cognitively through instructional activities and higher-level questions from HPHS’ instructional leadership team (ILT) and administrators. In addition, HPHS should continue to provide training to the ILT on how to deliver feedback to teachers.
- Leveraging learning walks as informal observations to monitor instruction and lesson pacing and to support teacher implementation of professional learning. Moreover, classroom teachers should be a part of these practices to build teacher capacity.
- Providing students with expansive college and career opportunities during the school day through expanded pathways that include manufacturing, computer science, and drone certification.
- Continuing to offer many opportunities for families to participate in school events, and expanding the family-centered parent engagement plan that reaches into the community and is based on the Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships

## **Next Steps:**

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

- Adding computer science and drone flying as EGT options for the pathway's expansion.
- Establishing a memorandum of understanding (MOU) for a clinical medical assistant program through Job Corps that will result in certifications in medical terminology, phlebotomy, electrocardiogram (EKG), clinical medical assistant, suicide prevention training, First Aid/CPR, and Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).
- Analyzing and revising systems, protocols, and the effectiveness of the Data Wise Improvement Process on reviewing benchmark assessments and utilizing common formative assessments to drive instruction and supports.
- Expanding family and community activities to involve not only the entire administrative cabinet, but also the teacher community to support the development of relationships and increase school pride.
- Expanding dual enrollment to include pathways and coursework for Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) training, municipal engineering, and phlebotomy.
- Embedding Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) questions and materials across content areas to improve student performance. HPHS found the need to improve SAT scores that directly correlate to their School Performance Index (SPI) on the Next Generation Accountability Index.

## **Recommendation:**

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

Prepared by:

Greg Dresko, Education Consultant, Turnaround Office

Reviewed by:

Jennifer Webb, Bureau Chief, Turnaround Office

Approved by:

Irene E. Parisi, Chief Academic Officer