

IX.C.

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 Slade Middle School, New Britain, 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, Slade Middle School, New Britain

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 turnaround 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 provides 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, Slade Middle School (SMS) in New Britain is recommended to remain in the Commissioner’s Network for an additional and final year.

Background:

Slade Middle School currently serves 795 students in grades six through eight. Seventy-seven percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. Twenty-one percent of the students are identified as needing special education services, and 21.1 percent are multilingual learners/English learners (MLs/ELs). Approximately 71 percent of the students are Hispanic/Latino, 12 percent are Black, and 11 percent are White.

On April 5, 2019, the CSDE received an *Expression of Interest Form* from the Consolidated School District of New Britain (CSDNB), volunteering SMS for participation in the Commissioner's Network. On May 23, 2019, the Commissioner initially selected SMS 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, SMS and the New Britain Federation of Teachers appointed members to serve on the school's Turnaround Committee, and the CSDE conducted an Operations and Instructional Audit on October 24, 2019. The audit revealed a lack of cohesiveness in the school or district vision, mission, and expectations among staff around student-centered learning, which resulted in inconsistent instructional practices. The school lacked curriculum for mathematics and English language arts (ELA) that aligned to the Connecticut Core Standards, and rigor and differentiation was limited, which led to minimal student engagement in learning tasks. Student attendance was also of concern as the chronic absenteeism rate at SMS far exceeded the state average. Upon entering the Commissioner's Network, SMS had declining test scores, with 13.1 percent of students meeting or exceeding the achievement standards in ELA and 2.6 percent in mathematics on the Smarter Balanced Assessment.

During the 2019-20 planning year, the school's Turnaround Committee developed the turnaround plan for SMS in accordance with C.G.S. §10-223h(d). The SMS Turnaround Plan focused on adopting a team-based model with a student-centered educational approach. The model centered on developing high performing learning communities that promote the development of strong teacher and student relationships combined with engaging instructional strategies that promote student choice. SMS' vision focuses on teachers becoming "Trustworthy Mentors" that build relationships with students, families, colleagues and the community aligned to a shared philosophy about the importance and enjoyment of being in school. Developing strong relationships promotes a stronger, unified effort in commitment to student success.

On May 7, 2020, after their plan was approved by the SBE, SMS 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, SMS 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, the Consolidated School District of New Britain has shared the costs of the school climate, behavior support, and literacy coaches. The school and/or district have aligned funding and expenditures closely with school goals and student needs.

On June 14, 2023, the SBE approved an additional year for the continued participation of SMS in the Commissioner's Network.

On November 14, 2023, SBE member Elwood Exley Jr. joined the CSDE Turnaround Office on a site visit to SMS to observe its progress and engage in discussions around next steps.

Improvements:

- The Next Generation Accountability Report for 2022-23 demonstrates an increase of 9.2 percentage points in SMS' accountability index, from an index of 39.3 in 2021-22 to 48.5 in 2022-23.
- The Next Generation Accountability Report for 2022-23 demonstrates an increase of 6.2 percentage points in SMS' performance index for ELA for all students, from an index of 53.7 in 2021-22 to 59.9 in 2022-23. Academic growth in ELA for all students demonstrates an increase of 14.6 percentage points from an index of 42.6 in 2021-22 to 57.2 in 2022-23.
- The Next Generation Accountability Report for 2022-23 demonstrates an increase of 7.3 percentage points in SMS' performance index for mathematics for all students, from an index of 39.0 in 2021-22 to 46.3 in 2022-23. Academic growth in mathematics for all students demonstrates an increase of 13.3 percentage points from an index of 40.3 in 2021-22 to 53.6 in 2022-23.
- The Next Generation Accountability Report for 2022-23 demonstrates an increase of 2.9 percentage points in SMS' performance index for science for all students, from an index of 49.9 in 2021-22 to 52.8 in 2022-23.
- The Next Generation Accountability Report for 2022-23 demonstrates an increase of 14.6 percentage points in SMS' academic growth in ELA for all students, from an index of 42.6 in 2021-22 to 57.2 in 2022-23.
- The Next Generation Accountability Report for 2022-23 demonstrates an increase of 22.6 percentage points in SMS' Progress Toward English Proficiency in literacy, from an index of 45.0 in 2021-22 to 67.6 in 2022-23.
- The Next Generation Accountability Report for 2022-23 demonstrates that growth in the Progress Toward English Proficiency in oral increased 6.5 percentage points from 44.4 in 2021-22 to 50.9 in 2022-23.
- There is a commitment to improving instruction through the provision of 90 minutes each week dedicated to collaborative content planning, professional learning sessions, weekly classroom walkthroughs and feedback sessions, and coaching cycles.
- Administrators and coaches conduct biweekly walkthroughs looking for building-wide trends and provide teachers feedback on areas of improvement. District leadership conducts walkthroughs every six weeks with the school leadership team.
- Professional learning is provided to support the instruction of multilingual learners using the strategies of Sheltered Instructional Observation Protocols.
- Coaches provide targeted support for teachers in the areas of classroom structures and routines, unpacking curriculum and assessments, lesson design, modeling lessons, and conducting peer observations. Coaches also participate in weekly meetings with the administration to monitor progress on coaching cycles and building teacher capacity.

- All four academic content areas have implemented standards-based curricula.
- The multi-tiered supports for academics have been expanded by hiring a Read-180 teacher who provides Tier 2 interventions.
- Tiered supports for the positive behavioral support system have been strengthened through the hiring of a climate coach, partnering with New Britain Youth Prevention Council to decrease destructive decision-making, conduct walkthroughs, provide feedback, and the development of a Restorative Center that includes a system for Restorative Conversations.
- The SMS schedule has been restructured to include academic and social-emotional intervention time three times a week using the Second Step curricular resource.

Continued Areas of Focus:

- Continuing to improve the quality of instruction with a focus on increasing rigor, increasing student engagement through higher order questioning, and providing differentiation through small group instruction.
- Continuing 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.
- Building teacher capacity to differentiate instruction, including the implementation of strategies for multilingual learners. Implementation effectiveness will be monitored through walkthroughs and data analysis.
- Providing mentoring to teachers new to the district and/or the profession through assigned mentors and monthly meetings devoted to professional learning on high priority topics.
- Providing professional learning and differentiated coaching to support individual teacher needs in planning for, and utilizing, strategies for increasing cognitive engagement, increasing Depth of Knowledge questioning, differentiating to meet students' needs, and classroom management.
- Revising the tiered intervention approach to meet the students' academic needs for acceleration in ELA and mathematics and expanding the tiered intervention approach to behavioral and SEL needs of struggling students.
- Increasing the effectiveness of Instructional Data Teams in reviewing assessments to drive instruction and support.
- Continuing to provide feedback from administrators to teachers to ensure fidelity of implementation of professional learning and adherence to the instructional vision.
- Continuing to focus on reducing chronic absenteeism for all students through leveraging wraparound services and outreach efforts to families on the importance of school attendance. Although the chronic absenteeism rate decreased from 49.3 percent in 2021-22 to 39.8 percent in 2022-23, the state rate was 20.0 percent. As of November 2023, the current chronic absenteeism rate at SMS was 29.1 percent. Attendance will be monitored weekly through data and attendance team meetings.

Next Steps:

During the 2024-25 school year, Slade Middle School will continue strategies that have shown 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 Slade Middle School enters Year 5 of the Commissioner's Network. The Year 5 plan will prioritize the following:

- Improving tiered instructional practices to ensure increased student outcomes by hiring a mathematics interventionist to close the achievement gap in numeracy.
- Improving the data culture around the effectiveness of Tier 1 instruction through data teams with a focus on common end-of-unit assessments and analyzing student work samples to inform instruction.
- Building teacher capacity to plan the progression of lessons to differentiate, and 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.
- Implementing a sustainable model of support and discipline wherein staff, students, families, and community members are aware of and understand the behavioral expectations of the school building and the processes within. This includes expanding the multi-tiered system of supports through partnerships with community-based organizations.
- Implementing Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) that impact instruction and student achievement.
- Increasing levels of problem-solving activities to improve student-centered instruction.
- Decreasing the chronic absenteeism rate through a multi-tiered systems approach, including the expansion of afterschool programming to include chess and boxing.

Recommendation:

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

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