

IX.D.

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 Smalley Elementary 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, Smalley Elementary 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, Smalley Elementary School (SES) in New Britain is recommended to remain in the Commissioner’s Network for an additional and final year.

Background:

Smalley Elementary School currently serves 594 students in kindergarten through grade five. Eighty-eight percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. Eighteen percent of the students are identified as needing special education services, and 26.9 percent are multilingual learners/English learners (MLs/ELs). Approximately 78 percent of the students are Hispanic/Latino, 8 percent are Black, and 8 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 SES for participation in the Commissioner's Network. On May 23, 2019, the Commissioner initially selected SES 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, SES 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 SES far exceeded the state average. Upon entering the Commissioner's Network, SES had declining test scores, with 7.5 percent of students meeting or exceeding the achievement standards in ELA and 3.9 percent in mathematics on the Smarter Balanced Assessment.

During the 2019-20 planning year, the school's Turnaround Committee developed the turnaround plan for SES in accordance with C.G.S. §10-223h(d). The SES Turnaround Plan focuses on adopting a student-centered model. The turnaround model involves developing core curriculum, instruction and assessment practices to ensure cultural and linguistic responsiveness to meet the needs of SES' diverse student population. It also supports SES' primary focus of literacy and numeracy achievement and the district's STEAM enrichment program. The shift in pedagogy to student-centered learning promotes advanced literacy skills that foster intellectual risks through interaction with more complex text structures. The student-centered learning model will also support the enhancement of school based Scientific Research-Based Interventions (SRBI) and data teaming practices to improve adult capacity to increase student performance outcomes.

On May 7, 2020, after their plan was approved by the SBE, SES 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, SES 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 an instructional coach and compensation for the leadership team. The school and/or district have aligned funding and expenditures closely with school goals and student needs.

On January 16, 2020, SBE members Erin Benham and Dr. Estela López joined the Turnaround Office on a site visit to Smalley Elementary School to observe its progress and engage in discussions around next steps.

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

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

Improvements:

- The Next Generation Accountability Report for 2022-23 demonstrates an increase of 5.7 percentage points in SES performance index for mathematics for all students, from an index of 45.7 in 2021-22 to 51.4 in 2022-23. The performance index for high needs students increased 6.0 percentage points, from an index of 44.4 in 2021-22 to 50.4 in 2022-23.
- The Next Generation Accountability Report for 2022-23 demonstrates an increase of 8.8 percentage points in SES academic growth in mathematics for all students, from an index of 63.4 in 2021-22 to 72.2 in 2022-23. Academic growth for high needs students increased 10.0 percentage points from an index of 62.4 in 2021-22 to 72.4 in 2022-23.
- Grade level teams meet regularly to review benchmark assessment data and student work. These meetings result in teachers refining instructional practices and informing multi-tiered system of supports.
- 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.
- Development of extended learning model through Smalley Elevate afterschool programming supports students in academics, social-emotional learning, and increasing attendance.
- Tiered supports for attendance including weekly attendance meetings and initiatives such as a student-run “attendance squad,” monthly challenges, kindergarten through Grade 2 parent meetings, parent workshops, and home visits resulted in a decrease in chronic absenteeism of 8.1 percentage points from 40.7 in 2021-22 to 32.6 in November 2023.

Continued Areas of Focus:

- Continuing to focus on improving student-centered instruction with a primary focus on increasing rigor, improving student engagement through higher order thinking questioning and student-centered activities.

- Continuing the implementation of the new curricula for math with a focus on student conceptual understanding through collaborative work and student discourse.
- Implementing the new professional learning around the ELA curricular resource aligned with the science of reading (SOR).
- Implementing the SES vision for effective instruction that includes small group instruction, student goal setting, learning targets and success criteria, student-based work and lessons, a focus on increasing student discourse and Depth of Knowledge questioning, increasing vocabulary instruction and utilizing word walls, and creating print-rich environments.
- Providing targeted support for teachers in the areas of classroom structures and routines, unpacking the new curricular resources, alignment with grade level Connecticut Core Standards, assessments, and lesson design. Coaches also participate in weekly meetings with the administration to monitor progress on coaching cycles and building teacher capacity.
- Differentiating to meet the needs of all students including professional learning and coaching on sheltered instructional practices, the creation of the What I Need (WIN) intervention block for thirty minutes daily in ELA and the implementation of a WIN block for mathematics in grades four and five for thirty minutes daily, and the implementation of differentiation strategies.
- Engaging in staff collaborative sessions to plan for increased opportunities for student discourse through the creation of scaffolded questioning that promotes meaningful talk among students as well as small group instruction.
- Continuing professional learning for teachers in purposeful planning for the new ELA curriculum, small group instruction, questioning, and academic discourse that helps students with clarity, sharing their own thoughts, and building meaning.
- Expanding the tiered intervention approach to meet the behavioral and social-emotional needs of struggling students.
- Analyzing and revising systems and protocols to increase the effectiveness of Instructional Data Teams in reviewing benchmark 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 establish a culture of teaching and learning with student growth and achievement at the forefront.

Next Steps:

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

- 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.
- Building teacher capacity to plan the progression of lessons to scaffold rigor and higher order thinking skills.
- Building teacher capacity to apply actionable feedback as well as implementing the new ELA curricular resource.

- Developing opportunities for instructional rounds for teachers within their grade level, as well as vertical rounds to develop teacher instructional practice and build capacity for identifying a root cause and aligned theory of action for future change.
- Expanding the implementation of student generated portfolios with actionable feedback, goal setting, and student led conferences.
- Decreasing the chronic absenteeism rate through a multi-tiered systems approach including the continuation of afterschool programming. Attendance will continue to be monitored weekly through data and attendance team meetings.

Recommendation:

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

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