

**Connecticut State Board of Education
Hartford**

To Be Proposed:
April 3, 2024

Resolved, That, pursuant to Section 10-223h of the Connecticut General Statutes, the State Board of Education approves the continued participation of Bennie Dover Jackson Middle School, New London, in the Commissioner's Network for an additional 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 April, 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: April 3, 2024

Subject: Approval of Commissioner’s Network Extension for Bennie Dover Jackson Middle School, New London

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 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, Bennie Dover Jackson Middle School (BDJMS) is recommended to remain in the Commissioner’s Network for an additional year.

Background:

BDJMS currently serves 330 students in grades six through eight. Ninety-six percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. Twenty percent of the students are identified as needing special education services, and 47 percent are Multilingual learners/English learners (MLs/ELs).

Approximately 69 percent of the students are Hispanic/Latino, 16 percent are Black, and 5 percent are White. The current principal began his leadership at BDJMS in the summer of 2019-20 as an assistant principal before becoming principal in 2021-22, prior to the school's first year in the Commissioner's Network.

On April 3, 2019, the CSDE received an *Expression of Interest Form* from New London Public Schools (NLPS), volunteering BDJMS for participation in the Commissioner's Network. On June 5, 2019, the Commissioner of Education initially selected BDJMS 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, BDJMS and the New London Federation of Teachers appointed members to serve on the school's Turnaround Committee, and the CSDE conducted an Operations and Instructional Audit on November 4, 2019. The audit revealed several challenges impeding success, including inconsistent instructional leadership, structures, and practices contributing to low teacher retention rates, low academic performance scores, and very high chronic absenteeism rates. Teaching effectiveness, pedagogy, and solid classroom management were lacking as observed by the low rigor, absence of differentiated teaching strategies, and high levels of disruptions in the 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 2020-21 planning year, the school's Turnaround Committee developed the turnaround plan for BDJMS in accordance with C.G.S. §10-223h(d). The goal of the BDJMS Turnaround Plan is to strengthen the instructional leadership structures and practices. Talent prioritizes the creation and implementation of a comprehensive support system for teachers which will also be supported by the implementation of schoolwide systems. The comprehensive support system for teachers will focus on academics and social-emotional practices to recruit and retain effective teachers. In academics, the Turnaround Plan is built around the identification and implementation of effective teaching strategies, culturally relevant and responsive standards-based curriculum, and strengthening Tier 1 supports and programming for Multilingual learners/English learners. To improve the culture and climate of BDJMS, the Turnaround Plan includes revising and implementing a comprehensive plan to address chronic absenteeism, developing and implementing a common set of behavior expectations and interventions, and professional learning to build the capacity of staff on culturally responsive teaching practices and trauma-informed teaching. Lastly, BDJMS's Turnaround Plan highlights the development of plans and structures that support opportunities to ensure collaborative planning and professional learning time.

On May 5, 2021, after their plan was approved by the SBE, BDJMS 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, BDJMS has been provided with 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, New London Public Schools has shared the costs of two instructional coaches, four interventionists, and four behavior motivators. Additionally, the district and school share the cost of six hybrid substitutes, which are full-time staff who serve a variety of purposes, including serving as daily and long-term substitute teachers, providing ML/EL support where needed, and attending professional development and staff meetings on a regular basis. The school and/or district have aligned funding and expenditures closely with school goals and student needs.

Improvements:

- The Next Generation Accountability Report for 2022-23 demonstrates BDJMS’s overall Accountability Index has improved by 8.3 percentage points, from 38.2 percent in 2021-22 to 46.5 percent in 2022-23.
- The Next Generation Accountability Report for 2022-23 demonstrates an increase of 3.6 percentage points in BDJMS’s performance index in English language arts (ELA), from 39.5 percent in 2021-22 to 43.1 percent in 2022-23. The ELA performance index for high-needs students improved by 3.7 percentage points, from an index of 39.2 in 2021-22 to 42.9 in 2022-23.
- The Next Generation Accountability Report for 2022-23 demonstrates an increase of 4.2 percentage points in BDJMS’s performance index in mathematics, from 29.8 percent in 2021-22 to 34.0 in 2022-23. The mathematics performance index for students identified with high needs improved by 3.9 percentage points, from 29.8 percent in 2021-22 to 33.7 percent in 2022-23.
- Chronic absenteeism has decreased by 10.2 percentage points – in 2021-22, BDJMS reported 46.8 percent of students as chronically absent while in 2022-23, the school reported chronic absenteeism decreased to 36.6 percent.
- BDJMS has shown a reduction in teacher turnover in the past two years. In 2021-22, the school reported the turnover rate was approximately 55 percent. Over this two-year span, from 2021-2023, the school reported the turnover rate has decreased to approximately 20 percent. The school’s strategic recruitment and hiring of staff, which focuses on attendance and behavior support, has contributed to the improvement of the teacher retention rate, reduced suspensions, and decreased chronic absenteeism.
- Out-of-school suspensions of BDJMS’s students have decreased from 31 instances, from August through January of the 2021-22 school year, to 6 this year, within the same respective time period.
- BDJMS has implemented multiple recognition events, such as the National Junior Honor Society, honor roll breakfasts and iReady growth celebrations, that have recognized over 300 students throughout the current school year.

Continued Areas of Focus:

- Expanding attendance structures to continue to decrease chronic absenteeism and improve culture and climate at BDJMS through the Learner Engagement and Attendance Program (LEAP), improvement of the attendance team meeting structures, provision of timely interventions for student groups and programs, and visits to families.
- Formalizing and implementing a comprehensive literacy and numeracy plan to address the needs of students across all tiers of instruction.
- Reviewing and revising a comprehensive, culturally relevant, and responsive plan to strengthen Tier 1 support and a continuum of responsive supports for ML/ELs and students with disabilities.
- Reviewing and revising professional development and instructional coaching focused on the adopted mathematics and ELA curricula.
- Promoting culturally relevant and responsive systems that improve relationships between all stakeholders to develop a positive school culture.
- Continuing to provide staff with professional development focused on culturally responsive teaching practices, trauma-informed teaching, and other strategies to support students' social-emotional well-being.

Next Steps:

During the 2024-25 school year, Bennie Dover Jackson Middle School will continue strategies that have shown steady improvement over the past three 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 Bennie Dover Jackson Middle School enters Year 4 of the Commissioner's Network. The Year 4 plan will prioritize the following:

- Decreasing chronic absenteeism 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 continue to participate in statewide training on the LEAP approach to support students struggling with absenteeism and disengagement.
- Providing targeted professional learning and instructional coaching on utilizing student data to best identify differentiated instructional strategies that provide appropriately challenging targeted small-group instruction.
- Continuing support and professional learning to meet the needs of all students, including students identified with high needs.
- Providing training in co-teaching models to foster strong communication between co-teachers so as to establish clear roles and responsibilities, tailor instruction to diverse learner needs, and regularly reflect on and refine collaborative practices.

- Continuing targeted support for intervention programs that individualizes instruction, provides regular progress monitoring to enhance data-driven decision-making, and creates a climate and culture that focuses on specific learner needs.
- Refining instructional coaching that utilizes trust between staff members to set clear goals, provides constructive feedback, builds reflective practices for staff in coaching cycles, utilizes data to drive effective coaching cycles, and builds resources available for aligned professional support.

Recommendation:

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

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