

**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 New London High 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 New London High 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, New London High School (NLHS) is recommended to remain in the Commissioner’s Network for an additional year.

**Background:**

New London High School currently serves 532 students in grades nine through twelve. Ninety-three percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. Twenty-five percent of the students are identified as needing special education services, and 39 percent are Multilingual learners/English learners (MLs/ELs). Approximately 71 percent of the students are Hispanic/Latino, 16 percent are Black, and 6 percent are White. The current principal began his leadership at NLHS in October of 2021-22, during the school’s second 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 NLHS for participation in the Commissioner's Network. On June 5, 2019, the Commissioner of Education initially selected NLHS 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, NLHS 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 October 30, 2019. The audit revealed several challenges impeding success, including low academic performance scores in both mathematics and English Language Arts (ELA), low four-year graduation rates, and high chronic absenteeism rates. Teaching effectiveness, pedagogy, and a lack of classroom management as observed by low rigor; an absence of differentiated teaching strategies; an absence of supports for special populations; and high levels of disruptions in class as evidenced by very high suspension rates. Instructional leadership was inconsistent with leadership currently under the direction of an interim administrator, and teachers did not receive regular, actionable feedback. Recruitment and retention of staff was also low due to inconsistent support, particularly around meaningful opportunities for professional development. While an attendance team at NLHS was established, implementation of interventions and strategies was lacking. Student behavior was a significant challenge and there was little evidence of a well-implemented behavior management system or evidence of positive teacher-student relationships.

During the 2020-21 planning year, the school's Turnaround Committee developed the turnaround plan for NLHS in accordance with C.G.S. § 10-223h(d). In talent, the NLHS Turnaround Plan prioritizes the recruitment and retention of culturally competent and linguistically diverse staff and supports staff through professional learning and mentorship to build capacity. The turnaround plan centers around the implementation of a culturally responsive curriculum that allows for increases in high-quality instructional practices. Administration, through data from ongoing observations and classroom walkthroughs, will develop professional learning for staff to implement culturally responsive instructional strategies. This professional learning will also provide opportunities for staff to collaborate around a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) to meet the needs of students identified as MLs/ELs and students with high needs.

Investments in improving the culture and climate of NLHS include the implementation of an effective MTSS to address attendance, academics, and behavior and the implementation of a schoolwide system to promote positive behaviors. Finally, NLHS will restructure the school schedule to implement extended learning and academic support and enrichment opportunities to accelerate student success as well as to provide staff collaborative planning time, job-embedded professional learning, and instructional coaching.

On May 5, 2021, after their plan was approved by the SBE, NLHS 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, NLHS 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.

### **Improvements:**

- The Next Generation Accountability Report for 2022-23 demonstrates an increase of 3.4 percentage points in NLHS's overall Accountability Index, from 47.9 percent in 2021-22 to 51.3 percent in 2022-23.
- The Next Generation Accountability Report for 2022-23 demonstrates an increase of 5.1 percentage points in NLHS's performance index in ELA, from 33.2 percent in 2021-22 to 38.3 percent in 2022-23. The ELA performance index for students identified with high needs improved by 5.1 percentage points, from 33.1 percent in 2021-22 to 38.2 percent in 2022-23.
- The Next Generation Accountability Report for 2022-23 demonstrates an increase of 5.9 percentage points in NLHS's performance index in mathematics, from 30.6 percent in 2021-22 to 36.5 percent in 2022-23. The mathematics performance index for students identified with high needs improved by 5.4 percentage points, from 30.6 percent in 2021-22 to 36.0 percent in 2022-23.
- Chronic absenteeism has reduced by 6 percent since 2021-22, NLHS reported 50.9 percent of students as chronically absent while in 2022-23, chronic absenteeism reduced to 44.9 percent.
- NLHS has increased the number of students participating in the Boat for Next Gen Program, a collaboration program with Electric Boat through the Maritime Electrical Pathway, from 14 students in 2022-23 to 48 students for the 2023-24 school year. In addition, the number of students participating in career informational sessions has tripled.
- The consistent usage of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) Rewards has increased by 64 percent over the past year, as evidenced by 85 percent of the staff using the rewards application daily in the 2023-24 school year as opposed to 21 percent in the 2021-22 school year. Additionally, in the 2023-24 school year, the use of the PBIS Rewards school store, The Whaler Marketplace, has shown a 100 percent increase in points redeemed by NLHS students over the same respective time period.
- Professional learning has occurred once a month with the school leadership around building capacity to evaluate and offer actionable feedback to the staff members they evaluate. Evaluators have increased the frequency of observing each classroom they are responsible for to at least once per week.
- The strategic hires of three college, career, and workforce readiness coordinators, one attendance liaison, and three behavior support motivators have improved retention rates, increased career and early college opportunities for students, reduced suspensions, and decreased chronic absenteeism.

## **Continued Areas of Focus:**

- Although NLHS's chronic absenteeism rate is significantly high, there are substantial efforts to address attendance rates, and incremental improvement can be seen. There needs to be a continued focus on reducing chronic absenteeism through leveraging wraparound services and outreach efforts to families on the importance of regular school attendance.
- Continuing to build a Professional Learning Community (PLC) protocol that includes norms, data collection, analysis, application, and expected outcomes.
- Providing additional professional learning opportunities and coaching focused on the continuation of capacity building of all staff, especially regarding higher-level cognitive engagement, student-centered practices, and increasing rigor.
- Providing professional learning to administration to build capacity on effective teacher practices and providing actionable feedback.
- Continuing to build comprehensive literacy and mathematics plans to address the needs of all students while increasing teacher efficacy around instructional practice through the unpacking of a relevant/responsive curriculum.
- Reviewing and refining an effective MTSS for students with disabilities and English Learners/Multilingual learners, including professional learning around a co-teaching model that employs multiple, equally active instructors in the classroom that provide opportunities to expand student supports and support learners.
- Emphasizing high expectations for all students, the improvement of instructional practice, the opportunities for credit recovery, and an improved focus on providing educational guidance so that students understand the effort needed to attain college and career readiness.

## **Next Steps:**

During the 2024-25 school year, NLHS 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 NLHS 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 participate in statewide training on the Learner Engagement and Attendance Program (LEAP) approach to supporting students struggling with absenteeism and disengagement.
- Targeting professional learning and instructional coaching that is dedicated to 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.

- Building a teacher leadership academy to support ongoing instructional practices and offer teacher-led choice professional learning facilitation moving forward. This will also include the development and implementation of a NLHS dashboard that provides an instructional practice video library of effective practice.
- Developing and implementing a professional learning calendar aligned to Tier 1 practices, including student-to-student discourse, engagement strategies, peer evaluation and feedback, self-reflection, and metacognition.
- Building sustainable practices for afterschool learning activities, such as tutoring and office hours for extra help.
- Developing an operational structures handbook that clearly defines the mission and vision statements and operational procedures, such as routines, schedules, emergency protocols, and student arrival and dismissal procedures, technology and equipment use and maintenance, the codes of conduct for all community members, and communication protocols. In addition, this handbook will offer clearly defined curriculum and instruction guidelines, including professional learning opportunities, grading policies, and extra-curricular opportunities, both in-house and in the community.

**Recommendation:**

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

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