

IX.A.

CONNECTICUT STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION Hartford

TO BE PROPOSED:

April 7, 2021

RESOLVED, That the State Board of Education, pursuant to Section 10-223h of the Connecticut General Statutes, approves continued participation of Wexler-Grant Community School, New Haven, in the Commissioner's Network for an additional year commencing July 1, 2021, and directs the Acting 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 seventh day of April, Two Thousand Twenty-One.

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, Acting Commissioner of Education

DATE: April 7, 2021

SUBJECT: Approval of Commissioner’s Network Extension for Wexler-Grant Community School, New Haven

Executive Summary

Introduction

Public Act 12-116, in part, 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 purpose of the Commissioner’s Network is to turn around chronically low-performing schools and improve outcomes for students who attend these schools. 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 Network for a minimum of three years. Subsection (h) of Connecticut General Statutes Section 10-223h establishes that the State Board of Education (SBE) may allow schools to continue in the Commissioner’s Network for an additional year, not to exceed two additional years, if necessary. For the reasons set forth below, Wexler-Grant Community School is recommended to remain in the Network for an additional year.

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 fifteen schools presently participating in the Network.

Background:

Wexler-Grant Community School currently serves 353 students in Grades Kindergarten through 8. One hundred percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. Eighteen percent of the students are identified as needing special education services, and six percent are English learners (ELs). Approximately 72 percent of the students are Black, 25 percent are Hispanic, and 3 percent are White.

Wexler-Grant Community School entered the Commissioner's Network in the fall of 2018. Prior to receiving State Board approval to enter the Network, an Operations and Instructional Audit was conducted on May 18, 2017. The audit revealed a lack of common vision for effective instruction and school-wide behavior management system; low level of instructional rigor, including higher-order thinking and questioning, high student chronic absenteeism; and the need for ongoing and job-embedded professional learning for teachers in data analysis and data-driven decision making. Upon entering the Network, Wexler-Grant Community School had declining test scores, with only 21.8 percent of students meeting or exceeding the achievement standards in English Language Arts and 4.0 percent in Mathematics on the Smarter Balanced Assessment.

For the first three years under the Commissioner's Network Grant, New Haven Public Schools has shared the costs of the five interventionists, one math teacher, and a climate and culture specialist. The school and district continue to repurpose funds to align expenditures more closely with school goals and student needs.

Improvements:

- The percentage of Wexler Grant students meeting or exceeding the achievement standard in English Language Arts (ELA) on the Smarter Balanced Assessment increased from 21.8 percent in 2017-18 to 25.1 percent in 2018-19, and the percentage of students achieving growth target in ELA increased from 51.5 percent to 67.0 percent; exceeding their ESSA Target Goal of 63.4 percent.
- The percentage of Wexler Grant students meeting or exceeding the achievement standard in mathematics on the Smarter Balanced Assessment increased from 41.2 percent in 2017-18 to 46.7 percent in 2018-19, and the percentage of students achieving growth target in mathematics increased from 48.9 percent to 65.0 percent; exceeding their ESSA Target Goal of 41.6 percent.
- The suspension rate decreased from 25 percent in 2016-17 to 6.4 percent in 2019-20, with 0 suspensions or expulsions to date in 2020-21.
- Strengthened the feedback cycle to improve instructional practice by creating a biweekly schedule for leadership to participate in focused walkthroughs, providing teachers same-day actionable feedback, and monitoring for improvement aligned to feedback.

Continued Areas of Focus:

- Chronic absenteeism rates have been inconsistent with a rate of 30.8 percent in 2016-17, 25.2 percent in 2017-18, 32.8 percent in 2018-19, and decreasing to 26.1 percent in 2019-20. With remote learning and other COVID-19-related disruptions, the chronic absenteeism rate YTD for the 2020-21 school year is 48.5 percent.

- Continue a focus on foundational skills for Grades K-3 in literacy with targeted instruction that promotes decoding, building vocabulary, and developing comprehension skills, with support from Hill for Literacy.
- Continue to develop foundational math skills by building number sense routines with support from Math Solutions.

Next Steps:

During the 2021-22 school year, Wexler-Grant Community School will continue strategies that have shown some 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 supports as Wexler-Grant Community School enters Year 4 of the Commissioner’s Network. The Year 4 plan will prioritize the following:

- Decrease chronic absenteeism rate through a multi-tiered systems approach. Continue to understand and monitor attendance trends through weekly data and attendance team meetings. Engage students and families in regular conversations to understand and address issues that are preventing students from attending school, and monitor the effectiveness of strategies to determine impact and adjust as needed. Develop community partnerships to engage students and families and promote school attendance. Effectively use the resources of the district to support and enhance the school efforts in meeting the needs of families and reducing chronic absenteeism.
- Provide on-going coaching to build teacher capacity on effective instructional practices and using data to plan for differentiation to meet the needs of all students in literacy and math.
- Continue to provide weekly common planning time for grade level teachers, which includes biweekly grade level meetings focused on examining data and evidence of student learning to inform instruction.
- Provide professional development focused on effective instructional practices that promote student engagement and increase instructional rigor in alignment with Connecticut Core State Standards.

Recommendation:

The CSDE recommends that the SBE approve an additional year commencing July 1, 2021.

Prepared by:

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Approved by:

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