

IX.C.

**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 Windham High School, Windham, 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 Windham High School, Windham

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, Windham High School in Windham 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:

Windham High School currently serves 616 students in Grades 9 through 12. Seventy-one percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. Twenty-four percent of the students are identified as needing special education services, and thirty-one percent are English learners (ELs). Approximately 76 percent of the students are Hispanic, 7 percent are Black, and 17 percent are White.

Windham High 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 December 15, 2016. The audit revealed a lack of cohesiveness in vision, mission, and expectations among staff. School and district leadership lacked an evaluation system with structured protocols for evaluation and feedback aligned to school improvement. Turnover of school administration and teaching staff contributed to the absence of a school mission or consistent strategic direction.

Over the past three years, Windham Public Schools has shared the costs of the College and Career Pathways Coordinator, School Counselor, and Interventionists. The school and/or district continue to repurpose funds to align expenditures more closely with school goals and student needs.

Improvements:

- The percentage of Windham High School students meeting or exceeding the achievement standard in English Language Arts (ELA) on the SAT increased from 26 percent in 2017-18 to 27.4 percent in 2018-19.
- The School Performance Index in ELA increased from 44.0 in 2017-18 to 45.9 in 2018-19.
- The percentage of students meeting or exceeding the achievement standards in mathematics on the SAT increased from 10.5 percent in 2017-18 to 17.7 percent in 2018-19.
- The School Performance Index in mathematics increased from 40.5 in 2017-18 to 41.9 in 2018-19.
- The suspension rate decreased from 23.8 percent in 2018-19 to 9.1 percent in 2019-20.

Continued Areas of Focus:

- The Accountability Index decreased from 57.2 in 2017-18 to 56.8 in 2018-19.
- The chronic absenteeism rate increased from 31.6 percent in 2018-19 to 32.9 percent in 2019-20.
- The four-year graduation rate decreased from 86.8 in 2017-18 to 80.3 in 2018-19.
- Ongoing professional learning for math teachers on aligning lessons to grade level content and practice standards, and the selection of rigorous learning experiences that provide application of skills in real-world problem solving situations.
- Continuing to strengthen the feedback cycle to improve instructional practice including a dedicated schedule for administration to frequently visit classrooms, an instructional walkthrough process establishing common expectations and practices, and weekly communication to staff on instructional focus areas and data team targets.

Next Steps:

During the 2021-22 school year, Windham High 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 Windham High 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. Continue to monitor the effectiveness of strategies to determine impact and adjust as needed.
- Calibrate high school and district practices and optimize strategies to benefit students with disabilities and English Learners. Continue to provide professional learning to teachers on best instructional practices for English Learners and Students with Disabilities.
- Provide on-going coaching and guidance to teachers in data analysis to drive instructional planning and practice.
- Provide professional development to teachers on higher-order questioning and the cognitive rigor matrix to plan for differentiation and increasing the level of rigor.

Recommendation:

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

Prepared by:

Iris White, Education Consultant, Turnaround Office

Reviewed by:

Lisa Lamenzo, Division Director, Turnaround Office

Approved by:

Irene E. Parisi, Chief Academic Officer