

# IX.A.

## Connecticut State Board of Education Hartford

**To Be Proposed:**  
May 3, 2023

**Resolved,** That the State Board of Education, pursuant to Section 10-223h of the Connecticut General Statutes, approves the continued participation of Hartford Public High School, Hartford, in the Commissioner's Network for an additional year commencing July 1, 2023, 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 May, Two Thousand Twenty-Three.

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:** May 3, 2023

**Subject:** Approval of Commissioner’s Network Extension for Hartford Public High School, Hartford

*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 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. Subsection (h) of Section (§) 10-223h of the Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.) 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, Hartford Public High School (HPHS) in Hartford is recommended to remain in the Commissioner’s Network for a fourth year.

**Background:**

Hartford Public High School currently serves 803 students in grades nine through twelve. Eighty-five percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. Twenty-eight percent of the students are identified as needing special education services, and 39 percent are multilingual learners/English learners (MLs/ELs). Approximately 69 percent of the students are Hispanic/Latino, 23 percent are Black, and 4 percent are White. The current Principal began her

leadership at HPHS in the summer of 2021-22, during the school's second year in the Commissioner's Network.

On June 15, 2018, the CSDE received an *Expression of Interest Form* from Hartford Public Schools (HPS), volunteering HPHS for participation in the Commissioner's Network. On September 17, 2018, the Commissioner of Education initially selected HPHS 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, HPHS and the Hartford Federation of Teachers appointed members to serve on the school's Turnaround Committee, and the CSDE conducted an Operations and Instructional Audit on October 11, 2018. The audit revealed several challenges impeding success, including: low academic performance scores; low four-year graduation rates; and very high chronic absenteeism rates. Teaching effectiveness, pedagogy, and solid classroom management were lacking as observed by low rigor, an absence of differentiated teaching strategies, and high levels of disruptions in 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 2018-19 planning year, the school's Turnaround Committee developed the turnaround plan for HPHS in accordance with C.G.S. § 10-223h(d). The HPHS turnaround plan focuses on the creation of multiple pathways to a student-success model, with a strong focus on the social-emotional development of HPHS students. The school structure includes a Freshman Academy for all first-time Grade 9 students and career pathways in Grades 10 through 12. The turnaround plan involves: the development of a rigorous, standards-based Tier I instructional model with intervention and enrichment support; the adoption of both a Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) model to foster positive interactions and relationships with peers and adults and a restorative approach to discipline; an advisory program; and an alternative program with a work component for over-aged and under-credited students.

Due to the restructuring of the school in which three separate school academy structures were combined into a single unified high school, HPHS was granted an additional planning year in 2019-20. Additionally, the school has experienced leadership turnover since the instructional audit, with three different individuals having held the position of Principal since 2018. The current school's leadership team and teachers, however, have started to enact sustainable change in academic performance, staff development, and student engagement.

On May 7, 2020, after their plan was approved by the SBE, HPHS 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, HPHS 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:**

- Hartford Public High School has expanded the pathway academies. The number of female students in the engineering program has grown from 2 to 22 in one year. Also, through a rigorous assessment process, Hartford Public High School earned a Distinguished Model Award in July 2022 for the engineering program.
- The Allied Health career pathway, started in the 2021-2022 school year, currently has 24 students enrolled in a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) program through Capital Community College. So far, students are on track to completing their practicum and taking the CNA certification test.
- Hartford Public High School met the state FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) Challenge in 2021-22 and have already met their target for this current year. This has been achieved by coordinating efforts between counselors, college and career specialists, and partners.
- The school has engaged partners such as the Urban League, Higher Heights, and Career Beginnings to provide in-person workshops to parents throughout the year. This work has helped to double Hartford Public High School's postsecondary efforts.
- Overall safety has improved as indicated by an 8.6 percent suspension rate and fewer reported incidents that the School Safety Officer must respond to.
- Hartford Public High School's chronic absenteeism rate currently holds at 62 percent, a significant decrease from 74 percent in its first year. Year-to-date attendance has also shown significant improvement since the school's initial year.
- Strategic hires for school leadership, operations, career pathways, student engagement, and core academic areas has ensured classrooms are staffed with qualified and certified staff, which has improved retention rates among academic classes.
- Wraparound community services such as laundry assistance and partnerships with community agencies and businesses have helped to minimize student and family needs for basic care and mental health.
- As a result of Hartford Public High School's robust ambassador program, the student council and freshmen leadership academy continue to ensure students have a voice in school and community matters and representation.

### **Continued Areas of Focus:**

- Although Hartford Public High School's chronic absenteeism rate is significantly high, there are substantial efforts to address attendance rates, and 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.
- Provide additional professional learning opportunities and coaching focused on the continuation of capacity building of staff, especially in regard to higher level cognitive engagement, student-centered practices, and increasing rigor.

- Student-centered practices are happening unevenly throughout the school. There is a need to expand practices that are engaging to students and offer multiple access points from some classrooms to all classrooms.
- There is a need for co-teaching training; multiple, equally active instructors in the classroom provide opportunities to expand student supports and support learners.
- Strengthen data analysis and the instructional planning protocol to develop a strong small-group instruction and support structure. Using formative and summative assessment data, teachers should develop targeted groups for instruction and match engaging teaching and materials to the group.
- Provide professional learning and coaching to support teachers in planning for, and utilizing, strategies for increased cognitive engagement, including meaningful peer-to-peer discourse that incorporates multiple learning styles, and provide ample opportunity for productive struggle.
- There is a continued need for emphasis on high expectations for all students, the improvement of instructional practice, 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.
- Hartford Public High School offers many opportunities for families to participate in school events, such as Open House, SAT Night, Financial Aid Night, and PTO meetings; however, limited numbers of parents attend, suggesting the need to develop a more family-centered parent engagement plan that reaches into the community and is based on the Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships, with a specific focus on educating families about the importance of regular school attendance.

### **Next Steps:**

During the 2023-24 school year, Hartford Public High 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 Hartford Public High School enters Year 4 of the Commissioner's Network. The Year 4 plan will prioritize the following:

- Decrease 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 trainings on the Learner Engagement and Attendance Program (LEAP) approach to supporting students struggling with absenteeism and disengagement. Target 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.
- Hartford Public High School's instructional leadership team (ILT) and administrators should continue to support teacher capacity to maintain a focus on providing opportunities to challenge students cognitively through instructional activities and higher-level questions. In addition, Hartford Public High School should continue to provide training to the ILT on how to deliver feedback to teachers.
- Continue to leverage learning walks in order to conduct informal observations, monitor instruction and pace, and support teacher implementation of professional learning. Moreover, classroom teachers should be a part of these practices to build teacher capacity.

- Continue to refine and expand the Multi-Tiered System of Supports as well as the development of the restorative mindset for all stakeholders in the HPHS community.
- Expand family and community activities to involve not only the entire administrative cabinet, but also the teacher community to support the development of relationships and increase school pride.

**Recommendation:**

The CSDE recommends that the SBE approve an additional year commencing July 1, 2023.

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Approved by:

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