

IX.E.

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 Derby Middle School, Derby, 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 Derby Middle School,
Derby

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 turnaround 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, Derby Middle School (DMS) in Derby is recommended to remain in the Commissioner’s Network for a fourth year.

Background:

Derby Middle School currently serves 301 students in Grades 6 through 8. Forty-seven percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. Nineteen percent of the students are identified as needing special education services, and two percent are multilingual learners/English learners (MLs/ELs). Approximately 46 percent of the students are Hispanic, 21 percent are Black, and 27 percent are White.

On April 5, 2019, the CSDE received an *Expression of Interest Form* from the Derby Public Schools (DPS), volunteering DMS for participation in the Commissioner's Network. On May 23, 2019, the Commissioner initially selected DMS 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, DMS and the Derby Education Association appointed members to serve on the school's Turnaround Committee, and the CSDE conducted an Operations and Instructional Audit on October 7, 2019. The audit revealed a lack of common vision for effective instruction and school-wide behavior management systems, a low level of instructional rigor, including higher order thinking and effective questioning techniques, inadequate or ineffective assessment and data collection systems, and the need for ongoing and job-embedded professional learning for teachers in data analysis and data-driven decision making. Upon entering the Commissioner's Network, DMS had declining test scores, with 28.4 percent of students meeting or exceeding the achievement standards in English language arts (ELA) and 20.4 percent in mathematics on the Smarter Balanced Assessment.

During the 2019-20 planning year, the school's Turnaround Committee developed the turnaround plan for DMS in accordance with C.G.S. § 10-223h (d). The goal of the DMS turnaround plan is to cultivate a strong professional learning community with a focus on rigorous teaching and learning that is student focused. The school's Turnaround Committee and the DMS staff are committed to creating a cohesive vision, shared sense of urgency for improvement, and common expectations for high levels of professional performance, perseverance, and continuous growth. The turnaround plan includes the development of an instructional coaching model to increase teacher capacity and effectiveness, the implementation of a rigorous, standards-aligned curriculum with supports for students through a tiered Scientific Research Based Intervention (SRBI) model, implementation of the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) model and establishment of a school culture focused on achievement, as well as creating school structures and systems to maximize instructional time and create extended learning opportunities.

On June 3, 2020, after their plan was approved by the SBE, DMS 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, DMS 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, Derby Public Schools has shared the costs of 3 instructional coaches, 3 interventionists, a parent liaison specialist, and a school climate and attendance specialist. The school and/or district have aligned funding and expenditures closely with school goals and student needs.

Improvements:

- The Next Generation Accountability Report for 2021-22 demonstrates an increase of 3.7 index points in DMS' performance index in ELA, from an index of 52.8 in 2018-19 to an index of 56.5 in 2021-22.
- The Next Generation Accountability Report for 2021-22 demonstrates an increase of 1.9 index points in DMS' performance index in mathematics, from an index of 46.3 in 2018-19 to an index of 48.2 in 2021-22.
- The Next Generation Accountability Report for 2021-22 demonstrates an increase of 7.1 percentage points in DMS' academic growth in ELA, from 39.8 percent in 2018-19 to 46.9 percent in 2021-22. Additionally, the school's ELA Academic Growth– High Needs Students increased 10.3 percent from 36.6 percent in 2018-19 to 46.9 percent in 2021-22. The gap between the school's ELA Academic Growth – All Students and High Needs Students has reduced to zero percent.
- The Next Generation Accountability Report for 2021-22 demonstrates an increase of 1.8 percentage points in DMS' academic growth in mathematics, from 42.6 percent in 2018-19 to 44.4 percent in 2021-22.
- Increased student proficiency on the 2022-23 ELA iReady Assessment in all grade levels from fall to winter – Grade 6 improved 7 percentage points from 28 percent to 35 percent, Grade 7 showed a 15 percentage point improvement from 31 percent to 46 percent, and Grade 8 improved by 24 percentage points from 23 percent to 47 percent.
- Increased student proficiency on the 2022-23 mathematics iReady Assessment in all grade levels from fall to winter – Grade 6 improved 9 percentage points from 23 percent to 32 percent, Grade 7 showed a 5 percentage point improvement from 20 percent to 25 percent, and Grade 8 improved by 19 percentage points, from 20 percent to 39 percent.
- A live Learning Lab was created and implemented to create a space for staff to explore, investigate, and learn in collaborative ways. Coaches, leadership, and teachers regularly meet and collaborate on improving instructional practices along with unpacking the standards and curriculum.
- Student Success Teams (SST) meet on a rotating schedule around mathematics, reading, and behavioral/social-emotional learning with a focus on high impact teaching strategies (HITS) occurring within the Tier 1 setting. Interventions are tracked and reviewed consistently.
- Coaches are providing targeted supports for teachers in the areas of classroom structures and routines, unpacking curriculum and assessments, and lesson design. Coaches also participate in weekly meetings with the administration to monitor progress on coaching cycles and building teacher capacity.
- Staff and administration continue professional learning in the Harvard University coursework. They participated in coursework titled, *Articulating the Intangibles of Teaching: Aligning Your Purpose and Practice for Instructional Leadership* (October 2022-November 2022) and in coursework titled, *Teachers Mentoring Teachers: Practices for Powerful Professional Communities* (January 2023-March 2023).
- Data continues to support improved outcomes around suspension numbers. In-school and out-of-school suspensions along with expulsions have improved by over 60 percent year-over-year, from 2021-22 to the current school year.

Continued Areas of Focus:

- There is a continued need for focus on chronic absenteeism. The chronic absenteeism rate for all students increased from 12.6 percent in 2018-19 to 24.1 percent in 2021-22. The current chronic absenteeism rate is 20.63 percent.

- There is a continued need to improve High Quality Instruction (HQI) in literacy and mathematics, to shift from teacher-centered instruction to student-centered learning.
- Continuing professional learning for teachers in purposeful planning for questioning and academic discourse that helps students with clarity, sharing their own thoughts, and building meaning they did not have before. Teachers would benefit from support in planning progression of lessons to scaffold rigor and higher order questioning to develop thinking skills in order to increase students' capacity to engage in complex content and increase cognitive demand.

Next Steps:

During the 2023-24 school year, Derby Middle School will continue strategies that have shown 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 Derby Middle School enters Year 4 of the Commissioner's Network. The Year 4 plan will prioritize the following:

- Continue to review and refine the instructional coaching model.
- Continue to align the focused capacity building coaching to district tenets for High Quality Instruction, Question Formulation Technique, discourse, and student engagement.
- Continue to strengthen the school-wide behavior system by evaluating the effectiveness of the redeveloped Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) program and adjust as needed.
- Continue to build the capacity of teachers to analyze data and use data to guide planning and instruction, including the use of real-time data to adjust instruction to meet the needs of students during lessons.
- Continue to review and refine the Scientific Research-Based Intervention (SRBI) process in order to provide a Multi-Tiered System of Support for students in reading, mathematics, and behavior management. DMS should align the assessment systems to intervention strategies and resources and refine structures to ensure that students receive the appropriate support needed.
- Continue to focus on improving chronic absenteeism through leveraging wraparound services and outreach efforts to families.
- Continue to offer professional learning and transfer of practice around engagement, rigor, and discourse through external consultants and continued participation in the Harvard University coursework.

Recommendation:

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

Prepared by:

Greg Dresko, Education Consultant, Turnaround Office

Approved by:

Irene E. Parisi, Chief Academic Officer