

IX.B.

Connecticut State Board of Education Hartford

To Be Proposed:

May 4, 2022

Resolved, That the State Board of Education, pursuant to Section 10-223h of the Connecticut General Statutes, approves the continued participation of Wexler-Grant Community School, New Haven, in the Commissioner's Network for an additional and final year commencing July 1, 2022, 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 fourth day of May, Two Thousand Twenty-Two.

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 4, 2022

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 a fifth and final year.

Background:

Wexler-Grant Community School (Wexler-Grant) currently serves 326 students in Grades Kindergarten through 8. One hundred percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. Sixteen percent of the students are identified as needing special education services, and five percent are Multilingual Learners (MLs). Approximately 65 percent of the students are Black, 26 percent are Hispanic, and 1 percent are White.

Wexler-Grant Community School entered the Commissioner's Network (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 schoolwide behavior management system, a low level of instructional rigor, including higher-order thinking and questioning, a 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 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, New Haven Public Schools shared the salary costs of the Climate and Culture Coordinator, Math 180 Teacher, and Interventionists. Wexler-Grant is now in its fourth year, and consequently, New Haven Public Schools has assumed fiscal responsibility for all positions in the Commissioner's Network Plan. The school and/or district continue to repurpose funds to align expenditures more closely with school goals and student needs.

On December 10, 2021, State Board of Education Chairperson Karen DuBois-Walton joined the Turnaround Office on a site visit to Wexler-Grant Community School to observe its progress and engage in discussions around next steps.

Improvements:

- Increased student proficiency on the Math Fact Fluency Assessment from 5.5 percent in fall 2021 to 21.3 percent in winter 2022.
- Increased student proficiency from 13.8 percent in fall 2021 to 18 percent in winter 2022 as measured by the Reading Inventory.
- Increased the on-track to high School graduation rate from 73.3 percent in 2018-19 to 86.1 percent in 2019-20. This Next Generation Accountability Index indicator calculates the percentage of 9th graders earning at least five full year credits in the year.
- Committed to monthly Literacy Leadership team meetings with consultants and literacy coach to engage in literacy leadership learning and tasks. Teachers are receiving professional learning from Hill for Literacy, focused on foundational reading skills and using data to plan for students' intervention. All leadership team members engage in weekly and bi-weekly lesson plan review, regular walkthroughs with written real time feedback, and provide coaching to teachers when needed.
- Instituted structures for intentional review of data and team planning for grade level and vertical teams. The teacher focus group reports significantly more time spent reviewing data to improve instruction in 2020-21.
- Increased instructional minutes in the school day for teachers to provide additional time needed for differentiation in English language arts, mathematics, as well as social emotional learning. This new structure was the result of the Leadership Team partnering with teacher leaders to develop a renewed schedule.
- Implemented A daily social emotional learning (SEL) block to commit (daily/weekly instructional blocks) to develop SEL habits to address the challenges students are facing as a result of the pandemic and to build a classroom community.

Continued Areas of Focus:

- The chronic absenteeism rate increased from 26.1 percent in 2019-20 to 48.1 percent in 2020-21. As of January 2022, the chronic absenteeism rate is 58.5 percent.

- Teachers would benefit from support in planning progression of lessons to scaffold rigor and higher order thinking skills, developing students' capacity to engage in complex content and increasing cognitive demand.

Next Steps:

During the 2022-23 school year, Wexler-Grant Community School (Wexler-Grant) 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 Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) Turnaround Office will provide intensive monitoring and supports as Wexler-Grant Community School enters Year 5 of the Commissioner's Network. The Year 5 plan will prioritize the following:

- Evaluate the implementation of strategies and impact on student attendance by examining data, evaluating interventions, and reinforcing interventions found to positively impact student attendance. The Wexler-Grant Leadership Team along with the attendance team and with district support should continue to focus on building community partnerships and refining the tiered approach to address chronic absenteeism. Wexler-Grant will also sustain strategies implemented through the LEAP Program. The CSDE will continue to provide targeted technical assistance to support the school in improving attendance including root cause analysis efforts.
- Utilize the CSDE Acceleration Cycle as a framework for developing and implementing an improvement plan to address learning acceleration, learning recovery, and student enrichment as a result of the pandemic. Wexler-Grant should convene a team to develop and monitor the implementation of a plan that intentionally addresses unfinished learning while focusing on the teaching of prioritized, essential content and maintaining a high level of rigor.
- Continue to provide professional learning focused on questioning and student discourse. Support teachers' capacity to maintain a focus on providing opportunities to promote cognitive rigor through instructional activities and higher-level questions. This professional learning is expected to develop teacher skills to plan instruction that consistently engages students in substantive conversations with purposeful questioning to promote inquiry and learning.
- Reconvene the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports committee to continue drafting school wide policies and practices to address student behavioral concerns/referrals. In addition, the committee will explore the use of Tier 1 restorative practices and de-escalation techniques in order to build teacher capacity to effectively use these strategies in the classroom. The Turnaround Office will also partner with school leadership to evaluate the impact of the school's efforts in the classroom during regular site visits.

Recommendation:

The CSDE recommends that the SBE approve an additional and final year commencing July 1, 2022.

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