

IX.C.

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 Windham High School, Windham, 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 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 a fifth and final year.

Background:

Windham High School currently serves 647 students in grades nine through twelve. Seventy-seven percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals. Twenty-five percent of the students are identified as needing special education services, and 29 percent are Multilingual Learners (MLs). Approximately 79 percent of the students are Hispanic/Latino, 4 percent are Black, and 14 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 the school's and district's vision, mission, and expectations among staff; school and district leadership lacked an

evaluation system with structured protocols for evaluation and feedback that aligned to school improvement; and turnover of school administration and teaching staff led to the inability to sustain implementation of school improvement action steps.

For the first three years, Windham Public Schools shared the cost for the College and Career Pathways Coordinator, School Counselor, and Interventionists. Windham High School is now in its fourth year, and consequently, Windham 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 November 17, 2021, State Board of Education Vice Chairperson Erin Benham joined the Turnaround Office on a site visit to Windham High School to observe its progress and engage in discussions around next steps.

Improvements:

- The on-track to high school graduation rate increased from 57.3 percent in 2018-19 to 72.8 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.
- The four-year cohort graduation rate increased from 80.3 percent in 2018-19 to 82 percent in 2019-20.
- The six-year cohort graduation rate increased from 88.7 in 2016-17 to 89.2 percent in 2017-18.
- In December 2021, Windham High School won the Monthly Award for the Free Application for the Federal Student Assistance (FAFSA) Challenge. Windham High School was recognized with the highest completion rate out of the forty "Challenge Schools" that participated in the FAFSA Challenge. Windham High School has already surpassed its 5 percent FAFSA completion improvement rate from last year (32 percent to an increase of 36.8 percent)
- Windham High School participated in Voice 4 Change, submitting 4 proposals eligible for their schoolwide ballot. Ultimately, "Project Courtyard" was selected as a finalist which focuses on revamping their outdoor space to be more conducive for collaboration and well-being.

Continued Areas of Focus:

- The chronic absenteeism rate increased from 32.9 percent in 2019-20 to 39.3 percent in 2020-21. As of January 2022, the chronic absenteeism rate is 36 percent.
- Establish rigor by communicating standards-aligned goals and stated/written lesson objectives, using rich vocabulary of the discipline, and questioning at all four levels of the Depth of Knowledge to ensure students can connect their ideas to current topics and problems.
- Provide professional learning opportunities and job-embedded coaching across content areas to improve teachers' ability to plan instruction so as to actively engage students in creating, understanding, and connecting to the content.

Next Steps:

During the 2022-23 school year, Windham High School will continue strategies that have shown steady improvement over the past four 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 support as Windham High School enters Year 5 of the Commissioner's Network. The Year 5 plan will prioritize the following:

- Decrease chronic absenteeism rate through a multi-tiered systems approach. Attendance will continue to be monitored weekly through data and attendance team meetings. 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. Windham High School 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.
- Monitor the implementation of professional learning and job-embedded coaching through weekly walkthroughs and participating in data team meetings. The Turnaround Office will also partner with school leadership to evaluate impact of professional learning and coaching during regular site visits.
- Provide opportunities for students to explore real world applications and transfer their learning to other content areas/disciplines.
- Increase student discourse and rigorous questioning through a design instruction that encourages students to think critically and process information at different levels.

Recommendation:

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

Prepared by:

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Approved by:

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