

VIII.A.

Connecticut State Board of Education Hartford

To Be Proposed:
May 13, 2026

Resolved, That, pursuant to Section 10-223h of the Connecticut General Statutes, the State Board of Education approves the continued participation of Barnum School, Bridgeport, in the Commissioner's Network for an additional year commencing July 1, 2026, 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 thirteenth day of May, Two Thousand Twenty-Six.

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 13, 2026

Subject: Approval of Commissioner’s Network Extension Year 4, Barnum School, Bridgeport

Executive Summary

Introduction

Public Act 12-116, now codified as Section (§) 10-223h of the Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.), 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 14 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, although C.G.S. § 10-223h(h) provides 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. Notwithstanding the forgoing, however, Public Act 25-175, § 4, amended § 10-223h(a), establishing a terminus date for the Commissioner’s Network of June 30, 2028. For the reasons set forth below, Barnum School (Barnum) in Bridgeport is recommended to remain in the Commissioner’s Network for a fourth year.

Background

Barnum currently serves 588 students in grades prekindergarten through eight. Ninety-five percent of students are eligible for free or reduced-price meals, 29.9 percent of the students are identified as needing special education services, and 37.6 percent are English learners/Multilingual learners (ELs/ MLs). Approximately 68 percent of the students are Hispanic/Latino, 23 percent are Black, and 7 percent are White.

On April 13, 2022, the CSDE received an *Expression of Interest Form* from Bridgeport Public Schools (BPS), volunteering Barnum for participation in the Commissioner’s Network. On May 26, 2022, the Commissioner of Education initially selected Barnum 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, Barnum and the Bridgeport Education Association appointed members to serve on the school’s Turnaround Committee, and the CSDE conducted an Operations and Instructional Audit on September 20, 2022. The audit identified several underlying challenges that contributed to inconsistent student outcomes and the need for systemic improvement. Data collection highlighted significant gaps in academic performance, with low percentages of students meeting or exceeding standards across multiple grade levels in both English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics. Chronic absenteeism rates were also elevated, reaching over 40 percent in recent years, signaling barriers to consistent student engagement and learning. Instructionally, the audit identified variabilities in classroom practices and the absence of a common instructional framework, resulting in inconsistent Tier 1 instruction and limited differentiation to meet the needs of diverse learners. Professional learning systems were not yet fully cohesive or systematically implemented, leading to uneven translation of professional development into classroom practice. Additionally, systems for using data to inform instruction and interventions were still developing, limiting teachers’ ability to consistently plan responsive instruction. These factors collectively highlighted the need for stronger professional learning structures, greater instructional coherence, and more robust systems for data-driven decision making to support improved student achievement and schoolwide consistency.

During the 2022-23 planning year, the school’s Turnaround Committee developed the turnaround plan for Barnum in accordance with C.G.S. §10-223h(d). The Barnum Turnaround Plan aims to improve teaching and learning by utilizing evidence-based strategies, methods, and best practices that have demonstrated effectiveness in improving student academic performance. High-quality professional learning, rigorous curricula, and assessments are aligned with the Connecticut Core Standards – combined with building and maintaining meaningful and productive relationships between students and staff – are some of the proven, high-leverage strategies that will be implemented to support this work. Participation in the Commissioner’s Network further supports the professional development of the school’s teaching staff through coaching opportunities in literacy and numeracy, expansion of the data-driven decision-making process, additional learning opportunities for students, and the effective communication of the school’s vision to the Bridgeport community.

On June 14, 2023, after Barnum’s plan was approved by the SBE, the school 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, although as also noted, during the 2025 session, the legislature amended §10-223h(a) to establish an end date of the Commissioner’s Network on June 30, 2028.

Since joining the Commissioner’s Network, Barnum 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 executive leadership coaching. 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, BPS shares the cost of several key positions and initiatives at Barnum. Grant funds support instructional leadership and intervention services, including mathematics and English Language Arts (ELA) instructional coaches and academic interventionists. Funding also supports efforts to strengthen school climate and student engagement through a school climate coach, attendance monitor, and teacher stipends for attendance and parent engagement teams. In addition, the grant supports professional learning and instructional coaching services focused on strengthening Tier 1 instruction and intervention practices in literacy and mathematics. Resources are also allocated for parent engagement programming, student incentives such as the school store, and instructional materials to support differentiated instruction, restorative practices, and student engagement.

Improvements

- The Next Generation Accountability Report for 2024-25 demonstrates that Barnum’s overall Accountability Index increased by 5.0 percentage points, from 46.7 percent in 2023-24 to 51.7 percent in 2024-25.
- In mathematics, the Next Generation Accountability Report for 2024-25 shows an increase of 1.4 percentage points in Barnum’s performance index, from 40.8 in 2023-24 to 42.2 in 2024-25. Notably, the mathematics performance index for students identified with high needs increased by 1.4 percentage points, from 40.5 percent in 2023-24 to 41.9 in 2024-25.
- The Next Generation Accountability Report for 2024-25 demonstrates an increase of 10.0 percentage points in Barnum’s academic growth in ELA, from 42.8 percent in 2023-24 to 52.8 percent in 2024-25. Similarly, the school demonstrated an increase of 15.2 percentage points in academic growth in mathematics, from 43.8 percent in 2023-24 to 59.0 percent in 2024-25.
- The Next Generation Accountability Report for 2024-25 demonstrates an increase of 6.8 percentage points in Barnum’s Progress Toward English Proficiency – Literacy, from 46.2 percent in 2023-24 to 53.0 percent in 2024-25. Similarly, the school demonstrated an increase of 4.0 percentage points in Progress Toward English Proficiency – Oral, from 41.6 percent in 2023-24 to 45.6 percent in 2024-25.
- Barnum has strengthened its instructional leadership and talent systems through the recruitment and retention of key instructional staff, including literacy and mathematics coaches. Leadership has also implemented staff recognition and collaboration structures designed to strengthen professional culture and staff retention.

- The school has expanded support systems for new teachers by increasing the number of teacher mentors and strengthening mentoring structures that provide instructional guidance, operational support, and regular check-ins focused on improving classroom practice.
- Barnum has leveraged Commissioner’s Network professional learning opportunities and external partnerships to strengthen Tier 1 instruction. Staff have reported incorporating feedback from Commissioner’s Network walkthroughs and coaching cycles to improve instructional planning, differentiation strategies, and classroom practices that support diverse learners.
- The school continues to strengthen the implementation of its instructional framework through increased student discourse, higher-order questioning, and rigorous task design. Leadership teams are utilizing walkthrough feedback and coaching cycles to build greater instructional consistency across classrooms.
- Instructional coaching and collaborative planning structures have been strengthened to support improvements in classroom instruction. Through professional learning and external partnerships, staff receive targeted support to improve lesson design, differentiation, and standards-aligned instruction.
- Barnum continues to build organizational capacity through the strengthening of systems for instructional monitoring, coaching, and collaborative planning. These efforts position the school to sustain recent improvements and accelerate progress toward grade-level proficiency.
- Barnum has developed systems to reinforce positive school climate and clearly communicate behavioral expectations. Parent survey results indicate strong perceptions of school safety. Barnum has also implemented student recognition and incentive structures designed to reinforce positive behavior and strengthen student engagement.

Continued Areas of Focus

- Strengthening professional learning systems to ensure coaching, professional development, and feedback cycles consistently translate into improved instructional practice and student outcomes.
- Establishing consistent data-driven instructional cycles that use assessment results to inform instructional planning, differentiation, and targeted intervention at the classroom, grade-level, and team levels.
- Increasing consistency in Tier 1 instruction by strengthening expectations for rigorous task design, student discourse, questioning strategies, and regular checks for understanding across classrooms.
- Expanding the impact of instructional coaching and walkthrough feedback to support consistent implementation of differentiation, scaffolding, and supports for ELs/MLs and students with disabilities.
- Refining the school’s Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework by clarifying intervention processes, strengthening progress monitoring systems, and ensuring clear staff roles and responsibilities within the continuum of academic supports.
- Strengthening school climate and behavioral systems through consistent implementation of positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS), expanded use of restorative practices, and proactive behavior supports that minimize disruptions to instructional time,

as the school's suspension rate increased from 6.7 percent in 2022-23 to 8.4 percent in 2024-25, which exceeds the current state rate of 6.8 percent.

- Improving student attendance outcomes by strengthening intervention strategies, deepening family partnerships, and addressing root causes of chronic absenteeism, as the school's rate remains high at 33.5 percent as of March 2026, showing only slight improvement from its planning year baseline of 34.2 percent in March 2023, and continues to remain substantially above the current state rate of 17.2 percent.
- Enhancing family engagement by expanding communication strategies, increasing opportunities for family participation, and strengthening partnerships that support student learning and school connectedness.
- Ensuring instructional technology and digital learning tools are used strategically to support student engagement, formative assessment, and differentiated instruction aligned to grade-level standards.
- Continuing to align Commissioner's Network grant resources with school improvement priorities to ensure staffing, professional learning, and instructional supports remain focused on improving student outcomes.

Next Steps

During the 2026-27 school year, Barnum will continue strategies that have demonstrated 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 Barnum enters Year 4 of the Commissioner's Network. In Year 4 the school staff plan to:

- Strengthen systems to ensure professional learning is coherent, differentiated, and demonstrably impacts classroom practice, including clear feedback loops and implementation monitoring.
- Implement a clearly defined and monitored data cycle that ensures assessments lead to instructional adjustments, differentiation, and intervention planning at the classroom and grade-team levels.
- Increase consistency and accountability for implementing the school's instructional framework, with a focus on student discourse, questioning strategies, and higher-order thinking.
- Intensify professional learning, coaching, and walkthrough monitoring to ensure consistent differentiation and scaffolding across classrooms.
- Refine MTSS structures to ensure intervention entry and exit criteria, progress monitoring systems, and staff roles are consistently implemented and understood.
- Ensure consistent implementation of PBIS practices across classrooms and strengthen staff capacity in behavior prevention and response.
- Continue refining attendance interventions to ensure targeted outreach and monitoring for chronically absent students.
- Develop additional strategies to reduce barriers to family engagement, particularly related to language access and scheduling.
- Develop systems to monitor the instructional impact and reliability of technology and digital learning programs.

Recommendation

The CSDE recommends that the SBE approve an additional year commencing July 1, 2026.

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