

# IX.A.

## Connecticut State Board of Education Hartford

### **To Be Proposed:**

June 14, 2023

**Resolved,** That the State Board of Education, pursuant to Section 10-223h of the Connecticut General Statutes, approves the continued participation of Pulaski Middle School, New Britain, 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 fourteenth day of June, 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:** June 14, 2023

**Subject:** Approval of Commissioner’s Network Extension for Pulaski Middle School,  
New Britain

*Executive Summary*

**Introduction**

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 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 positively impact 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. C.G.S. §10-223h(h) 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, Pulaski Middle School (PMS) in New Britain is recommended to remain in the Commissioner’s Network for a fourth year.

**Background:**

Pulaski Middle School currently serves 889 students in Grades 6 through 8. Of those 889 students, 78 percent are eligible for free or reduced-price meals; 18 percent are identified as needing special education services; and 22 percent are multilingual learners/English learners (MLs/ELs). Approximately 68 percent of the students are Hispanic/Latino, 10 percent are Black, and 17 percent are White.

On April 5, 2019, the CSDE received an *Expression of Interest Form* from the Consolidated School District of New Britain (CSDNB), volunteering PMS for participation in the Commissioner's Network. On May 23, 2019, the Commissioner of Education initially selected PMS 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, PMS and the New Britain Federation of Teachers appointed members to serve on the school's Turnaround Committee, and the CSDE conducted an Operations and Instructional Audit on October 10, 2019. The audit revealed a lack of common vision for effective instruction and schoolwide behavior management systems, a low level of instructional rigor, including higher order thinking and effective questioning techniques, and inadequate or ineffective assessment and data collection systems. The audit also evidenced the need for ongoing and job-embedded professional learning for teachers in instructional practices as well as professional learning in data analysis and data-driven decision making. Upon entering the Commissioner's Network, PMS had declining test scores, with 13.5 percent of students meeting or exceeding the Smarter Balanced Assessment achievement standards in English language arts (ELA) and only 4.2 percent of students doing so in mathematics.

During the 2019-20 planning year, the school's Turnaround Committee developed the turnaround plan for PMS in accordance with C.G.S. §10-223h(d). The goal of the PMS turnaround plan is to enhance teaching and learning through a student-centered approach. This approach emphasizes personalization of learning, high learner expectations, hands-on learning experiences, the teaching of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, and opportunities for educators to reflect on their practices. By prioritizing a student-centered approach, PMS aims to transition students from dependent to independent learners and empower teachers to develop as culturally responsive educators to address the distinct learning needs, interests, aspirations, and cultural backgrounds of all learners.

The PMS turnaround plan includes investments in the areas of talent, academics, culture and climate, and operations to ensure PMS maximizes student outcomes and teacher development. These investments support the school's transformation into a personalized academic environment where positive relationships between students and teachers are developed and reinforced through instruction that is challenging, relevant, collaborative, student directed, and connected to real-life situations. PMS recognizes the impact educator preparation has on student learning, and the core talent strategies concentrate on effective instruction through student-centered professional learning opportunities, the implementation of a culturally relevant curriculum based on the New Britain Profile of a Graduate, the development of teacher capacity, and instructional rounds and data collection.

On May 7, 2020, after their turnaround plan was approved by the SBE, PMS 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 up to two additional years if necessary.

Since joining the Commissioner's Network, PMS 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 Professional 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, the CSDNB has shared the costs of the instructional coaches and compensation for leadership team members. The school and/or district have aligned funding and expenditures closely with school goals and student needs.

On April 7, 2022, SBE members Erin Benham and Bonnie Burr joined the CSDE Turnaround Office on a site visit to PMS to observe its progress and engage in discussions around next steps.

### **Improvements:**

- The Next Generation Accountability Report for 2021-22 demonstrates an increase of 10.1 percentage points in PMS' academic growth in ELA, from 42.8 percent in 2018-19 to 52.9 percent in 2021-22.
- The Next Generation Accountability Report for 2021-22 demonstrates an increase of 4.8 percentage points in PMS' academic growth in mathematics, from 35.7 percent in 2018-19 to 40.5 percent in 2021-22.
- The Next Generation Accountability Report demonstrates growth for Progress Toward English Proficiency – Literacy and Oral indicators. Literacy proficiency increased 3.1 percentage points from 49.8 percent in 2018-19 to 52.9 percent in 2021-22. Oral proficiency increased 2 percentage points from 42 percent in 2018-19 to 44 percent in 2021-22.
- PMS' school improvement plan continues to focus on improving student-centered instruction with a primary focus on increasing instructional rigor and student engagement.
- There is a commitment to improve instruction through the provision of weekly time dedicated to collaborative content planning, professional learning sessions, weekly classroom walkthroughs and feedback sessions, and coaching cycles.
- Coaches provide targeted support 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.
- All four academic content areas have guaranteed, standards-based curricula that PMS has been rolling out over the last three years.
- All teachers have been trained on the Pulaski Instructional Model and they subsequently modified instruction and lessons based on the feedback from coaches to increase student-centered practices.
- Academic support and acceleration in the areas of literacy and mathematics are provided through the What I Need (WIN) intervention block during the school day.
- A schoolwide behavior intervention system has been developed with a focus on implementing restorative practices to address student behavior and equip students with strategies that will assist them in developing positive relationships with peers.

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

- PMS still has a significantly high chronic absenteeism rate. The chronic absenteeism rate for all students increased from 25.6 percent in 2019-20 to 40 percent in 2021-22. As of February 2023, the current chronic absenteeism rate is 39 percent.
- There is a continued need to prioritize the change in instructional practices to improve learning and increase rigor in a student-centered environment. There is a need for a focus on expanding

intentional instructional planning that emphasizes student-centered learning and increasing levels of rigor, differentiation to support individual student needs, and increasing levels of student discourse and problem-solving tasks.

- Providing professional learning and coaching to support teachers in planning for and utilizing strategies for increased cognitive engagement, including meaningful peer-to-peer discourse that provides ample opportunity for productive struggle.
- PMS' instructional leaders, coaches, and administrators should continue to provide timely and actionable feedback to teachers to ensure fidelity of implementation of professional learning and adherence to the instructional vision.
- Continuing to analyze and revise data systems and protocols and continue to analyze the effectiveness of instructional data teams in reviewing benchmark assessments and utilizing common formative assessments in order to drive instruction and supports.
- Expanding the school's tiered intervention approach to meet the academic, behavioral, and social-emotional needs of struggling students.
- Re-evaluating and strengthening the schoolwide behavior system by utilizing data to determine the effectiveness of the redeveloped program and adjust as needed.
- Continuing to expand positive interactions and engagement opportunities with the community, family, and school.

### **Next Steps:**

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

- Provide mentoring to teachers new to the district and/or the profession through assigned mentors and monthly meetings devoted to professional learning on high priority topics.
- Create a leadership team consisting of administrators, teacher representatives from each content area, the multilingual department, and the special education department that will meet, learn, plan, and implement strategies in the approved turnaround plan.
- Build the capacity of teachers to implement research-based instructional strategies, that require academic discourse among students, through the provision of professional learning, walkthroughs, and data analysis that monitors implementation and effectiveness.
- Improve tiered instructional practices to ensure increased student readiness, academic performance, and overall student outcomes. This includes hiring a certified reading teacher to provide Tier 2 interventions.
- 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.
- Implement a sustainable model of support and discipline wherein staff, students, families, and community members are aware of and understand the behavioral expectations of the school building and the processes within. This also includes, utilizing a social-emotional learning (SEL) curriculum or evidence-based strategies for students, strengthening relationships with students through the use of restorative practices, and expanding the Multi-Tiered System of Supports through partnerships with community-based organizations.

- Decrease the chronic absenteeism rate through a multi-tiered system approach including the expansion of the school's afterschool programming. Continue to monitor attendance through data and attendance team meetings.

**Recommendation:**

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

Prepared by:

Jennifer Webb, Education Consultant, Turnaround Office

Approved by:

Irene E. Parisi, Chief Academic Officer