

# IX.B.

## 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 Slade 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 Slade 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, Slade Middle School (SMS) in New Britain is recommended to remain in the Commissioner’s Network for a fourth year.

**Background:**

Slade Middle School currently serves 835 students in Grades 6 through 8. Of those 835 students, 78 percent are eligible for free or reduced-price meals; 20 percent are identified as needing special education services; and 21 percent are multilingual learners/English learners (MLs/ELs). Approximately 71 percent of the students are Hispanic/Latino, 10 percent are Black, and 12 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 SMS for participation in the Commissioner's Network. On May 23, 2019, the Commissioner of Education initially selected SMS 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, SMS 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 24, 2019. The audit revealed a lack of cohesiveness in the school and district vision, mission, and expectations among staff around student-centered learning which resulted in inconsistent instructional practices. The school lacked mathematics and English language arts (ELA) curricula that aligned to the Connecticut Core Standards, and rigor and differentiation was limited, which led to minimal student engagement in learning tasks. Student attendance was also of concern as the chronic absenteeism rate at SMS far exceeded the state average. Upon entering the Commissioner's Network, SMS had declining test scores, with 13.1 percent of students meeting or exceeding the Smarter Balanced Assessment achievement standards in ELA and only 2.6 percent of students doing so in mathematics.

During the 2019-20 planning year, the school's Turnaround Committee developed the turnaround plan for SMS in accordance with C.G.S. §10-223h(d). The SMS turnaround plan focuses on adopting a team-based model with a student-centered educational approach. The model centers on developing high performing learning communities in which a core interdisciplinary team of teachers of ELA, mathematics, social studies, and science have the same cohort of students during the same periods of the day. This team model promotes the development of strong teacher and student relationships and allows for common planning time for teachers of the same content area. The SMS vision concentrates on teachers becoming "trustworthy mentors" that build relationships with students, families, colleagues, and the community and that aligns to a shared philosophy about the importance and enjoyment of being in school. Developing strong relationships promotes a stronger, unified effort in the commitment to student success.

On May 7, 2020, after their turnaround plan was approved by the SBE, SMS 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, SMS 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 school climate, behavior support, and literacy coaches. 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 6.7 percentage points in SMS' academic growth in mathematics, from 33.6 percent in 2018-19 to 40.3 percent in 2021-22.
- SMS' school improvement plan continues to focus on improving student-centered instruction with a primary focus on increasing rigor and student engagement.
- There is a commitment to improving instruction through the provision of weekly blocks of 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 SMS has been implementing in phases over the last three years.
- Tiered supports for the school's positive behavioral support system have been strengthened through the hiring of a climate coach, partnering with external providers, training staff, conducting walkthroughs, providing feedback, creating a system for restorative conversations and the development of a restorative center.
- The SMS schedule has been restructured to include academic and social-emotional (SEL) intervention time during the school day.

## **Continued Areas of Focus:**

- SMS still has a significantly high chronic absenteeism rate. The chronic absenteeism rate for all students increased from 23.1 percent in 2019-20 to 49.3 percent in 2021-22. As of February 2023, the current chronic absenteeism rate is 41.2 percent.
- Prioritize to improve the quality of instruction in order to shift from teacher-centered instruction to student-centered learning.
- Continue professional learning for teachers in purposeful planning for questioning and academic discourse, which 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 differentiate, scaffold rigor, and develop higher order questioning so as to progress thinking skills in order to increase students' capacity to engage in complex content and increase cognitive demand.
- Provide professional learning and coaching to support teachers in planning for, and utilizing, strategies for increased cognitive engagement, including meaningful peer-to-peer discourse that incorporates multiple learning styles and provides ample opportunity for productive struggle.
- Expand the school's tiered intervention approach to meet the academic, behavioral, and social-emotional needs of struggling students.
- Analyze and revise instructional data team systems and protocols to increase the effectiveness of instructional data teams in reviewing assessments to drive instruction and support.
- SMS's 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.

**Next Steps:**

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

- Providing 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.
- Building the capacity of teachers to differentiate instruction, including strategies for multilingual learners, through professional learning, walkthroughs, and data analysis to monitor its implementation and effectiveness.
- Creating lead teacher positions to facilitate grade level team meetings to support and communicate alignment with the school's instructional vision of rigorous standards-based teaching and learning.
- Improving tiered instructional practices to ensure increased student outcomes. This includes implementing formative assessments to monitor student learning as well as hiring a certified reading teacher to provide Tier 2 interventions.
- Continuing 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.
- Implementing 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. The implementation of this model includes utilizing a SEL curriculum for students, employing restorative practices to strengthen relationships with students, and expanding the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) through partnerships with community-based organizations.
- Decreasing the chronic absenteeism rate through a MTSS approach, including the expansion of the school's afterschool programming. Continue to monitor attendance weekly through data and attendance team meetings.

**Recommendation:**

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

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Approved by:

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