

# IX.C.

## 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 Smalley Elementary 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 Smalley Elementary 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, Smalley Elementary School (SES) in New Britain is recommended to remain in the Commissioner’s Network for a fourth year.

**Background:**

Smalley Elementary School currently serves 591 students in kindergarten through Grade 5. Of those 591 students, 87 percent are eligible for free or reduced-price meals; 20 percent are identified as needing special education services; and 26 percent are multilingual learners/English learners (MLs/ELs). Approximately 79 percent of the students are Hispanic/Latino, 7 percent are Black, and 7 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 SES for participation in the Commissioner's Network.

On May 23, 2019, the Commissioner of Education initially selected SES 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, SES 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 SES far exceeded the state average. Upon entering the Commissioner's Network, SES had declining test scores, with 7.5 percent of students meeting or exceeding the Smarter Balanced Assessment achievement standards in ELA and only 3.9 percent of students doing so in mathematics.

During the 2019-20 planning year, the school's Turnaround Committee developed the turnaround plan for SES in accordance with C.G.S. §10-223h (d). The SES turnaround plan focuses on adopting a student-centered model. The turnaround model involves developing core curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices to ensure cultural and linguistic responsiveness to meet the needs of SES' diverse student population. The turnaround model also supports SES' primary focus on literacy and numeracy achievement and the district's science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics (STEAM) enrichment program. The shift in pedagogy to student-centered learning promotes advanced literacy skills that foster intellectual risks through the interaction with more complex text structures. The student-centered learning model will also support the enhancement of school-based Scientific Research Based Interventions (SRBI) and data teaming practices to improve adult capacity to increase student performance outcomes.

On May 7, 2020, after their turnaround plan was approved by the SBE, SES 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, SES 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 an instructional coach and compensation for the leadership team. The school and/or district have aligned funding and expenditures closely with school goals and student needs.

On January 16, 2020, SBE members Erin Benham and Estela López joined the CSDE Turnaround Office on a site visit to SES to observe its progress and engage in discussions around next steps.

### **Improvements:**

- The Next Generation Accountability Report for 2021-22 demonstrates an increase in SES' Mathematics Academic Growth – All Students, from 47.1 percent in 2018-19 to 49.2 percent in 2021-22.
- The Next Generation Accountability Report for 2021-22 demonstrates an increase of 10.8 percentage points in SES' academic growth in mathematics, from 52.6 percent in 2018-19 to 63.4 percent in 2021-22.
- The Next Generation Accountability Report for 2021-22 demonstrates an increase of 5.4 percentage points in SES' ELA Academic Growth – All Students, from 46.1 percent in 2018-19 to 51.5 percent in 2021-22.
- The Next Generation Accountability Report demonstrates growth in the Progress Toward English Proficiency – Literacy and Oral indicators. Literacy proficiency increased 35.4 percentage points from 45.9 percent in 2018-19 to 81.3 percent in 2021-22. Oral proficiency increased 8.2 percentage points from 48.5 percent in 2018-19 to 56.7 percent in 2021-22.
- SES' school improvement plan continues to focus on improving student-centered instruction with a primary focus on increasing rigor and student engagement.
- SES has systems in place to develop teacher effectiveness in the planning and implementation of the new curricula for mathematics and ELA.
- There is an established vision for effective instruction that includes learning targets and success criteria, student-based work and lessons, a focus on increasing student discourse and Depth of Knowledge questioning, increasing vocabulary instruction and utilizing word walls, and creating print-rich environments.
- 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.
- SES has an assessment system securely in place with an established calendar and protocols. Data collection is housed in a centralized location that is easily accessible to all.
- Tiered supports for attendance include initiatives such as a student-run "attendance squad," monthly challenges, kindergarten parent meetings, and parent workshops.

- Professional learning and embedded instructional coaching are provided to develop teacher capacity to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of all students, in Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP), the creation of the What I Need (WIN) intervention block, and the implementation of differentiation strategies. In addition, the staff engages in collaborative sessions to plan for increased opportunities for student discourse through the creation of scaffolded questioning, which promotes meaningful talk among students.
- Grade level teams have been trained in using a student work protocol and assessment data to refine instructional practices and inform the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS).
- The development of an extended learning model through the school's afterschool programming supports students in academics, social-emotional learning, and increasing attendance while also expanding mentoring opportunities with community partners.

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

- SES still has a significantly high chronic absenteeism rate. The chronic absenteeism rate for all students increased from 23.2 percent in 2019-20 to 43.9 percent in 2021-22. The current chronic absenteeism rate is 36.1 percent.
- There is a continued need to support staff with the implementation of new curricula and in creating a student-centered environment.
- Continuing professional learning for teachers in purposeful planning for questioning and academic discourse that 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, to scaffold rigor, and to develop higher order questioning to progress thinking skills in order to increase students' capacity to engage in complex content and increase cognitive demand.
- Expanding the school's MTSS approach to meet the academic, behavioral, and social-emotional needs of struggling students.
- Analyzing and revising instructional data team systems and protocols to increase the effectiveness of instructional data team time for reviewing assessments and instructional planning and support.
- SES' 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, SES 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 SES enters Year 4 of the Commissioner's Network. The Year 4 plan will prioritize the following:

- Continuing to establish a culture of teaching and learning with student growth and achievement at the forefront.
- Improving the data culture through weekly data teams with a focus on common formative assessments and analyzing student work samples.
- Building teacher capacity around the implementation of the science of reading.
- Planning for sustainability through building teacher leadership capacity.
- Providing professional learning on implementing actionable feedback and next steps for students through a portfolio process.

- Decreasing the chronic absenteeism rate through a multi-tiered system approach, including the continuation of the school's afterschool programming. Attendance will continue to be monitored weekly through data and attendance team meetings.

**Recommendation:**

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

Prepared by:

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Approved by:

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