

## **Every Student Prepared for Learning, Life, and Work Beyond School**

The Comprehensive Plan for Education 2023-2028 has been developed by the Connecticut State Board (Board) of Education to set forth the state's vision for education and provide direction for policy consideration and administrative actions designed to help meet the challenge of effectively preparing each student for learning, life, and work beyond the classroom.

The Board recommended these policy considerations and actions after studying data, past performance, the educational landscape, reviewing trends in the learning environment, and most importantly, receiving feedback from thousands of stakeholders across Connecticut. After careful consideration and a facilitated prioritization process, the Board has identified four critical strategic priorities to address the aforementioned challenge and has identified actions which will assist in achieving the desired outcomes.

The four priorities include two that continue strategic commitments of the previous Connecticut State Board of Education Comprehensive Plan 2016-21. While the Board believes that progress has certainly been made in both, work must continue in these areas. These two continued priorities are **ensuring equitable access to education** regardless of background or advantage and **ensuring safe and healthy learning environments** are available for all learners, educators, and families. In addition to these, the Board has added two new areas of focus; **elevating Connecticut's curriculum frameworks** to support the development of rigorous, engaging instruction that is responsive to the age of artificial intelligence and reliably teaching, and assessing required skills for life, learning and work beyond school, as well as **creating opportunities for students to explore multiple career pathway options** to fuel their passion for learning.

What follows is a description of the intended actions and outcomes for each of the strategic priorities over the next five years.

***Strategic Priority: All learners are supported, including those with high needs, and have equitable access to education regardless of background or advantage, as well as access to great teachers and leaders, and a diverse educational workforce.***

**Rationale:**

Great schools are structurally safe, welcoming, and culturally responsive learning environments where students meet their learning goals and where parents and guardians are engaged as true partners with meaningful voices. In a variety of geographical settings across the state, however, there remain many challenges when striving for this ideal, creating barriers to success. We know from examples across the state and country that with high expectations, adequate resources, quality support services, strong leadership, rigorous instruction, and motivated teachers, we can build schools in which all students thrive and make dramatic gains. The State Board of Education, in partnership with local and regional boards of education, and key educational partners, will provide intensive interventions and supports in Connecticut’s most challenged communities and work to transform low-performing schools and districts by helping to create and sustain stable learning environments in every community.

To ensure all Connecticut learners acquire the skills and knowledge they will need to succeed in college, career and civic life, the State Board of Education is committed to deepening its support of districts transitioning to mastery-based systems of learning, with students demonstrating mastery through tests, portfolios of work, demonstrations or exhibitions of learning, and multidisciplinary presentations. Additionally, districts will be supported in their implementation of personalized learning strategies that empower student voice in how to incorporate technology, differentiated instruction, and experiential learning. Measuring every school’s progress is an important part of our effort to strengthen all Connecticut schools, giving every learner a well-rounded, world-class education that prepares them for college, career, and civic life beyond school. We are committed to enhancing the public’s access to information and data on schools and districts, helping inform local boards of education and other stakeholders regarding the education system in their communities. The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) will identify schools’ strengths and areas for improvement and hold the system accountable for our broader definitions of student learning.

In addition, while progress toward diversifying the workforce has certainly been made, the racial, ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity of Connecticut's educator workforce still does not reflect the characteristics of our student body. We will continue to work to build an educator workforce that reflects the diversity of the state by attracting and retaining teachers and educational leaders of color and facilitating the filling of high need vacancies.

**Actions:**

The State Board of Education will take the steps necessary to support the following actions to help ensure equitable access to education for all learners:

- Provide support and resources to district leaders to continue to grow in their own journey in implementing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion plans, in accordance with state statute.
- Continue to develop guidance and resources to implement mastery-based learning to increase student outcomes for skills, dispositions, and competencies for a local or regional board of education portrait/vision of a graduate.
- Continue to pursue initiatives focused on the recruitment and retention of quality teachers and the diversification of the educator workforce. Such initiatives will include enhanced reciprocity agreements with other states, modernization of the Connecticut state certification regulations, supporting school districts to create diversity plans and provide resources to support them, partnering with districts and higher education preparation programs to expand teacher residency programs and apprenticeship programs, expanding our statewide Grow Your Own program and implementing a scholarship program for students of color who are interested in pursuing a career in teaching.
- Continue to develop and implement policies that have a fundamental goal of closing equity gaps and increasing proficiency in key subjects for all students, including students who are underserved and diverse learners.
- Ensure that all learners are valued members of the school community, who are educated in the general education settings, to the greatest possible extent, with appropriate supports and services with a school based collective responsibility for supporting the performance and progress of all learners.

- Support schools, districts, and programs in increasing access for students with disabilities to general education settings with a continuum of supports and services.
- Support continued offering of summer enrichment and learning opportunities, so students return to the next school year engaged and ready to learn.

**Outcomes:**

The State Board of Education expects these actions will build more welcoming and culturally responsive learning environments and lead to better outcomes for students.

- District Diversity, Equity and Inclusion plans developed and implemented and provide access and opportunities to all learners (adults and traditional aged students).
- Increased numbers of teachers and administrators as role models for students that reflect the racial, ethnic, and linguistic diversity of the state.
- Convened educators and assisted in establishing professional learning communities for educators transitioning to mastery-based learning and strengthened efforts in providing effective and equitable professional development statewide.
- Increased access to an inclusive education for students with individualized education programs (IEPs) alongside their peers.
- Improved performance between schools in various demographic groups.
- Implemented innovative strategies, e.g., creation and expansion of a long-term pipeline of future educators, scholarships and other financial assistance, and residency and apprenticeships programs to increase and enhance the talent pipeline of diverse, highly effective educators.
- Convened Certification Council and plans developed to modernize education certification.

**Strategic Priority: *Learning spaces are safe, compassionate, and culturally responsive and are designed to support the academic, physical, and social-emotional well-being of all learners including learners of color, multilingual learners, those with a disability, learners***

*experiencing food and housing insecurities, learners coming from low-income families and those who identify as LGBTQ+.*

**Rationale:**

Research studies over the past decade have consistently concluded that student health status and student achievement are directly connected and, in fact, that student health is one of the most significant influences on learning and achievement. Additionally, the US Surgeon General’s 2021 Advisory on Youth Mental Health, identifies the alarming increases in the prevalence of certain mental health challenges in youth. The Advisory further highlights the youth groups at higher risk of mental health challenges. i.e., racial and ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+, low-income, youth in immigrant households and youth with disabilities.

The Advisory outlines the actions that can be taken by educators, school staff and school districts, which includes creating positive, safe, and affirming environments; expanding social and emotional learning programs and other evidence-based approaches that promote healthy development; as well as supporting the mental health of all school personnel.

This effort matters because we know, and as the pandemic has made it even more clear, that students who feel intellectually, physically, and emotionally safe and healthy are much more likely to be successful learners than students who do not. Having environments which are welcoming and supportive, and ensuring that to the greatest degree possible, the needs of all learners and school staff are met in creating these environments, dramatically increases the chances for universal student success. We remain focused on this critical outcome as we strive to help every student succeed in life, learning and work beyond school.

**Actions:**

The State Board of Education will take the steps necessary to support the following actions to help ensure that all Connecticut learners are provided a safe, inclusive learning environment:

- Encourage local and regional boards of education to incorporate multigenerational approaches and partnerships that focus on each student’s education, whole family

well-being, and shared responsibility among the staff, families, and community members.

- Support the growth and offering of comprehensive resources to meet the complex and changing needs of children and families who utilize mental health services.
- Support access to nutritionally sound meals during the school year and summer from preschool through Grade 12.
- Increase support for districts in engagement of continuous quality improvement to promote healthy development among all learners, including those in adult education settings.
- Support districts to use their disaggregated school data to discover trends in attendance, discipline, academic performance, and family engagement across all learner populations to better inform instruction and identify gaps in educational access and outcomes.
- Establish a fully operational Special Education Call Center to provide callers' access to information and resources related to special education.

**Outcomes:**

The State Board of Education expects these actions will address the academic and non-academic needs of the whole child and strengthen school, family and community relationships and lead to better outcomes for students.

- All students report that they are comfortable and feel supported in their local learning communities, and have a sense of belonging in schools.
- Increased collaboration with public and private mental and behavioral-health providers to expand the quality and quantity of these critical services.
- Increased collaboration between school medical professionals, school-based health services and family health care providers for optimal student physical health.
- Decreased rates of chronic absenteeism and improved student engagement.

- Improved systems of support that promote positive, preventive, and restorative school discipline practices that reduce the overall and disproportionate use of exclusionary discipline.
- Increased the number of family engagement practices and school-family partnerships that promote student learning and success.
- Data outcomes which show that students have access to quality nutrition continuously during the school year and summer.
- Improved access to information and resources related to special education laws and the rights and protections of students receiving special education services.

***Strategic Priority: Elevate Connecticut’s curriculum frameworks to provide support for the development of rigorous, engaging instruction and the reliable assessment of universally required skills for life beyond school and a lifelong love of learning.***

**Rationale:**

More than 20 years ago, there was a shift in the high school accreditation standards from the New England Association of Schools and Colleges which required each community to identify “community expectations for learning.” Since that time, there have been efforts to identify a set of broad skill requirements that should be in place for each student beyond the explicit content standards that the state and local districts have traditionally taught and tested. More recent iterations of this same process are now discussed as a “Vision of the Graduate” or the “Portrait of the Learner” which districts use to paint a clear picture of the skills and dispositions required for future student success. As an indication of the growing consensus of accepting this approach, individual content area standards such as science, social studies, mathematics, and language arts have evolved to include many of these same cross-cutting skills in their own content area expectations.

Collectively, these efforts recognize that in an era of increased use of technology, including the explosive emergence of artificial intelligence, and ubiquitous information access, learners of all ages and abilities must be prepared for a world where on-demand learning will become a dominant process that creates value for individuals in the workplace. It is these underlying

skills of adaptability and reinvention – creativity, collaboration, critical thinking, and communication – that must be part of each Connecticut learners’ educational experience. However, these outcomes are notoriously challenging to teach and reliably assess, and as a result, every local district is often left to meet this challenge individually.

This strategy seeks to reduce this burden by providing districts with access to shared resources they can use to pursue these skill-based priorities while at the same time supporting the acquisition of the foundational literacies that all students require as a foundation for future success.

**Actions:**

The State Board of Education will take the steps necessary to support the following actions to advance elevating Connecticut’s curriculum frameworks to provide support for engaging, culturally relevant instruction and the aligned assessment of universally required skills for life beyond school:

- Collaborate with various stakeholders to explore how the emergence of a vast array of artificial intelligence tools might influence the nature of curriculum design for teachers, students and families, the balance between content and skill outcomes, the tension between legacy and new content requirements, and the nature of Connecticut’s curriculum frameworks.
- Ensure that all Connecticut students have access to consistent, culturally responsive, evidence-based, scientifically based K-3 literacy curricula and instruction while celebrating and highlighting schools and educators implementing Connecticut Approved K-3 Reading Curriculum Models or Programs and utilizing culturally responsive, universally accessible, evidence-based, scientifically based literacy strategies.
- Continue the development of state model curricula for grades K-8 that recognizes the time and content pressures that districts are under, with implementation resources and guidelines for districts that help to highlight critical standards.



- Continue to support school districts and programs in writing IEPs for eligible students with a disability, that are aligned with the State’s academic content standards for the grade in which the student is enrolled.
- Continue to provide technical assistance to local and regional boards of education of the design and development of an inclusive, prioritized culturally responsive curricula using the CSDE K-12 Universal Curricula Design Principles.
- Support all districts, including adult education learning centers/programs, by continuing to provide all learners with 21<sup>st</sup> century learning environments that include a combination of hands on and digital tools which allow students to develop skills and relationships that will prepare them for success after high school.
- Collaborate with various stakeholders to create and post resources on GoOpen CT to inform local use of Connecticut’s curriculum frameworks and standards, sample instructional materials, and performance assessment tasks to assist local and regional boards of education in meeting the challenge of effectively preparing each student for life, learning, and work beyond school.
- Create Assistive Technology Resource Centers (Hubs) that include community services, resources, and state agency connections, to support districts in increasing educational access for unique learner populations.
- Establish fully operational Center for Literacy Research and Reading Success and Office of Dyslexia and Reading Disabilities to ensure we achieve the goal of having proficient readers across all Connecticut schools.

**Outcomes:**

The State Board of Education expects these actions will positively impact teaching and learning and will prepare all students for life beyond school while fostering lifelong learning.

- Shared statewide curriculum vision and framework design that will serve students who will live, learn and work in an era of revolutionary technologies, including artificial intelligence.

- Connecticut State Board of Education approved curriculum standards which explicitly target and articulate how critical thinking, communication, creativity and collaboration are applied within and across disciplines.
- Students are on-track in K-2 with acquisition of the foundational learning to read skills and increased percentage of students reading at or above grade level by grade three.
- Developed prioritized, essential student learning outcomes for mastery by the end of a grade or grade band.
- High-quality IEPs developed and implemented for students with disabilities that reflect high expectations and meaningful access to the State's academic content standards.
- Increased opportunities for students to apply content and discipline-based skills in authentic, real-world settings.
- Increased curriculum resources support student self-reflection, engagement, and choice.
- Established Regional Assistive Technology Resource Centers (Hubs) with a virtual/online presence.
- Established and fully operational Center for Literacy Research and Reading Success and Office of Dyslexia and Reading Disabilities, with developed targets and benchmarks, in addressing the statutory requirements of both offices.

***Strategic Priority: Create opportunities for all students to explore multiple career pathways through coordinated and rigorous programs that are developed in partnership with institutions of higher education and local/regional employers, and that align with economic opportunity and advance students in careers of their choice.***

**Rationale:**

There is a growing consensus that postsecondary choices after high school should better align with career interests and industry needs. Furthermore, not every student needs to pursue a traditional higher education program toward a four-year college degree. Many may benefit from career-oriented postsecondary pathways that lead to two-year degrees, certificates, or industry recognized credentials. Regardless, all learners should be on pathways toward prosperous and self-filling careers after high school graduation. Our education system should recognize that all of these options represent pathways to future success.

Ever increasing college costs combined with the explosion of novel careers with non-traditional preparation programs now provide alternative post-secondary pathways for many students in all demographics. Using community college certifications to explore an interest in a career pathway after high school may help some students better determine where their interests lie or help them recognize their strengths and passion before making a longer-term commitment. While full, four-year post-secondary education continues to be an important required benchmark for many traditional professional career choices, this strategic priority acknowledges the viability of other options for students beyond high school as well.

This strategic priority is designed to recognize this new reality and ensure that every student can make the choice that is right for their own future. The focus should be on appropriate preparation, the success of the student, and the degree of fulfillment that the student derives from their choices beyond K-12 education. In the final analysis, school success should be a reflection of the career choice, happiness, and success of the individual student rather than what college or university a student attends.

**Actions:**

The State Board of Education will take the steps necessary to support the following State actions in providing opportunities for all students to explore multiple career pathways:

- Support state-wide initiatives that value and promote the acquisition of universally required skills of adaptability and reinvention – creativity, collaboration, critical thinking, and communication for life beyond school.
- Assist districts in expanding dual credit offerings in all Connecticut secondary schools, so that learners can have the ability to take college level courses which count toward both degree programs, lessening the amount of time it takes to earn a college degree, or an industry certificate.
- Provide technical assistance, professional learning, and resource allocations to increase the continuum of career exploration activities offered by local and regional boards of education.

- Work with local and regional boards of education, higher education, and business and industry stakeholders to collaboratively provide all students with opportunities to gain work-based learning experiences, to attain industry recognized credentials, and earn postsecondary credits.
- Provide research, learning opportunities, and technical support to strengthen the evidence-based knowledge, skills, and mindsets of educators, administrators, and higher education teacher preparation faculty.
- Support school districts/programs in providing transition services, and a results-oriented process, to students with IEPs to improve academic and functional achievement to facilitate the child's movement from school to post-school activities.

**Outcomes:**

The State Board of Education expects these actions will increase opportunities for all students to explore multiple careers and advance students in careers of their choice.

- Launched a system of assessment and measurement which will reflect the growth and acquisition of critical post-secondary skills of adaptability and reinvention – creativity, collaboration, critical thinking, and communication for life beyond school that is quantifiable and, with substantial data, will enable continued programmatic shaping.
- Increased offering of dual credit courses in Connecticut high schools which give our learners opportunities to earn early credits which can be applied toward academic and/or career-oriented degrees and certificates.
- Increased number of flexible career pathways within the public school experience, which emphasizes student and family choice on pathways of study.
- Increased number of students graduating with work-based learning experience in a career connected program, industry recognized credentials, and post-secondary credits.
- Increased High quality IEPs inclusive of secondary transition services for all students no later than the year the student turns 14 years of age.

**Conclusion:**

The State Board of Education’s comprehensive plan for education over the next five years will position us to deliver on the promise of a high-quality public education to every child in Connecticut by focusing on the four strategic areas of focus outlined in this document. Succeeding in the implementation of this strategic plan will improve the outcomes for many students who need our support the most and it will create the conditions to allow for them to make productive choices about their preferred pathway to enjoy the full benefit of rigorous preparation for life after high school.

While the responsibility for implementing this plan rests with the CSDE working in cooperation with local boards of education, districts and schools across the state, and key educational partners, this plan belongs to the residents of Connecticut. We are grateful to the thousands of Connecticut parents, students, educators, local school board members, policymakers, and community members who attended meetings, participated in focus groups, and responded to surveys, and whose contributions helped inform the development of this plan.

As the plan is implemented, all work across the CSDE is aligned to the vision and goals articulated here. The CSDE will continue to approach the work with a growth mindset and find areas for efficiencies and improvements thereby resulting in stronger leadership, clearer guidance, and improved delivery of service to our students, educators, schools, districts, and families. We look forward to the work ahead to implement this plan and to our continued partnerships to improve outcomes for Connecticut’s students.