

**Connecticut State Board of Education
Hartford**

Accountability and Support Committee

Wednesday, March 20, 2024
450 Columbus Blvd.
Plaza North, Second Floor, Meeting Rooms C & D
Hartford, Connecticut

**Minutes
(Approved on April 11, 2024)**

I. Call to Order

Pursuant to the notice filed with the Secretary of the State, Committee Chairperson Erin D. Benham called the meeting to order at 3:30 p.m.

Committee

Members Present: Erin D. Benham
Donald F. Harris, Jr.
Allan B. Taylor
Dr. Seth D. Zimmerman

Committee

Members Absent:

Staff Present: Irene Parisi
Jennifer Webb
Greg Dresko
Iris White

Guests Present: Dr. Cynthia Ritchie, Superintendent of New London Public Schools, New London
Chris Vamvakides, Principal, Bennie Dover Jackson Middle School, New London
Bryan Mahon, Principal, New London High School, New London
Dr. Darren Schwartz, Deputy Superintendent of Waterbury Public Schools,
Waterbury
Dr. Michelle Baker, Principal, Wilby High School, Waterbury

II. Approval of Minutes

There were technical difficulties with the preparation of the October 19, 2023, Accountability and Support Committee meeting minutes as a result the Committee tabled the meeting minutes.

Vote: In Favor: 0
Abstained: 0
Opposed: 0
Absent: 0

III. Bennie Dover Jackson Middle School, New London

Irene Parisi, Chief Academic Officer for the CSDE Academic Office, went over the agenda items with the Committee, and Jennifer Webb, Bureau Chief for the CSDE Turnaround Office, provided an overview of the work to date with Bennie Dover Jackson Middle School (BDJMS), New London. Ms. Parisi and Ms. Webb welcomed Dr. Cynthia Ritchie, Superintendent of New London Public Schools; Jennifer Hills-Papetti, Assistant Superintendent of New London Public Schools; and Chris Vamvakides, Principal of Bennie Dover Jackson Middle School, to provide a progress update.

BDJMS expressed its gratitude to the CSDE for their support throughout the school's three years in the Commissioner's Network. When BDJMS entered the Commissioner's Network, an approved turnaround plan was developed to address talent, academics, climate/culture, and operations. Some of the improvements around the abovementioned domains that BDJMS highlighted for the Committee were the school's in-school suspension and out-of-school suspension rates have decreased; the school's teacher turnover rate has decreased in the past two years; and the school's strategic recruitment and hiring of staff shifted focus onto attendance and behavior support.

To support this shift in focus, the district and school are using Commissioner's Network funds to share the cost of six hybrid substitute teachers to serve a variety of purposes, including serving as daily and long-term substitute teachers, providing Multilingual learners/English learners support where needed, and attending professional development and staff meetings on a regular basis, resulting in the drastic turnaround of BDJMS' climate and culture. Additionally, New London Public Schools and BDJMS are using Commissioner's Network funds to share the costs of two instructional coaches and four behavior motivators to further support the school's Turnaround Plan. This shift in focus has contributed to the improvement of the teacher retention rate, reduction of suspensions, and the decrease in chronic absenteeism.

If the State Board of Education (SBE) approves the school's request for a one-year extension in the Commissioner's Network, BDJMS would like to continue working on decreasing the school's chronic absenteeism through a multi-tiered systems approach; continue supporting teachers and building their capacity through the provision of professional learning to meet the needs of all students, including students identified with high needs; continue offering in bilingual the subject area of science; and provide training in co-teaching models to foster strong communication between co-teachers.

The Chair opened the floor for comments and questions from the Committee.

IV. New London High School, New London

Jennifer Webb, Bureau Chief for the CSDE Turnaround Office, provided an overview of the work to date with New London High School (NLHS), New London. She also noted to the Committee that the NLHS Turnaround Plan was approved by the SBE prior to the hiring of Principal Mahon, and as the new principal, he is now leading the implementation of the approved Turnaround Plan. Ms. Webb welcomed Dr. Cynthia Ritchie, Superintendent of New London Public Schools; Jennifer Hills-Papetti, Assistant Superintendent of New London Public Schools; and Bryan Mahon, Principal of New London High School, to provide a progress update.

NLHS expressed its gratitude to the CSDE for their support throughout the school's three years in the Commissioner's Network. When NLHS entered the Commissioner's Network, an approved turnaround plan was developed to address talent, academics, climate/culture, and operations. The Turnaround Plan for NLHS centers around the implementation of a culturally responsive curriculum that allows for increases in high-quality instructional practices. Some of the improvements around the abovementioned domains that NLHS highlighted were the school's success in capacity building of all staff, especially regarding higher-level cognitive engagement, student-centered practices, and increasing rigor through the provision of professional learning opportunities and coaching; building of administration capacity on effective teacher practices and providing actionable feedback; and decreasing chronic absenteeism.

NLHS also shared with the Committee that the strategic hires of three college, career, and workforce readiness coordinators, one attendance liaison, and three behavior support motivators have improved teacher retention rates, increased career and early college opportunities for students, reduced suspensions, and helped decrease chronic absenteeism. Additionally, the ability to hire consistent long-term substitute teachers has contributed to the drastic turnaround of NLHS' culture and climate. As permanent teaching staff, substitute teachers are also provided with the same positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) training.

The school went on to share with the Committee that students were given the opportunity to create instruction presentations for teachers, and the school plans to continue this practice to further strengthen NLHS' culture and climate and build teacher capacity.

If the SBE approves the school's request for a one-year extension in the Commissioner's Network, NLHS would like to continue developing and implementing a professional learning calendar aligned to Tier 1 practices, including student-to-student discourse, engagement strategies, peer evaluation and feedback, self-reflection, and metacognition; and to build a teacher leadership academy to support ongoing instructional practices; and, NLHS would like to offer teacher-led choice professional learning facilitation moving forward. This will also include the development and implementation of an NLHS dashboard. NLHS would like to continue efforts to decrease the school's chronic absenteeism through a multi-tiered systems approach.

The Chair opened the floor for comments and questions from the Committee.

V. Wilby High School, Waterbury

Jennifer Webb, Bureau Chief for the CSDE Turnaround Office, provided an overview of the work to date with Wilby High School (WHS), Waterbury. Ms. Webb welcomed Dr. Darren Schwartz, Deputy Superintendent of Waterbury Public Schools; and Dr. Michelle Baker, Principal of Wilby High School.

WHS expressed its gratitude to the CSDE for their support throughout the school's three years in the Commissioner's Network. When WHS entered the Commissioner's Network, an approved turnaround plan was developed to address talent, academics, climate/culture, and operations. The Turnaround Plan for WHS is built upon the work done during the Commissioner's Network planning year to strengthen the instructional leadership structures and practices. This will assist in teacher retention at WHS as well as improve instructional practices to deliver instruction that is appropriately standards-based and differentiated.

Some of the improvements around the abovementioned domains that WHS highlighted were the reintroduction of a 9th grade academy comprised of three dedicated teams of teachers that allow for smaller class sizes with collaborative time for data review and student support, contributing to an increase in the student first-time pass rate; utilization of parent academic liaisons to provide outreach to families chronically absent students; continued provision of differentiated instructional coaching opportunities to all staff; implementation of one course for leadership through the 9th grade academy; and increase of the number of students who applied to a two-year college and four-year college. Additionally, WHS shared that the school's robotic team competed in the CT Electrathon race at Lime Rock Park and made it to nationals.

If the SBE approves the school's request for a one-year extension in the Commissioner's Network, WHS would like to continue implementing the 9th grade academy student success course; providing ongoing professional learning based on staff needs; establishing an instructional practice video library for in-house staff to showcase best practices; and continue afterschool programming to support student needs with academics and social-emotional learning.

The Chair opened the floor for comments and questions from the Committee. The Committee thanked the Commissioner's Network school teams from New London and Waterbury. Chair Erin D. Benham expressed to the Commissioner's Network school teams that she looked forward to seeing them at the SBE meeting on April 3, 2024, where the SBE will vote for the approval of these Commissioner's Network schools' request for a one-year extension in the Commissioner Network.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:44 p.m.

Prepared by: Leslie Navarrete