



Connecticut's Charter Schools

Best Practices Annual Report 2020 – 2021

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Photographs featured in the report were retrieved from the websites of Connecticut’s charter schools.
 Cover photo from [Integrated Day Charter School](#). Photo above from [The Bridge Academy](#).

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Connecticut's Charter Schools

In 1996, Connecticut's General Assembly and Governor enacted legislation establishing charter schools in the state and empowering the State Board of Education (SBE) as the sole authorizer of charter schools. As non-sectarian public schools, charter schools represent innovative school models utilizing diverse, research-based educational methods. There are 21 charter schools statewide. Located in 10 host districts, these schools serve over 10,900 students.

Connecticut has both state and local charter schools. A local charter school is a new school or part of a public school that is converted into a charter school and is approved by the local board of education and the SBE. As independent local education agencies, charter schools are granted significant autonomy in exchange for strict accountability and high expectations for school performance.

Every year, charter schools prepare and submit to the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) annual reports summarizing school progress,

strategies, and results aligned to the CSDE's performance framework for charter schools. The annual reports also include certified financial audit statements of all revenues. The CSDE subsequently prepares a best practices report utilizing the annual report submission, providing data on the status and achievement of Connecticut's charter schools and identifying schools' self-reported practices having the greatest impact on improving student outcomes.



Charter Schools Statewide

Amistad Academy

New Haven, CT

Elm City Montessori School*

New Haven, CT

New Beginnings Family Academy

Bridgeport, CT

Achievement First Bridgeport Academy

Bridgeport, CT

Explorations Charter School

Winsted, CT

Odyssey Community School

Manchester, CT

Achievement First Hartford Academy

Hartford, CT

Great Oaks Charter School

Bridgeport, CT

Park City Prep Charter School

Bridgeport, CT

Booker T. Washington Academy

New Haven, CT

Highville Charter School

New Haven, CT

Side By Side Charter School

Norwalk, CT

Brass City Charter School

Waterbury, CT

Integrated Day Charter School

Norwich, CT

Stamford Charter School for Excellence

Stamford, CT

Capital Preparatory Harbor School

Bridgeport, CT

Interdistrict School for Arts & Communication

New London, CT

The Bridge Academy

Bridgeport, CT

Common Ground High School

New Haven, CT

Jumoke Academy

Hartford, CT

Elm City College Preparatory School

New Haven, CT

* *Local charter school*

Charter School Performance Standards

The CSDE’s charter school performance framework holds charter schools accountable for impact and results in four key areas: **school performance; stewardship, governance, and management; student population; and legal compliance.**

These four performance standards are consistent across all charter school accountability systems

and processes, including the initial application and granting of the charter, annual reporting, and charter renewal. The best practices highlighted in the following sections of this report represent promising practices across Connecticut’s charter schools in these areas.

The Performance Standards are clearly defined on pages 4 and 5.



Standard 1: School Performance

Is the school a successful model resulting in strong student outcomes and a positive school climate?



Standard 2: Stewardship, Governance, and Management

Is the school financially and organizationally healthy and viable?



Standard 3: Student Population

Is the school promoting equity by effectively attracting, enrolling, and retaining students, particularly among targeted populations?



Standard 4: Legal Compliance

Is the school acting in compliance with applicable laws and regulations?



Photo from [Brass City Charter School](#).

Performance Standards Definitions

Standard 1: School Performance

Based on Connecticut's Next Generation Accountability System launched in the 2014-15 fiscal year, the accountability system is a broad set of 12 indicators that helps tell the story of how well a school is preparing its students for success in college, career, and life. The system moves beyond test scores and graduation rates and instead provides a multifactor perspective of performance that will incorporate student growth over time.

Standard 2: Stewardship, Governance, and Management

Financial Management — The school materially complies with applicable state and federal laws, rules and regulations relating to financial management and oversight expectations as evidenced by an annual independent audit.

Financial Reporting and Compliance — The school materially complies with applicable state and federal laws, rules and regulations relating to financial reporting and compliance requirements (e.g., submits reports on time, annual inventory of current assets and review of appropriate financial controls).

Financial Viability — The school demonstrates strong short and long-term fiscal viability evidenced by ability to meet enrollment projections; reasonability and certainty of revenue projections and funding sources; margins and cash flow; and debt levels.

Governance and Management — The school materially complies with applicable state and federal laws, rules and regulations relating to governance by its board, including training related to charter school governing council responsibilities during the term of the charter.

School Facility — The school materially complies with applicable state and federal laws, rules and regulations relating to the school facilities, grounds, and transportation. Viable certificate of occupancy or other required building use authorization, health, safety and fire code requirements and maintaining and documenting requisite insurance coverage.

Recruitment and Enrollment Process — The school materially complies with applicable state and federal laws; rules and regulations relevant to student populations; fair and equitable enrollment and recruitment processes; and transparent and open access.

Standard 3: Student Population

Waitlist and Enrollment Data — The school's enrollment variance equals or exceeds 95 percent in the most recent year.

Demographic Representation — The student body reflects the demographics of the target population and/or surrounding communities. There is strong evidence of efforts to attract, enroll, and retain special populations.

Family and Community Support — The school maintains strong parent satisfaction and community support.

School Culture and Climate — The school maintains clear policies and consistent implementation of policies (e.g., ongoing behavior intervention monitoring, low frequency of suspensions and/or expulsions).

Performance Standards Definitions

Standard 4: Legal Compliance

Open Meetings/Information Management — The school materially complies with applicable state and federal laws, rules and regulations relating to the maintaining and handling of information; all Governing Board meetings are open and accessible to the public; proper and secure maintenance of education records and regulations; proper transference of student records; proper and secure maintenance of testing material.

Students with Disabilities — Consistent with a state charter school’s status as a Local Education Agency (LEA), the school materially complies with applicable state and federal laws, rules and regulations, (including but not limited to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Americans with Disabilities Act, Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.) § 10-66ee(d)(3), and the school’s policies and procedures governing the education of students with disabilities) relating to the education of students with identified disabilities and those suspected of having a disability. A state charter school is a LEA, except that state law designates the LEA of the child’s residence responsible for the identification of student eligibility for special education services and determination of the special education services to be provided, pursuant to IDEA for students attending a charter school.

English Learners — The school materially complies with applicable state and federal laws, rules and regulations, (including but not limited to Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act [ESEA] as amended by Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), U.S. Department of Education authorities, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974 (EEOA)) relating to requirements regarding English Learners (ELs). Required policies related to the service of EL students.

Rights of Students — The school materially complies with applicable state and federal laws, rules and regulations relating to the rights of students, including but not limited to, appropriate handling of student information, due process protections, and State nondiscrimination laws.

Teacher/Staff Credentials — The school materially complies with applicable state and federal laws, rules and regulations, relating to state certification requirements as modified by any waivers that have been granted. C.G.S. § 10-66dd, Regulations CT State Agencies § 10-145d-401.

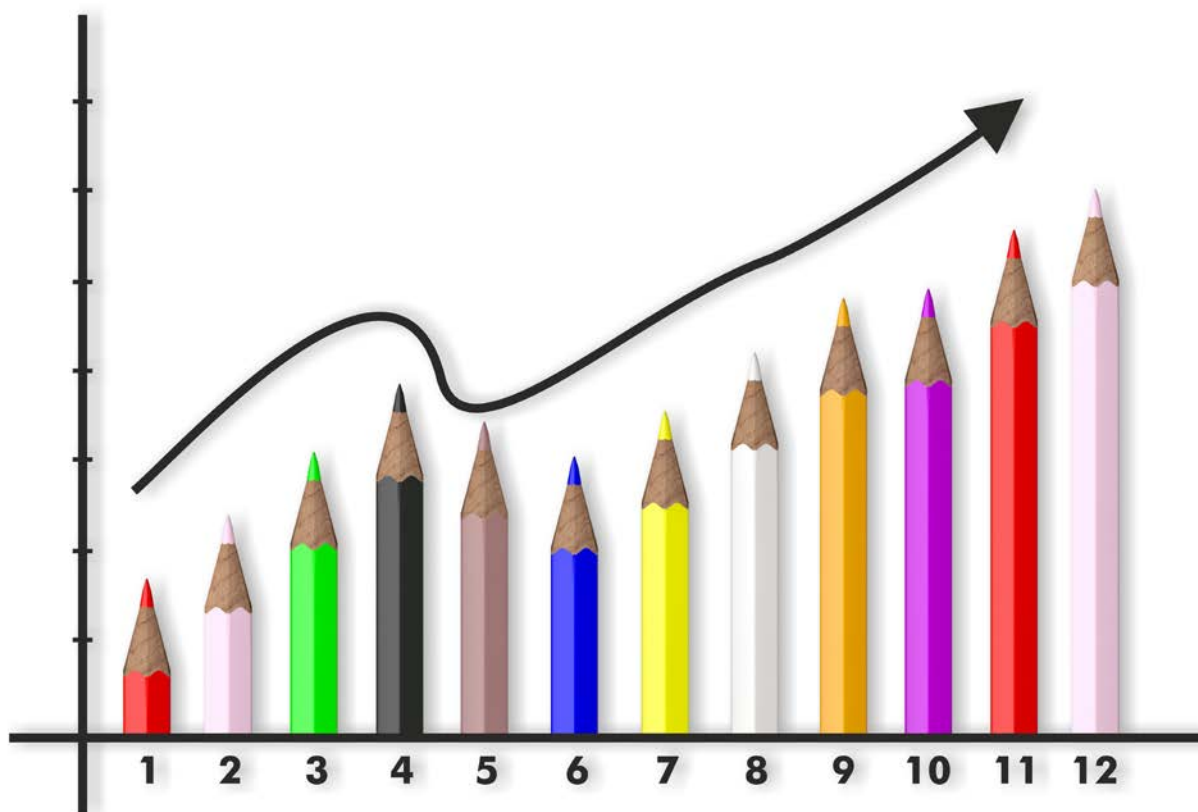
Employee Rights — The school materially complies with applicable state and federal laws, rules and regulations, relating to state certification requirements as modified by any waivers that have been granted. C.G.S. § 10-66dd, Regulations CT State Agencies § 10-145d-401.

Charter School Performance

Connecticut charter schools account for approximately two percent of the state’s public schoolchildren. Many of Connecticut’s charter schools maintain waitlists of hundreds of students, demonstrating interest for school choice by families and students. In 2020-2021, over 6,100 students sought enrollment and were wait-listed.

Connecticut’s Next Generation Accountability System launched in the 2014-15 school year, a system developed under ESEA Flexibility included as part of Connecticut’s state plan under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The accountability system is a broad set of 12 indicators that helps tell the story of how well a school is preparing its students for success in college, career, and life. The system moves beyond test scores and graduation rates and instead provides a multifactor perspective of performance that will incorporate student growth over time.

As part of the Next Generation Accountability System, all public schools including charter schools receive a report that provides a picture of how the school measures on all 12 of the indicators. The data will provide a more comprehensive holistic picture of student and school performance.



Please visit the CSDE’s Charter School Office [website](#) for additional best practices and to access schools’ annual reports.



School Performance: Charter School Best Practices

Best Practice #1: Side by Side Charter School, Norwalk

Located in the diverse and urban community of Norwalk, Side by Side Charter School's (SBS) mission is to ensure that every child has the opportunity to succeed and every voice is heard. School goals are supported and enhanced through community partnerships with surrounding art centers, museums, and neighboring commerce.

To meet the unique demands of the 2020-21 year, SBS implemented digital learning platforms for its science and math curriculum to ensure student and teacher access across environments and maintain fidelity to the core curriculum. Additionally, the use of quality technology was prioritized through one-to-one device capability for all students and the installation of conference center cameras to enable group and partner work and active student engagement.

Approximately 98 percent of students in grades 3-8 learned in a hybrid format. A historical comparison of Smarter Balanced Assessment (SBA) data revealed among matched hybrid learning students in grades 5-8 an increase in the ELA proficiency rate from 42.1 percent in 2018-19 to 43.4 percent in 2020-21. In math, among hybrid learning students in grades 5-8 data showed an increase in the proficiency rate from 35.5 percent in 2018-19 to 43.4 percent in 2020-21.

Best Practice #2: Integrated Day Charter School, Norwich

Integrated Day Charter School (IDCS), in partnership with various stakeholders, strives to provide a safe, flexible, and academically challenging learning environment that meets the unique social, emotional, academic, and physical needs of each student.

In the 2020-21 year, IDCS strived to meet school goals and advance teaching and learning. For example, students researched and utilized technology to communicate and solve problems. To this end, students and teachers utilized technology in a variety of contexts, including independent research and presentation, classroom learning activities, and assessments. To address climate and culture goals, the school implemented a social curriculum to build and strengthen advocacy, self-awareness, and relationship skills among students. Additionally, IDCS achieved family engagement in a unique way through virtual home visits.

Approximately 85 percent of students in grades 3-8 learned in a hybrid format during 2020-21. SBA data showed an increase in the grades 5-8 ELA proficiency rate from 50.8 percent in 2018-19 to 54.1 percent in 2020-21 among matched hybrid students.

Please visit the CSDE's Charter School Office [website](#) for additional best practices and to access schools' annual reports. Photo from [Side by Side Charter School](#).



Stewardship, Governance, and Management: Charter School Best Practices

Best Practice #3: Common Ground High School, New Haven

Common Ground High School's Board of Directors is reflective of its community, for example, including voting student, teacher, and parent representatives. The Board is reflective of expertise in areas such as education, finance, nonprofit management and is trained in the responsibilities of a charter school board. In the 2020-21 year, efforts focused on renewing the Board and strengthening governance through the addition of four new Board members with strong roots in the New Haven community. In addition to general Board trainings on responsibilities, specific ones were related to the board of Common Ground High School and the non-profit New Haven Ecology Project.

The school has invested in its School Committee as a reliable, transparent structure to make key decisions on policies at the school. In addition, Common Ground High School formalized and strengthened its Professional Development and Evaluation Committee, a standing committee with a broad range of internal stakeholders, as part of the larger effort to bring greater transparency, inclusivity, and intentionality to key decisions.

Best Practice #4: Stamford Charter School for Excellence, Stamford

Stamford Charter School for Excellence's (SCSE) Governing Board strives to safeguard the school's fidelity to its mission, vision, charter, and high-quality model. Board membership includes a broad spectrum of expertise and the capacity to provide effective oversight. It maintains oversight of the school's academic, operational, and financial health while delegating the school's daily decision-making and supervision to the school's leadership team. There are systems and practices in place to support the Board's work. Handbooks, policies, bylaws, and operating procedures provide guidance for responsibilities and regulations. Throughout the year, the Finance Committee reviews the budget, revenues, and expenditures every month and the Board of Directors reviews them at each Board meeting.

SCSE's practices have yielded strong outcomes. The school regularly maintains healthy ending cash and net asset balances.

Please visit the CSDE's Charter School Office [website](#) for additional best practices and to access schools' annual reports. Photo from [Common Ground High School](#).



Student Population: Charter School Best Practices

Best Practice #5: Stamford Charter School for Excellence, Stamford

Stamford Charter School for Excellence (SCSE) targets its outreach efforts in high-needs communities to attract and retain a diverse student body that is reflective of the surrounding community it serves. SCSE utilizes a variety of strategies to this end which include:

- Distribution of marketing materials at locations, such as open houses, public meetings, meet-and-greets, and during presentations at local community organizations that serve varied populations;
- Neighborhood canvassing with a concentration on multicultural communities;
- Distribution of flyers and mailings in English and Spanish; and
- Utilization of local media stations (radio and internet) to target English and non-English speaking audiences.

With these efforts, the school reports a waitlist of over four hundred students for the year.

Please visit the CSDE's Charter School Office [website](#) for additional best practices and to access schools' annual reports. Photo from [Great Oaks Charter School](#).

Best Practice #6: Great Oaks Charter School, Bridgeport

In partnership with a variety of stakeholders, Great Oaks Charter School implements a comprehensive recruitment plan. Activities include school-based and virtual open houses, targeted mailings, social media campaigns, individual calls to prospective families, parent-to-parent-recruitment, and online advertising. The recruitment team strategically targets subgroups through the distribution of marketing materials to neighborhoods, community-based organizations, and clubs. Seventy percent of the school's student body is identified as qualifying for free and reduced meals, and 94 percent are students of color.

Additionally, the team tailors its efforts to target multilingual learners and students who are eligible to receive special education services. In addition to offering printed marketing materials in English and Spanish, the school partners and collaborates with local Hispanic organizations on outreach efforts. Great Oaks Charter School also promotes its focus on personalized instruction and tutoring model to attract families with students who are eligible to receive special education. Together, these action steps have yielded a heterogeneous student body, with nearly 18 percent of students eligible to receive special education services and 12 percent of English learners.



Legal Compliance: Charter School Best Practices

Best Practices #7: Common Ground High School, New Haven

Common Ground High School strives to support nearly 24 percent of its students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) by prioritizing its special education team's collaboration with external and internal stakeholders. For example, the team collaborates with sending school districts to develop and ensure compliance with students' IEPs and 504 plans. It commits to engaging students in the Planning and Placement Team process by fostering self-advocacy skills through increasing students' awareness of available supports corresponding to their needs. Additionally, the team coordinates closely with the Student Support Team and provides embedded coaching to general education staff to address students' needs.

Best Practices #8: New Beginnings Family Academy, Bridgeport

Historically, New Beginnings Family Academy's (NBFA) suspension rates trend low. NBFA uses a multi-tiered support system to ensure all students receive high-quality differentiated instruction, interventions, and supports. A range of assessments are used to identify students' needs and strength areas and inform the Scientific Research Based Interventions (SRBI) decision-making process. Students who are not meeting academic or behavioral goals are referred to the SRBI Team. A school-wide interdisciplinary team, including parents, works collaboratively to identify evidence-based interventions and develop tiered intervention plans. Progress monitoring is conducted frequently to inform the decision-making process in a timely manner and determine next steps. For example, the team collaborates with the school's health and wellness staff to address needs in areas of attendance, behavior, social interactions and environmental concern. When necessary, referrals to community-based agencies are made for additional support.

Please visit the CSDE's Charter School Office [website](#) for additional best practices and to access schools' annual reports. Photo from [New Beginnings Family Academy](#).