

Focus Schools Fact Sheet

Focus schools are those with consistently lagging academic achievement, growth, or graduation rates for students with high needs. Students with high needs are students from economically disadvantaged families, English learners/multilingual learners, and students with disabilities. In Connecticut's approved [ESSA plan](#), Focus schools are also referred to as "Targeted Support and Improvement" (TSI) schools.

How are Focus schools identified?

Focus schools are identified annually using data from the three most recent years. Focus schools are identified for different reasons.

Identification based on growth for students with high needs

Schools with Smarter Balanced growth results are divided into two groups:

- Elementary schools: highest grade is between 4 and 6;
- Middle schools: at least one of the grades taught is 7 or 8 even if other grades are taught (e.g., 6-12 school).

Elementary and middle schools are evaluated based on the average percentage of growth target achieved by students with high needs in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics. Any school that is in the bottom 10 percent of schools in their comparison group (elementary and middle) for a subject for three consecutive years is identified as a Focus school. When elementary and middle schools are identified as Focus schools, the designation includes a subject. Schools can be identified as a Focus school for ELA and/or mathematics.

Identification based on achievement for students with high needs

Typical high schools serving Grades 9-12 do not have Smarter Balanced growth data, so these schools are evaluated based on the academic achievement of students with high needs (i.e., subject performance index or SPI). Any school that is in the bottom 10 percent of high schools for a subject for three consecutive years is identified as a Focus school. When high schools are identified as Focus schools based on achievement for students with high needs, the designation includes a subject. High schools can be identified as a Focus school for ELA, mathematics, and/or science.

Identification based on graduation rates for students with high needs

Any school with a six-year adjusted cohort graduation rate below 70 percent for students with high needs for each of the three most recent cohorts is identified as a Focus school for graduation rate.

What school category is assigned to Focus schools?

As required under Connecticut General Statutes Section 10-223e, Connecticut has a five-category school classification system. Newly identified Focus schools are placed in Category 4. Focus schools that do not meet exit criteria within four years of identification are moved from Category 4 to Category 5.

How do Focus schools exit?

To exit, a Focus school must no longer meet the reason for their identification in two of three years after identification.

- **Elementary and Middle Schools:** the average percentage of growth target achieved for students with high needs in the designated subject (ELA and/or math) must exceed the bottom 10 percent of schools in the comparison group for two of three years.
- **High Schools identified for achievement:** the subject performance index for students with high needs in the designated subject (ELA, math, and/or science) must exceed the bottom 10 percent of high schools for two of three years.
- **High Schools identified for graduation rate:** the six-year graduation rate for students with high needs must be at least 70 percent for two of three years.

Each Focus identification (i.e. ELA, math, science, graduation rate) is evaluated independently for exiting. Therefore, for example, a Focus school identified for ELA and math could exit Focus status for ELA and remain Focus for math.

What supports does a Focus school receive?

Focus schools receive targeted support aimed at improving outcomes for the specific student groups that led to identification. These supports help school and district teams examine evidence, understand performance patterns, and refine strategies aligned to student group needs.

Each Focus school works directly with a CSDE Turnaround Office consultant, who provides guidance on improvement planning, progress monitoring, and the use of accountability data. Schools participate in structured processes such as the annual Needs Assessment to review evidence, analyze student group performance, and identify priorities for improvement. CSDE also provides access to evidence-based practice guides and technical assistance for required ESSA components, including the Resource Allocation Review.

District and school teams may receive additional guidance on strengthening instruction, intervention systems, and climate practices as they relate to their identified student groups. Focus schools also have access to CSDE-sponsored professional learning opportunities and, when available, may apply for School Improvement Grants (SIG) to support evidence-based interventions and improvement strategies.

For detailed information about school identification, see [Using Accountability Results to Guide Improvement](#).