



CONNECTICUT STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Improving High School Graduation Rates: Insights from Four Connecticut Districts

May 2020

How are graduation rates calculated?

- All states use a uniform system for tracking students and calculating the four-year cohort graduation rate.
- Students are followed from initial entrance into Grade 9 through graduation.
- The four-year cohort graduation rate represents the percentage of first time 9th grade students who earn a standard high school diploma within four years.

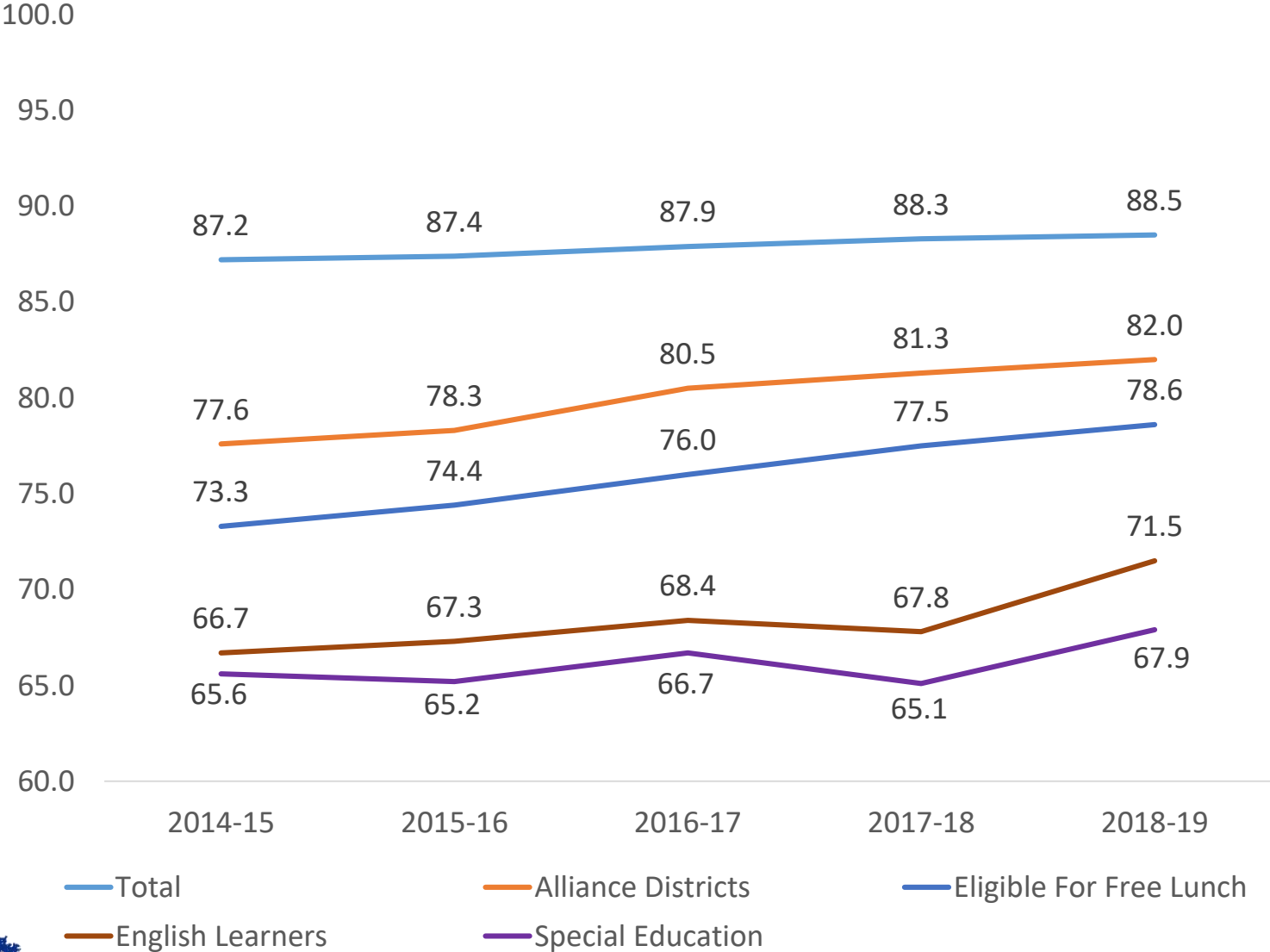


Graduation Rates for 2018-19 Improve Again

- The overall graduation rate for all students statewide continues to improve.
 - Four-year rate is 88.5 percent for the graduating class of 2019.
- Most student groups are improving.
 - Trend data for all groups available on [EdSight](#)
- Graduation rates for students with the greatest needs are improving at a faster rate than their peers.



Four-Year Graduation Rates Improve for Student Groups



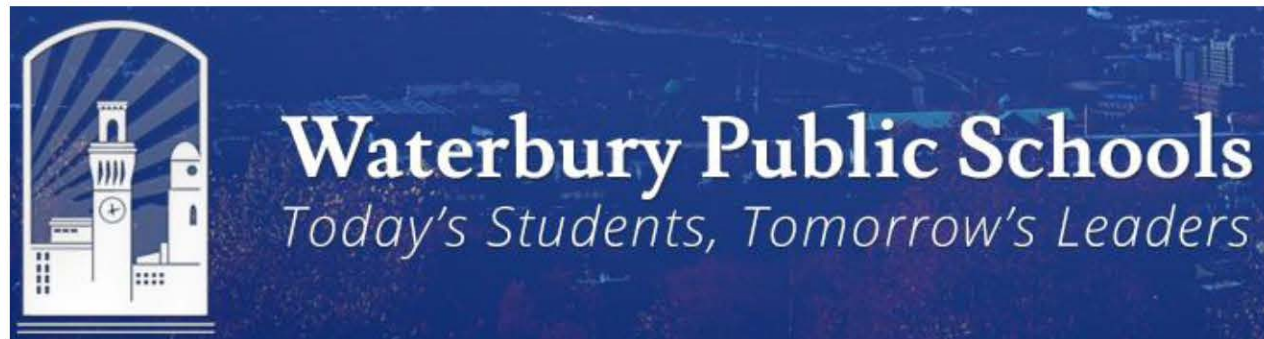
CSDE Initiatives Support District Efforts

- Alliance District Program ([C.G.S. 10-262u](#))
 - Increased funding and support
- Graduation Flexibilities ([C.G.S. 10-221a\(g\)](#))
 - Students earn credits by demonstrating mastery of content.
 - Coursework can be completed online.
- Efforts to reduce exclusionary discipline ([C.G.S. 10-233 a-n](#))
- [Promising practices](#) for preventing and addressing chronic absenteeism



Improving High School Graduation Rates: Insights from Four Connecticut Districts

CONSOLIDATED SCHOOL DISTRICT OF NEW BRITAIN
PURSUING EXCELLENCE ONE STUDENT AT A TIME



Click on a district to see the Connecticut Report Card.



Personalized Student Supports in New Britain

- Satellite Careers Academy (SCA)
 - Currently serves 150 over-age/ under-credited students.
 - Students are not placed at SCA; they apply.
 - SCA staff are experienced and highly committed to student success.
 - Personalized supports
 - Three career coaches proactively monitor and guide students.
 - Full-time social worker and full-time guidance counselor
 - School-based health center
 - Students have access to all New Britain High School extra curricular activities.



New Britain Plans to Build on Success

- SCA expansion is a delicate balance
 - Goal is to serve more students, but size impacts personalization, which drives effectiveness.
- Engagement is key, and it starts early.
 - Programs must be proactive, not reactive
 - District is identifying students who need extra support well in advance of high school
- Online credit recovery and extended day support student progress to demonstrate mastery of knowledge and skills, not rote memorization.
- Current programming provides an “extra layer of love.”
- All district efforts are in service of the Board vision to pursue excellence one student at a time.



Waterbury Students See Possibilities

- Focus on every individual driven by timely, accessible, accurate, relevant data
 - IT and Central Office Staff are critical partners in providing administrators what they need, when they need it through a dashboard application.
- Attendance appeals available to all students once in high school
 - Students were losing credits based on attendance.
 - With guidance, students advocate for themselves and secure lost credits.
 - Success with this process provides students with a path forward.



Adapting to Student Need in Waterbury

- Flexibility in earning missed credits
 - Recuperative Academy at Crosby High uses blended learning to address the needs of over-age/under-credited students.
 - Significant reduction in study halls to increase time spent on credit-earning activities
 - Summer school available at no-cost
- Engaged students working with teachers, support staff, and community organizations improves school culture and climate.
 - Districtwide reduction in suspension rates



Forging Relationships Takes Time, Pays Dividends in Waterbury

- Partnerships are a necessity, not a luxury
 - District staff recognize the uncertainty felt among individuals in the immigrant community. There is clear messaging that the district is a safe, supportive place focused on the needs of families and children.
 - Bilingual social worker improves communication with families.
 - Professional learning for staff to identify students experiencing homelessness. All students are integral members of the Waterbury Public Schools community.
 - Guidance and attendance counselors tap into social supports for students and families.
- Advisory program in every high school
 - Builds meaningful relationships between students and staff
 - Provides students with additional advocates



High Expectations for ALL Students in West Haven

- West Haven has been on a twelve-year path to sustained improvement.
 - High expectations and supports in place for ALL students
 - Small heterogeneous mathematics classes with differentiated teaching and appropriate support for students
 - Increased activities and performance tasks that require application of learning
 - Within six years, improvements were evident for all student groups, but English learners in particular benefited.
 - When students succeed, they are proud of their accomplishments and it becomes a positive self-sustaining cycle.
 - Student and teacher enthusiasm is contagious.



West Haven Lays the Groundwork Early

- Elementary/middle grade experience leads to success and persistence in high school
 - Students introduced to post-secondary opportunities in advance of high school. Students see the possibilities.
 - [Variety of programs](#) designed for students to earn college credit in high school including Project Lead the Way: Engineering and Biomedical Science
 - College signing day celebrations positively impact students and their families.
- Results
 - Overall graduation rate improved 15.1 percentage points since 2011 and ELs improved by 17.8 percentage points.



Student Voice Honored in Vernon

- Students are the customers
 - Leaders seek answers to—What is working and not working for students? How can the district more effectively meet their needs?
 - Satisfied customers are engaged, empowered students.
- Library Media Center transformed into a learning hub based on student input
 - Features makerspace, recording studio, 3D printers, green screen rooms, logic puzzles, interactive TVs, and more
 - Changes the nature of the work teachers assign
 - Generates excitement about learning
 - Positively impacts school culture



Vernon has a *Blueprint for Success*

- Five Drivers are Rigorous Curriculum, Talent Management, Student Interventions, Professional Learning, and Family Engagement.
 - [Family School and Community Partnerships Center](#) funded in part through a Hartford Foundation grant
 - “We meet families where they’re at.”
 - Job-embedded professional learning serves to attract and retain the best people.
 - Blended learning teacher supports a variety of small programs designed for students based on their needs.



Clear, Measurable Goals for Vernon Schools

- School Improvement Plans (SIPs) are revamped *living* documents with three goal areas: Academics, Climate, Parent Engagement.
 - School leaders know what they are working on, and district leaders know what to look for.
 - Adjustments to SIPs can and should be made as needed.
- Next Generation Accountability System provides clarity on key measures and informs goal setting.
- “All the little things add up to district-level change.”



Thank You to Our District Partners

New Britain

[Nancy Sarra](#), Superintendent

[Michael Foran](#), Assistant Superintendent

[Stan Glowiak](#), Director of Guidance

West Haven

[Anne Druzolowski](#), Assistant Superintendent

Vernon

[Robert Testa](#), Assistant Superintendent

[Jason Magao](#), Principal of Rockville High School



Thank You to Our District Partners

Waterbury

[Verna Ruffin](#), Superintendent

[Greg Rodriguez](#), Deputy Superintendent

[Janice Epperson](#), Assistant Superintendent

[Darren Schwartz](#), Chief Academic Officer

[Jade Lee Gopie](#), Principal of Crosby High School

[Rob Johnston](#), Principal of Kennedy High School

[Adela Jorge-Ferguson](#), Supervisor of Bilingual/ESOL
Education

[Tara Battistoni](#), Supervisor of Research, Development,
and Student Testing

