

HIGHLIGHTS OF CONNECTICUT'S ESEA FLEXIBILITY REQUEST

COLLEGE- AND CAREER-READY EXPECTATIONS FOR ALL STUDENTS

Connecticut adopted rigorous English language arts and math standards now in place in 45 other states and the District of Columbia, with a strong transition plan that includes a new vision and strategy for improving the way Connecticut prepares educators so that all students will have well-prepared teachers and school leaders. A newly created council will advise Connecticut in revising regulations and policies regarding standards and procedures for the approval and continued accreditation of Connecticut teacher and administrator preparation programs.

IMPROVED STATE AND DISTRICT ACCOUNTABILITY AND SUPPORT FOR ALL STUDENTS

Index System that Provides Incentives for Student Growth at all Levels: Connecticut created a system of differentiated recognition, accountability, and support that places each school into one of five categories—Excelling, Progressing, Transition, Review, or Turnaround—based on an index that includes student achievement, gains in student achievement, graduation rate, and the percentage of students meeting the State’s highest performance level. Instead of an accountability system focused on getting students to one proficiency bar—no matter how far ahead or behind they started—Connecticut constructed a School Performance Index that will give schools strong incentives to help all students improve. At the same time, they raised their target for all students to achieve at a level that is truly college ready.

Ambitious Performance Targets: Connecticut established new performance targets for reading, math, writing, science, and graduation rates that will cut the gap to proficiency in half in six years.

Renewed Focus on Closing Achievement Gaps: Connecticut will identify the schools in the State with the greatest challenges for groups of students as “Focus schools” and demand interventions to improve student performance. To identify schools with large achievement gaps, Connecticut has created a “high-needs” subgroup made up of English Learners, students with disabilities, and students qualifying for free- or reduced-price lunch. Connecticut has added an additional protection that any school with African American or Hispanic students performing at the same level as the “high-needs” group will also be picked up as Focus schools. If a Focus school fails to make progress in meeting its annual targets for three years in a row, it is placed on “conditional” status and required to undergo a diagnosis, planning, and intervention phase similar to that in Focus schools. To capture more schools in the accountability system, Connecticut has reduced from 40 to 20 the minimum number of students necessary for individual subgroup performance to be considered. This will increase the number of schools accountable for African American students from 280 to 414, for Hispanic students from 356 to 548, students with disabilities from 276 to 683, English Learners from 97 to 209, and free and reduced priced lunch students from 757 to 928.

Aggressive Plan for Turning Around the Lowest-Performing Schools: Connecticut will identify the lowest-performing schools in the State as “Priority schools” and ensure that districts implement meaningful interventions in these schools. Connecticut is aggressively tackling its lowest-performing schools by designating its lowest-performing thirty districts as “Alliance Districts,” which are eligible for increased funding in exchange for reforms. The State requires Alliance Districts to take

appropriate intervention measures to improve student performance in Focus schools and in the larger category of “Review Schools,” which includes both Focus Schools and other low-performing schools. Alliance Districts must tier schools according to need and must implement support and interventions as appropriate. All of Connecticut’s Focus schools are located in these thirty districts and will be required to take appropriate intervention measures to improve student performance.

Building Capacity for School Improvement: Connecticut also established a “Commissioner’s Network,” a system of State supports and interventions to turnaround low-performing schools based on the combined efforts of the State and local school districts. The Network will serve as a vehicle for innovative initiatives, a platform for the sharing of effective practices, and a model for other schools and districts throughout the State. The State will select up to 25 schools over the next three years to be part of the Network based on low student achievement and lack of progress. Network schools will either be administered by a partnership between the district and the State, or the State will serve as a temporary trustee and directly administer turnaround efforts. The Network recently received \$7.5 million in new turnaround funding.

Emphasis on Growth and Progress: Connecticut has identified its highest-performing schools and will provide them with meaningful rewards, including providing teachers and principals at each of these schools with the option to nominate a teacher or administrator who has made a substantial contribution to the school’s progress for a yearlong sabbatical. During this sabbatical year, the chosen educator would be deployed by the state Turnaround Team to share effective practices with other schools in the Commissioner’s Network.

Transparently Reporting on Students’ Progress: Connecticut will provide annual reports that clearly lay out, in simple graphs and short accompanying narratives, how schools perform over time, if they have any subgroup achievement gaps, and how they compare to other similar schools. Connecticut aims to incorporate some of the best practices in information visualization from States like Colorado and Massachusetts and districts like Maryland’s Montgomery County.

Creating a Well-Rounded Education: To encourage schools to focus on a well-rounded curriculum, Connecticut will be holding schools accountable for student performance in writing and science, in addition to English language arts and math.

SUPPORTING EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION AND LEADERSHIP

Connecticut has proposed guidelines for its statewide system that evaluates teachers and principals based upon multiple student learning indicators, including assessments, teacher observation of professional practice, feedback from peers and parents including surveys and schoolwide student learning indicators or student feedback (for teachers) and teacher performance growth and effectiveness outcomes (for administrators). Connecticut is working to overhaul its system of professional development by requiring professional development activities to be job-embedded, differentiated based on the results of evaluation, and delivered primarily in small-groups.