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Report on Commissioner's Network Schools

June 2021



Connecticut State Department of Education

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INTRODUCTION

The [Commissioner's Network](#) is a commitment between local stakeholders and the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) to improve student achievement in up to 25 schools. It offers new resources and authorities to empower teachers and school leaders to implement research-based strategies. Schools are selected by the Commissioner of Education to participate in the network for a period of three to five years. Network schools remain part of their local school districts, but the districts and the CSDE secure school-level flexibility and autonomy for the schools in exchange for heightened accountability. The network began in the fall of 2012. For the 2019-20 school year, eight schools were part of the network, while five schools exited after the 2018-19 school year.

Subsections (j)(1) and (j)(2) of Connecticut General Statutes Section 10-223h require the CSDE to submit an annual report on the academic performance of schools in the network to the Connecticut General Assembly. Subsection (j)(3) of Connecticut General Statutes Section 10-223h requires the CSDE to submit a final report that evaluates turnaround plans and the academic performance of exiting schools and make recommendations for the operation of such schools. Subsection (j)(4) requires the commissioner to submit a report (A) evaluating the commissioner's network of schools and its effect on improving student academic achievement in participating schools, and (B) making any recommendations for the continued operation of the commissioner's network of schools. This report fulfills these requirements.

METHODOLOGY AND DATA

In prior years, the primary data source for this report are the results from Connecticut's Next Generation Accountability System. This system is a broad set of 12 indicators that help tell the story of how well a school is preparing its students for success in college, careers and life. A brief overview of the system is contained in [this FAQ](#) and [introductory video](#). The system began in 2014-15 and was fully implemented in 2015-16.

In prior years, for purposes of comparing and analyzing the academic performance of the network schools, this report annually incorporates the following indicators from the accountability system:

- Accountability Index
- Performance Index
- Academic Growth
- Chronic absenteeism
- Four Year Graduation Rate for All Students
- Six Year Graduation Rate for High Needs Students¹

However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all statewide assessments and the Next Generation Accountability System results for the 2019-20 school year were [waived by the U.S. Department of Education](#). As a result, the first three indicators (Accountability Index, Performance Index, and Academic Growth) are not available for the 2019-20 school year.

Therefore, the report for the 2019-20 school year includes the following indicators:

- Chronic absenteeism
- Suspension/expulsion²
- Four Year Graduation Rate for All Students
- Six Year Graduation Rate for Students with High Needs

The following caveats should be noted with respect to the 2019-20 data. Chronic absenteeism calculations for the 2019-20 year are based only on in-person school days until mid-March 2020. With respect to suspension/expulsion rates, it should be noted that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in-person classes were cancelled in mid-March 2020; all districts switched to fully remote instruction for the remainder of the school year. Disaggregated data by race/ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, special education status, and English learner status are available on the CSDE's interactive data portal, [EdSight](#), at <http://edsight.ct.gov>.

¹ These are students who are English learners, students with disabilities, and/or those eligible for free or reduced price meals.

² Student suspension/expulsion rates are not part of the Next Generation Accountability System but are included here because they are an important measure of school climate and student engagement.

The list of current Commissioner’s Network schools is in Table 1. Click the school name below to access their report card directly.

Table 1: List of Commissioner’s Network Schools for 2019-20

District Name	School Name	School Code	When Entered Network
Bridgeport School District	Roosevelt School	0152611	Fall 2019
East Hartford School District	East Hartford Middle School	0435111	Fall 2015
New Britain School District	New Britain High School	0896111	Fall 2017
New Haven School District	Clinton Avenue School	0930611	Fall 2016
	Wexler/Grant Community School	0933211	Fall 2018
Winchester School District	Batcheller Early Education Center	1620411	Fall 2016
	Pearson School	1625111	Fall 2016
Windham School District	Windham High School	1636111	Fall 2018

RESULTS

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all statewide assessments and the Next Generation Accountability System results for the 2019-20 school year were waived by the U.S. Department of Education. As a result, the first three indicators (Accountability Index, Performance Index, and Academic Growth) are not available for the 2019-20 school year. The remaining available indicators are reported here.

Chronic Absenteeism

Indicator 4 of the accountability system is chronic absenteeism. It represents the percentage of students missing at least 10 percent of the days enrolled for any reason. Chronic absence has been shown to be related to academic achievement, high school graduation, drop-out, and juvenile delinquency. Absences occur due to many factors, e.g., health, unstable housing, lack of transportation, student disengagement from school, and safety/school climate. By removing barriers to attendance, districts, schools and community partners can improve school attendance. The trend in chronic absenteeism for the Commissioner’s Network schools is presented here (Table 2).

Table 2: Chronic Absenteeism Trend for Commissioner’s Network Schools

District Name	School Name	Grade Range	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Bridgeport School District	Roosevelt School	PK-8	17.5	17.3	16.2	13.9	14.7
East Hartford School District	East Hartford Middle School	6-8	9.5	12.4	15.3	10.8	16.1
New Britain School District	New Britain High School	9-12	33.3	34.0	37.5	39.6	36.8
New Haven School District	Clinton Avenue School	K-8	18.7	14.9	18.2	15.8	15.6
	Wexler/Grant Community School	PK-8	20.0	30.8	25.2	32.8	26.1
Winchester School District	Batcheller Early Education Center	PK-2	12.2	6.8	8.7	5.9	8.6
	Pearson School	3-6	4.1	4.8	5.2	3.4	6.9
Windham School District	Windham High School	9-12	31.8	31.6	29.2	31.6	32.9

In general, students in higher grades (i.e., Grade 7 and up) tend to have the greater rates of chronic absenteeism than those in the lower grades. Therefore, schools serving those grades tend to reflect higher rates of chronic absenteeism than those serving only the elementary grades. Note that for 2019-20, chronic absenteeism calculations are based only on in-person school days until mid-March 2020. The overall statewide chronic absenteeism rate increased from 10.4% in 2018-19 to 12.2% in 2019-20.

Suspension/Expulsion Rate

The suspension/expulsion rate is the percentage of students in a school year receiving at least one suspension (in-school or out-of-school) or expulsion. Studies suggest a correlation between exclusionary discipline policies and practices and an array of serious educational, economic, and social problems. These include: school avoidance and diminished educational engagement; decreased academic achievement; increased behavior problems; increased likelihood of dropping out; substance abuse; and involvement with juvenile justice systems. The trend in suspension/expulsion rates for the Commissioner’s Network Schools is presented here (Table 3).

Table 3: Suspension/Expulsion Rate Trend for Commissioner’s Network Schools

District Name	School Name	Grade Range	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Bridgeport School District	Roosevelt School	PK-8	24.0	17.7	12.8	13.4	10.0
East Hartford School District	East Hartford Middle School	6-8	18.6	20.5	22.4	27.8	16.4
New Britain School District	New Britain High School	9-12	30.6	24.1	26.8	23.3	22.7
New Haven School District	Clinton Avenue School	K-8	N/A	*	3.5	7.5	5.2
	Wexler/Grant Community School	PK-8	21.0	25.7	8.1	5.2	6.4
Winchester School District	Batcheller Early Education Center	PK-2	N/A	*	4.7	*	*
	Pearson School	3-6	6.5	8.8	3.8	5.1	3.2
Windham School District	Windham High School	9-12	30.8	30.1	28.2	23.8	9.1

* Counts are small and data have been suppressed to protect student confidentiality

With respect to suspension/expulsion rates, it should be noted that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in-person classes were cancelled in mid-March 2020; all districts switched to fully remote instruction for the remainder of the school year. Looking at the long-term trend over the past five years, notable declines in suspension/expulsion rates are evidenced at Wexler/Grant Community School in New Haven, New Britain High School, and Windham High School.

High School Graduation Rate

The four-year adjusted cohort graduation rate is the percentage of 9th graders who graduate with a regular high school diploma in four years or less. Some students benefit from having an extra year or two to complete high school. Therefore, in addition to the four-year rate, Connecticut’s Next Generation Accountability System incorporates the six-year rate in the accountability system to serve as an important additional measure of high school success. Separate points are awarded for the six-year graduation rate of students with high needs. The trend of four- and six-year graduation rates for the Commissioner’s Network high schools is presented here (table 4).

Table 4: High School Graduation Rate Trend for Commissioner’s Network Schools

District Name	School Name	Four-Year Rate (All Students)					Six-Year Rate (High Needs Students)			
		2015-16 Cohort	2016-17 Cohort	2017-18 Cohort	2018-19 Cohort	2019-20 Cohort	2013-14 Cohort	2014-15 Cohort	2015-16 Cohort	2016-17 Cohort
New Britain School District	New Britain High School	75.5	77.6	80.5	85.6	84.6	72.5	74.7	77.6	81.1
Windham School District	Windham High School	87.2	83.7	86.8	80.3	82.0	80.3	81.8	88.1	87.3

The four-year graduation rate of all students in the two schools exceeds 80 percent. New Britain High School's graduation rate has improved substantially over the past five years. The rates for both schools remain below the ultimate graduation rate accountability target of 94 percent. The six-year graduation rate for students with high needs has shown strong improvement in both schools – a clear indication that these schools are retaining non-graduates with high needs beyond four years and helping them achieve a regular high school diploma within six year.

Performance Evaluation Ratings

In light of extended class cancellations in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all components of the [Educator Evaluation and Support Plan \(EESP\) were waived](#) for the 2019-20 school year. Therefore, no performance evaluation rating data are available for the 2019-20 school year.

SCHOOLS EXITING THE NETWORK

East Hartford Middle School, a Cohort 4 school that entered the Network in fall 2015, exited the Commissioner's Network in spring 2020 after participating in the Network for the full extent of the permissible five years. As outlined in Connecticut General Statutes Section 10-223h, schools may participate in the Network for up to an additional two years based upon approval from the State Board of Education.

During spring 2020, a CSDE Turnaround Office consultant worked directly with school and district administration to compose the Network School Exit Audit Report including school data trends, successful initiatives and remaining challenges in the areas of Talent, Academics, Climate/Culture and Operations, as well as recommendation from the Department to the District. Using the Turnaround Office's School Turnaround Rubric, schools were rated on sub-indicators of Talent, Academics, Climate/Culture and Operations, and a summary of strengths and growth areas were provided to the schools in order to build a stronger understanding of the Network Operations and Instructional Exit Audit findings. In addition, the reports indicate the districts' commitment to sustaining the successful initiatives that the schools have implemented since entering the Network, as well as supporting the schools with remaining challenges.

PERFORMANCE SUMMARY

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting waiver from state assessments and accountability, many of the standard critical academic measures of achievement and growth are not available. Furthermore, the cancellation of in-person classes from mid-March to June also present challenges with comparing chronic absenteeism and suspension/expulsion rate data for 2019-20 with those from prior years. Performance evaluation ratings for staff also were not available for the 2019-20 year. Graduation rates (four-year and six-year) for the two high schools show promise but will need continued examination in the coming years.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Upon completion of the duration of time involved in the Commissioner's Network program and the finalization of the Network Operations and Instructional Exit Audit report findings, the CSDE Turnaround Office Consultant collaborates with district and school leadership to review the audit indicators, reviewing areas of strengths and areas for continued growth. Through this engagement, the district identifies how it plans to support successful school initiatives, while also identifying additional sustainability indicators to ensure the school will continue to improve. The CSDE Turnaround Consultant works with the district and school leadership teams through ongoing collaborative planning discussions, to pinpoint action steps that will be taken to address these indicators. By completing this process, the Commissioner's Network exiting schools leave the Network with a strategic plan for sustainability and improvement.