



THE BOARD REPORT



2000-01: Issue 6

February 2001

The State Board of Education met on Wednesday, February 7, 2001. Below are highlights of the meeting.

EARLY READING SUCCESS

The Board discussed two major state initiatives to implement early reading success:

- the federal Early Reading Success Initiative (ERSI), involving eight schools in three Connecticut districts (Hartford, New Haven and Bridgeport); and
- the state Early Reading Success Institute, an endeavor to support priority school districts in developing and implementing a three-year in-service reading instruction training plan for the professional development of the districts' school librarians, elementary school principals, and not less than 70 percent of its teachers in Grades 1-3.

The federal initiative was made possible by a \$1.6 million grant to the Connecticut State Department of Education in collaboration with Haskins Laboratory and the University of Rhode Island. The goal of the project is to provide teachers and teacher-trainers with a solid foundation in reading research and to bridge the gap between theory and practice. **Anne Fowler, research scientist at Haskins Laboratory**, explained to the Board that the initiative is research-based and driven; focuses on teacher knowledge and skills; relies on year-long support from an Early Reading Success Fellow who is an expert in language and early reading and works with the K-1 teachers and teacher specialists half-time; and is tailored to the schools' individual needs. The efficacy of this literacy initiative is being evaluated for its impact on student achievement, teacher knowledge and success in school implementation.

Linda Liss-Bronstein of Maria Sanchez School in Hartford explained the role of the Fellows in the Early Reading Success initiative. Ms. Liss-Bronstein stated that in a school in which 92% of students come from homes in which English is not the primary language, the importance of focusing on early literacy skills of kindergarten and Grade 1 students cannot be overemphasized. Monthly in-service blocks and continuous follow-through in the classroom have been effective, she noted. *(continued on page 3)*

POSITION STATEMENT ON CREATING A HEALTHY SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

The Board adopted a Position Statement on Creating a Healthy School Environment. The statement, drafted by the Board's Policy Development Committee, conveys the importance of teaching respect for others and self, integrity, citizenship and developing a commitment and obligation to the school and community, as well as the importance of a healthy physical environment. The statement focuses on the roles of the school, local school boards of education, families and students in working to create a positive school climate. A copy of the statement is attached to this issue of **The Board Report**, and has been posted on the Department's website.

Several individuals participated in a panel discussion of the link between educational success and the provision of student support services. Speakers addressed how coordinated counseling, guidance and psychological support services in schools and communities can improve the mental and behavioral health for all students.

Dr. William Johnson, Assistant Superintendent of Windham Public Schools, discussed the correlation between attendance and academic achievement. He attributed absences to several reasons, including poor health (e.g., asthma, depression, etc.) lack of parental supervision, fear of being bullied, boredom, and feeling disconnected. **Catina Caban-Owens, school social worker in Windham**, described the team approach to address student absences. Working under the beliefs that all children can learn and that all families are strong and resilient, Ms. Caban-Owens stated, health workers, educators, social service providers and parents together can address the causes of student absences. The school social worker serves as an advocate between the school and the family.

Dr. Barbara Fischetti, Coordinator of Psychological Services for the Westport Public Schools, explained the benefits of individual counseling and support groups for high school students. Dr. Fischetti stated that all students should be entitled to these services as they often prevent more serious problems from occurring at in the future. Support groups are offered to Westport's high school students who are adopted, students who have a special needs sibling, students who are new to the school, and students who wish to quit smoking. Another integral part of her job, Dr. Fischetti added, is coordinating crisis intervention teams and conducting assessments.

Dr. Nancy DePalma, Director of Guidance for the West Hartford Public Schools, described the shift to a standards-based model of guidance services, making them an integral part of the school experience and a service that is provided equitably to all students. **Ed D'Addio, a middle school guidance counselor in West Hartford**, described an example of how this model is applied. Students engage in a project in which they recreate a cave setting. The project enhances their analytical skills and artistic, communication and writing skills. The project gives students an understanding of how art reveals cultural norms and beliefs, how the media influences such norms and beliefs, and what factors influence group success.

Representing the **South Windsor Public Schools** were **Eleanor Lee, Principal of Eli Terry Elementary School**, and **Maureen Shepard, school social worker**. Ms. Shepard discussed the success of the peer mediation program implemented in Grades 2-5, wherein students receive training in how to conduct mediations. The training assists students in developing problem-solving and leadership skills. Ms. Shepard attributes the reduction in the number of students referred for services to the success of the peer mediation program.

**CONNECTICUT ADVISORY COUNCIL
FOR TEACHER PROFESSIONAL
STANDARDS**

The Board received the 2000 Annual Report of the Connecticut Advisory Council for Teacher Professional Standards. The report, required by Section 10-144d of the Connecticut General Statutes, summarizes the Council's key issues in 2000. The primary focus of the Council's work related to ensuring an adequate supply of qualified teachers in Connecticut's classrooms.

**CONNECTICUT ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR
SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR PROFESSIONAL
STANDARDS**

The Board received the 2000 Annual Report of the Connecticut Advisory Council for School Administrator Professional Standards. The report, required by Section 10-144e of the Connecticut General Statutes, summarizes the Council's key issues in 2000. The primary focus of the Council was on administrator shortages. Council members Roch Girard and David Cressey will serve on the Commission on the Teacher and School Administrator Shortage and Minority Recruitment, established under Public Act 00-187.

EARLY READING SUCCESS *(continued from page 1)*

Diane Cloud, Principal of Laurel School in Bloomfield described how ERSI had required that she continuously hone her knowledge in order to be an effective leader. She also discussed the impact ERSI has had on improving instruction, moving her school from a "very good" status to an "excellent" status. The grant has allowed teachers to use new teaching strategies and make changes in their classrooms that are directly linked to research (e.g., looping in kindergarten and Grade 1). Teachers attend monthly professional development seminars. Further, Ms. Cloud added, the Haskins grant has promoted collegiality among teachers, providing funds for substitute teachers to allow classroom teachers to meet during the school day to exchange ideas about effective practices.

Eileen Howley, Chief of the Bureau of Curriculum and Instruction, State Department of Education, described the state's Early Reading Success Institute and follow-up activities. The Regional Educational Service Center (RESC) Alliance kicked off the Institute in October 2000. RESC representatives are working with districts to identify types of training and technical assistance, and began creating training modules that represent Connecticut's Blueprint for Reading Achievement. The Department will continue to expand this Institute to reach all of the priority schools and will provide technical assistance to support implementation of the in-service plans. An evaluator will assess the effectiveness of the Institute in terms of student achievement, teacher knowledge and success in school implementation.

PRAXIS II TESTS - GRADES 5-9

The Board approved the discontinuation of the Principles of Learning and Teaching, Grades 5-9, effective March 1, 2001. This test was eliminated because we now have validated tests for middle school content in English language arts, mathematics, science and social studies. Pedagogy is assessed through the Beginning Educator Support and Training (BEST) program. The Board's action will increase consistency in testing requirements across middle and high school levels.

DENIAL OF CONTINUATION OF CERTIFICATION

By a recorded roll call vote, the State Board of Education voted unanimously to deny continuation of Alberto J. Ayala's professional educator certificate. The Board rendered its decision after accepting and adopting the proposed findings of fact prepared by the hearing officer assigned to this matter, affirming the decision of the Department of Education to deny Mr. Ayala continuation of his certificate, endorsed in elementary education (Grades Prekindergarten-8), Spanish (Grades 7-12), and history and social studies (Grades 7-12).

SUMMER FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM

The Board approved the Fiscal Year 2001 State Plan for the Summer Food Service Program for Children. Funds will be used to provide meals for needy children during the summer months while schools are not in session. Efforts will be made to expand the program in certain areas of the state where levels of participation have been low. Connecticut receives approximately \$3.1 million in federal funds for this program.

APPROVAL OF EASTCONN LEASE

The Board approved the lease agreement between EASTCONN and the Capitol Theater Development Corporation for the Capitol Theater Building in Willimantic. EASTCONN has submitted a proposed construction project for a Regional Arts Magnet School, to be housed in the former theater. State Board approval of the lease is a condition of grant eligibility.

REGIONAL VOCATIONAL-TECHNICAL SCHOOL SYSTEM (RVTSS) MATTERS

Mid-Year Progress Report

The Board received the RVTSS Mid-year Progress Report on the individual school improvement plans. The report contains a summary of activities conducted through December 2000 in each of the eight critical practices: teaching and learning; school culture; technology; fiscal and facilities; leadership; assessment; accountability; and professional development. Progress is reported through school visits, monthly meetings with the directors of the vocational-technical schools, analysis of data, and direct observation of teacher activities in the schools.

Technology Plan Update

The Board received a report on the implementation of technology in the RVTSS. Highlights of the report include:

- Communication systems have been enhanced via telecommunications, the system's website, electronic mail, and Internet access.
- Productivity has increased due to access to computers and uniformity in their applications, as well as distance learning facilities in three schools.
- Technology has had a significant impact on the curriculum.
- Administrative electronic systems are in place in each school, and administrators are being held accountable for their use.
- Professional development programs include dissemination of system goals and a model of a digital classroom and assistance from the regional educational service centers (RESCs) in technology training.
- Maintenance and support have increased with the hiring of six additional local area network (LAN) specialists, and plans are in place for schools to become laboratories for experimentation and real work experience for future technology professionals.
- Efforts are being made to enhance funding for technology to ensure that a permanent funding stream is in place to support and enhance the system's technology goals.
- Ongoing assessment of progress over time will take place.
- The system has several partners in its efforts to use technology effectively. These include the RESCs, the Distance Learning Consortium, Southern New England Telephone, Connecticut Business and Industry Association, and community colleges.

CONNECTICUT STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

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<p>❖ To obtain a copy of a report considered by the Board, please contact the Office of Public Information, 860-566-1304.</p>	<p><i>Theodore S. Sergi, Secretary</i></p> <p><i>Valerie Lewis, ex officio</i></p>

The Board Report is published monthly and is posted on the Department's Internet site (<http://www.state.ct.us/sde>). It provides a summary of matters considered by the State Board of Education at its regular monthly meetings. The Department welcomes comments and suggestions concerning the format and content of **The Board Report**. Please submit your comments to Pamela V. Bergin, Office of the State Board of Education, 165 Capitol Avenue, Room 301, Hartford, CT 06106, or pamela.bergin@po.state.ct.us

The next meeting of the State Board of Education is scheduled for Wednesday, **March 7, 2001**.

The meeting will be held in Room 307 of the State Office Building, 165 Capitol Avenue, Hartford, Connecticut, at **11:00 a.m.**

Visitors are advised to call the Office of Board Matters (860-566-5371) to confirm the meeting date and time.

