



THE BOARD REPORT



2002-2003: Issue 2

October 9, 2002

The following is a summary of the October 9, 2002, meeting of the State Board of Education.

SPOTLIGHT ON SUCCESS: CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP AT AMISTAD ACADEMY, NEW HAVEN

Dacia Toll, Executive Director of Amistad Academy Charter School in New Haven, described significant progress made by Amistad students in just three years of operation. Amistad Academy currently serves 221 students in Grades 5-8. The incoming Grade 5 student population is predominantly (95%) minority, high poverty (86%) and significantly behind academically (on average, more than two years below grade level, according to baseline achievement tests). Ms. Toll provided the following background information:

- o Amistad Academy received 455 applications for the 65 new seats available this fall.
- o In 2001, Amistad's 8th graders, 87 percent of whom receive free or reduced-price lunches, achieved at the same level as their suburban counterparts on the Connecticut Mastery Test. They exceeded the statewide average in writing and math and were close to the state average in reading.
- o All but four of the 32 Grade 8 students (three of whom are special education students) reached either proficiency or mastery in math and writing.
- o Data show a direct correlation between the number of years students have been at Amistad and their performance. Students who arrived at Amistad in Grade 6 were concentrated at that time in levels 1 and 2 on the CMT, and two years later were in levels 3 and 4 on the Grade 8 CMT.
- o Last year, Amistad students attended 186 instructional days, attending school from 7:30 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. four days a week. Students are dismissed at 1:30 p.m. on Fridays to allow for two hours of staff training and meeting time each week.
- o All students receive more than 3.5 hours of instruction in language arts and mathematics every day. All students receive instruction in science, technology and civics/history. Grade 8 students take Spanish I. The final hour of the school day is reserved for art, theater, music and physical fitness classes.

Ms. Toll and Doug McCurry, Associate Director of Curriculum, focused their remarks on the Amistad leadership team's relentless pursuit of closing the achievement gap and the positive results of those efforts. Student achievement is determined by (1) what is taught and (2) how it is taught. Ms. Toll stressed the importance of a clear, standards-based curriculum and periodic assessments based on those standards. Instructional materials, too, are standards based. Teachers use achievement data to determine the best way to ensure that skills are mastered, not just covered. Once skills have been mastered, they continue to be incorporated into the curriculum throughout the year. Further, teacher supervision and evaluation is linked directly to the mastery of standards.

Teacher recruitment and hiring is key to the school's success, and Ms. Toll described this as one of her most important responsibilities. Teachers must be intelligent and willing to work in accordance with the school's expectations and needs. They must be receptive to self-assessment and feedback received through the school's internal coaching process. Hiring decisions are made after a comprehensive review of each applicant. In addition to submitting writing samples and

attending a formal interview, prospective teachers are observed while teaching at the school and participate in a follow-up debriefing session.

An extraordinary amount of time and emphasis is spent on professional development activities, internal coaching and evaluation of staff members. Ms. Toll told the Board that Amistad Academy "obsesses" about independent reading, and students engage daily in three separate hour-long classes for reading comprehension, writing and decoding. Teachers are given a budget to select books for their in-class library to facilitate and support individual student interests and to encourage reading.

Rory Edwards, Dean of Students, described the orderly school culture. Amistad holds high expectations of its students, he noted, and incorporates the REACH approach into the school climate. Students are expected to demonstrate respect, enthusiasm, achievement, citizenship and hard work. Rules are consistently enforced, and if students break a rule, they are required to evaluate their behavior and determine how to correct it. The school also has schoolwide recognition systems in place.

When asked how Amistad's success could be duplicated elsewhere, staff members responded that additional instructional time is needed, but cautioned that "quantity" without a corresponding increase in quality of instruction will not yield the same results. Teachers must "own" the standards, and their evaluation must be linked directly to how well their students' perform. For further information about Amistad Academy, please call Dacia Toll, Executive Director, at 203.773.0364.

LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS

The Board adopted the following legislative proposals for the 2003 General Assembly:

- ✍ Improve **indoor air quality in schools** by (1) providing construction reimbursement for the correction of a documented indoor environmental quality deficiency not otherwise covered under a health, safety or building code; (2) requiring all school construction applications to include an environmental site assessment, roof designs that ensure proper drainage and construction plans that address indoor air quality and incorporate proven air quality technology and (3) requiring that heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems be maintained and operated in accordance with industry standards.
- ✍ Permit a school to record **Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT)** results for each student on such student's permanent record and transcript; and require that a school note successful achievement for the appropriate component part of the CAPT on the permanent record and transcript of any student who meets or exceeds the statewide mastery goal level on such part and issue a certificate of mastery for each such component.
- ✍ Improve the **Beginning Educator Support and Training (BEST) Program** by extending the timeframe for completing the BEST assessment for teachers who begin teaching on or after January 1 in a school year; giving the Commissioner of Education more flexibility in extending the two-year timeframe for completing BEST for good cause by allowing him to grant two-year extensions, rather than one year extensions.
- ✍ Conform state law with federal categories of **racial and ethnic minorities**.
- ✍ Amend the **school readiness program** by making it possible to calculate at the beginning of the fiscal year how much money a school readiness program has available for program administration, and providing more flexibility in the qualifications of school readiness program staff.
- ✍ Include **advanced practice registered nurses** in the list of licensed practitioners who are able to provide to school districts written notice restricting the physical activities of students.
- ✍ Make technical and minor changes to the **Education Cost Sharing (ECS) statutes** concerning the submission of the equalized net grand list and the transmission of the preliminary equalized net grand list data.
- ✍ Amend the statute concerning the administration of **no-nexus state agency placement grants** by changing two dates so that they conform with dates established by the General Assembly in 2000 for other similar grants for students requiring special education.

These proposals were submitted to the 2002 General Assembly. Many of them had public hearings and received committee approval and were adopted by either the Senate or House of Representatives, but were not enacted by the General Assembly.

The following proposals were discussed by the Board, and will be presented to the Board for adoption on November 6, 2002:

- ✍ improve the operation and funding of the **interdistrict magnet school program**;
- ✍ expand the **minority teacher incentive program** to include students interested in becoming student support services personnel;
- ✍ allow state school construction reimbursement and a bonus for construction of a **family resource center** in an elementary school;
- ✍ eliminate the cap on the expenditures for computer equipment for **adult education programs** that are eligible for reimbursement and require coursework in civics and American government for the issuance of an adult education diploma;
- ✍ require towns to provide the same **health services** to students in state charter schools as they are already required to provide to students in private nonprofit schools;
- ✍ require the State Bond Commission to act on **bond authorizations for the Regional Vocational-Technical Schools** for equipment, repairs, buses and technology by August 31 each year;
- ✍ provide that state funds for the **costs of providing educational services to certain special education students** be included in the budget of the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services rather than in the Department of Education budget;
- ✍ streamline the **school-to-career program**;
- ✍ provide a process for the state to **intervene in school district operations** in certain circumstances;
- ✍ permit school districts to adopt **equivalencies for graduation credits** to provide greater flexibility in determining compliance with state-mandated graduation requirements;
- ✍ extend the current **regulations concerning educator certification** that were to have been repealed on July 1, 2003, to allow for a comprehensive review of Connecticut's educator certification continuum;

LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS, continued

- ✍ amend provisions concerning construction bonuses for cooperative arrangements made pursuant to Section 10-158a of the Connecticut General Statutes;
- ✍ specify that the mandate requiring certain Grade 4 and Grade 6 priority school district students to attend **summer school** be within available appropriations;
- ✍ amend the provisions concerning the **reemployment of retired teachers** to raise the amount of money they are able to earn when they are employed temporarily and allow them to be employed for not more than two years with one board of education, without the statutory salary limitations, in subject shortage areas and other positions deemed necessary by the Commissioner of Education;
- ✍ amend the statute concerning **school construction grant applicants** by changing the date by which local funding must be secured from June 30 to November 30 in order for a project (for which an application was filed by June 30) to be included in the priority list for the subsequent year;
- ✍ define a method of **prioritizing individual school construction projects within categories** on the annual school construction priority list submitted to the General Assembly for grant authorizations;
- ✍ provide that the Commissioner of Education, rather than the State Board of Education, approve a town or regional school district's entering into a **design-build contract for new school construction**;
- ✍ extend the validity of the **elementary education and comprehensive special education endorsements** to include kindergarten;
- ✍ extend the following provisions concerning educator certificate holders to **individuals with permits and authorizations issued by the State Board**:
 - the denial of issuance or reissuance of certificates to applicants convicted of enumerated offenses;
 - the requirement that the Department of Children and Families (DCF) notify the state agency responsible for the issuance of a certificate when the Commissioner of DCF has reasonable cause to believe that a child has been abused by a staff member of a public or private institution or facility providing care for children or private school who holds a certificate issued by the state; and
 - the requirement that copies of mandated written reports concerning certified school employees be sent to the Commissioner of Education.
- ✍ update provisions concerning the **Beginning Educator Support and Training (BEST) Program** by deleting obsolete language and specifying that beginning teachers shall be assessed by educators with teaching experience in the same general subject area as the beginning teacher;
- ✍ eliminate the \$100 statutory **cap on tuition fees for apprenticeship programs** offered by the Regional Vocational-Technical Schools, and make this program self-sustaining;
- ✍ give preference to students in schools identified as needing improvement under the federal No Child Left Behind Act when admitting students into the **Open Choice Program**;
- ✍ provide **grants for charter school renovations** when a charter school is renewed for the first time;
- ✍ allow **licensed occupational and physical therapists employed by school districts to administer medications** pursuant to the written order of a physician;
- ✍ allow, on a case-by-case basis, school nurses and school medical advisors to approve plans for the **administration by paraprofessionals of an epipen to a student with a medically diagnosed allergic condition**;
- ✍ provide that the Department of Public Health adopt **regulations concerning the administration of medications in schools** in consultation with the Department of Education;
- ✍ require that a local or regional board of education have a **technology plan** developed or updated during the three-year period preceding its application for information technology grant funds;
- ✍ clarify grant **eligibility as a priority school district** by more clearly identifying the year in which a district would have to be designated as a priority school district and the period of time during which this eligibility would apply;
- ✍ amend the **special education statutes** to conform with federal requirements, eliminate duplicative language and clarify that boards of education can make placements in private facilities providing special education only if the facility is approved by the Commissioner of Education. However, the Commissioner may give approval to placements in non-approved or out-of-state facilities if he determines that there is no approved private facility that is appropriate and available for a particular child;
- ✍ allow the Department to use up to 50 percent of **unexpended school readiness funds** for supplemental grants to towns, and up to 50 percent of those funds to enhance the system of professional development for preschool educators in school readiness programs;
- ✍ require all **state-funded Head Start programs** to allocate at least 10 percent of their state funds for activities designed to increase the literacy and numeracy skills of children and provide for a five-year limit to grant awards, with reapplication after five years; and
- ✍ clarify and simplify the listing of which services family resource centers must provide.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN CONNECTICUT: 2001-2002

The Board discussed the 2001-2002 annual report on special education. Findings include: 12.3 percent of the 560,701 Connecticut schoolchildren enrolled in Grades K-12, as well as 5,051 preschool children, were receiving services from special education teachers, speech/language pathologists, school psychologists, physical or occupational therapists or some other person specially trained to work with students with disabilities. The special education prevalence rate has been on the decline since its peak of 13.9 percent in 1995-1996. Just over 40 percent of the students receiving special education services have been classified as learning disabled, 20 percent with a speech and language impairment, 10.6 percent with emotional disturbance, 8.7 percent of students with disabilities are "Other Health Impaired," which indicates chronic health problems; and 5.3 percent with intellectual disabilities. The remaining 12.5 percent includes students with visual or hearing impairments, orthopedic impairments, multiple disabilities, traumatic brain injuries and autism.

Other highlights of the report include:

- The amount of time students with disabilities spend with their nondisabled peers has remained steady for six years, with a mean of 68 percent.
- While young children (ages 3 through 5) with disabilities represent only 6 percent of the general population of the same age group, they represent approximately 10 percent of the total special education population served. The majority of these children are identified as "developmentally delayed," with the second largest disability category being "speech and language impaired."
- The total special education expenditure for Connecticut (unaudited) for 2000-2001 was \$955,656,108. Federal dollars made up only 5.7 percent of special education costs, while the state share was 35.1 percent and the district share was 59.2 percent.
- On average, 71.3 percent of students with disabilities participated in the standard administration of the Connecticut Mastery Test in Grades 4, 6 and 8; 25.2 percent participated in an alternative state assessment; and 3.5 percent were absent or had an invalid score. In Grade 10, 61.8 percent of students with disabilities participated in the Connecticut Academic Performance Test.

For further information or to obtain a copy of the report, please call the Bureau of Special Education and Pupil Services, 860.807.2025.

POSITION STATEMENT ON ADULT EDUCATION

The Board adopted a revised Position Statement on Adult Education and stressed the importance of an enhanced public awareness program and recruitment efforts by local school boards to address the needs of more than 500,000 Connecticut adult residents who lack basic skills in reading, writing and computation.

The statement addresses accessibility to a well-defined system of adult education, English language and literacy services, and the need for quality programs that are assessed by clear, measurable standards. The statement also defines the link between adult education and early childhood initiatives, describing adult education as a "bridge across the achievement gap when linked with a district's early childhood initiatives."

This statement has been disseminated to educators, local school board members, workforce boards and adult education programs. A copy of the statement is attached to this issue of *The Board Report*. It also has been posted on the Department's website (www.state.ct.us/sde).

CONDITION OF PUBLIC SCHOOL FACILITIES

The Board received the *Annual Report on the Condition of Connecticut's Public School Facilities*. The report is compiled from data provided by each school district and addresses construction activity and cost estimates, general building conditions, appearance and upkeep, service systems, dedicated specialty areas, building size and capacity, and long-range facility planning, maintenance and implementation. The report will be submitted to the General Assembly in compliance with Section 10-220 of the Connecticut General Statutes.

TEACHER OF THE YEAR CEREMONY

The Board gratefully accepted a gift from ING Financial Advisors to support the Teacher of the Year Program. This is the eighth year ING Financial Advisors has awarded the Department of Education a grant to support this program. This year's gift will be used to sponsor the annual awards ceremony at the Bushnell Theater on October 30, 2002, and will support the Teacher of the Year for travel and other expenses incurred in the performance of her duties.

APPLICATIONS FOR FUNDS

The Board approved the submission of the following applications to the United States Department of Education:

Federal Funds for Charter Schools: The Department requested \$659,714 for 2002-03, \$695,231 for 2003-04 and \$732,072 for 2004-05. Funds will support the opening of New Beginnings Family Academy Charter School in Bridgeport as well as the 12 charter schools already in existence, including development, planning and evaluation activities, and the dissemination of best practices.

Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Program Grant: It is anticipated that the grant award will be \$300,000 for each year of the grant period (2002-03, 2003-04 and 2004-05). Funds will be used to improve services to gifted and talented students and develop the capacity of the state and local education agencies to serve these students most effectively.

CERTIFICATION REGULATIONS

The Board declared its intent to amend the Regulations Concerning State Educator Certificates, Permits and Authorizations and authorized the Commissioner to effect such changes through regulatory or legislative action, whichever course of action would most expeditiously facilitate the resolution of the issues.

The proposal included changes in certification requirements that would (1) include kindergarten in the allowable grades for a comprehensive special education endorsement (currently it is valid for Grades 1-12); (2) include kindergarten in the allowable grades for an elementary education endorsement (currently it is valid for Grades 1-6); (3) include state-approved Birth to Three programs as acceptable venues for the purpose of candidates for teaching certificates to acquire teaching experience; (4) repeal the certification regulations that are due to take effect July 1, 2003; and (4) eliminate the expiration date of the current regulations.

The Board's approval of these changes will allow for a comprehensive review of the entire professional development continuum, including how to attract approximately 20,000 individuals over the next 10 years to fill the positions of teachers who will be retiring within that period. The focus will include the Teacher Preparation Program Approval Regulations, the Teacher Certification Regulations, the assessment requirements (Praxis I and Praxis II), the Beginning Educator Support and Training (BEST) Program, and the continuing education unit (CEU) requirements for teachers.

The Department will submit to the Board by November 2003 its proposals for a reconceptualized certification continuum and revisions to the regulations.

Regional Vocational-Technical School System (RVTSS) Matters

Back to School Report

Superintendent of Schools Dominic Spera reported on the opening of the 2002-03 school year. Highlights of his report included:

- ✍ The October 1, 2002, enrollment for Grades 9-12 was 11,223, a 3 percent increase over the October 1, 2001, enrollment.
- ✍ The Regional Vocational-Technical School System serves 12,419 students during the day, including adult day students, diploma students at the Bristol Technical Education Center and Grade 6-8 students who attend the Trailblazers Charter School, housed within J.M. Wright Regional Vocational-Technical School.
- ✍ This year's freshman class, 3,400 students, is the largest since 1985.
- ✍ Females comprise 36 percent of the secondary enrollment.
- ✍ The system average percent of attendance for October 1, 2002, was 94 percent.

Application for Funds

The Board approved an application for \$123,342 for the *Rewarding Youth Achievement Program Grant*, for submission to the Capital Region Workforce Development Board. The funds will support academic enrichment, career planning and leadership skills activities for 100 students at A.I. Prince Regional Vocational-Technical School in Hartford.

CONNECTICUT STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

(effective July 1, 2002)

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NOTE: The Board will meet on November 6, 2002. The meeting will begin at 9:30 a.m. in Room 307 of the State Office Building, 165 Capitol Avenue, Hartford, CT.

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.

Commissioner's Report

Commissioner Sergi announced that Connecticut was named winner of the first annual "Smartest State Award" by Morgan Quitno Press, an independent research and publishing company. Criteria used to determine this ranking included per pupil expenditures, public high school graduation rates, average class size, the percentage of staff who are school district administrators, student reading and mathematics proficiency, pupil-teacher ratios and teacher salaries.

