

NEWS

Connecticut Department of Education



Dr. Mark K. McQuillan
Commissioner

For Immediate Release:

Monday, January 28, 2008

Contact: Tom Murphy 860.713.6525

State Education Department Working with 12 Districts to Close Achievement Gap

The Connecticut State Department of Education is working directly with twelve of the state's urban school districts to improve the quality of their educational programs and to help their students to achieve at higher levels.

"This work is about taking joint responsibility for our state's neediest children by forming partnerships between the Department and local school districts and providing support, resources and guidance to achieve common goals. This effort represents a strong step forward in addressing Connecticut's biggest educational challenge—closing the achievement gap," said Commissioner Mark K. McQuillan.

Legislation adopted in the 2007 Special Session (P.A. 07-3, section 32) identifies school districts with the greatest need for improvement and gives new authority and responsibility to the State Education Department to support improvement activities in each district. Under the legislation, the Commissioner and State Board of Education are given the authority to evaluate each district's strengths and weaknesses, work with each district to develop a focused and prioritized plan for improved student performance, approve certain expenditures for reform, and monitor progress.

Teams from the State Education Department have been assigned to work with each district for the next several years to support local administrators and boards to implement their plans.

Districts identified are: Bridgeport, East Hartford, Hartford, Meriden, Middletown, New Britain, New Haven, New London, Norwalk, Norwich, Waterbury, and Windham.

The districts serve more than 113,500 students, nearly 20 percent of the state's public school enrollment.

“It is important to understand that these districts serve children with the greatest needs. Poverty, student mobility, limited English language proficiency, teacher turnover, and lack of resources are significant factors affecting progress - factors which come into play well before students enter kindergarten. We recognize the challenges that these districts face and are committed to doing everything we can to effect positive change. It is vital that we work together to maximize our efforts on reshaping schools in need of improvement,” said McQuillan.

As part of the process:

- The commissioner met with the superintendent and board chair of each district to discuss school and district improvement goals and to review and discuss current improvement plans;
- A portion of each of the district’s municipal ECS increase has been directed to school improvement actions, as approved by the commissioner;
- Assessment and demographic data have been reviewed and evaluated by SDE staff;
- A district-wide assessment and individual assessments of several schools in each district have been conducted by Cambridge Education, an international school improvement organization that has conducted similar evaluations in the U.S. and in several other countries. The assessment reports will be submitted to the State Department of Education and to the superintendent of each district for review during the months of January and February;
- Local districts will then revise improvement plans to address findings in the Cambridge Assessments and present focused plans to the Commissioner and State Board of Education. Teams from the State Education Department will assist the districts in their plans;
- The State Education Department will work with districts to implement strategies such as programs addressing the learning needs of diverse student populations, targeted professional development, leadership teams, use of data to inform policy and instruction, and improvements to curriculum and teaching practice;
- The State Board of Education will be reviewing the results of the assessments for potential implications for state policy and legislative recommendations.

The Cambridge assessments involved extensive review of what is working well in the districts and what needs improvement. Information was gathered from a variety of sources in each district. Interviews were conducted with central office and school-based staff, local school board members, teacher and administrative union representatives, parents, students and community partners. District policy and curriculum documents were reviewed. The assessments also included discussions of internal operating procedures such as human resources, transportation, food and fiscal services.

- end -