

**Priority 6: Invitational Priority -- School-Level Conditions for Reform, Innovation, and Learning** *(not scored)*

The Secretary is particularly interested in applications in which the State’s participating LEAs (as defined in this notice) seek to create the conditions for reform and innovation as well as the conditions for learning by providing schools with flexibility and autonomy in such areas as—

- (i) Selecting staff;
- (ii) Implementing new structures and formats for the school day or year that result in increased learning time (as defined in this notice);
- (iii) Controlling the school’s budget;
- (iv) Awarding credit to students based on student performance instead of instructional time;
- (v) Providing comprehensive services to high-need students (as defined in this notice) (*e.g.*, by mentors and other caring adults; through local partnerships with community-based organizations, nonprofit organizations, and other providers);
- (vi) Creating school climates and cultures that remove obstacles to, and actively support, student engagement and achievement; and
- (vii) Implementing strategies to effectively engage families and communities in supporting the academic success of their students.

*The State is invited to provide a discussion of this priority in the text box below, but such description is optional. Any supporting evidence the State believes will be helpful must be described and, where relevant, included in the Appendix. For attachments included in the Appendix, note in the narrative the location where the attachments can be found.*

*Recommended maximum response length, if any: Two pages*

As described in Section (F), Connecticut has created an urban school reform model grounded in innovation known as CommPACT schools. The University of Connecticut's Neag School of Education is the central clearinghouse coordinating supports within and across Connecticut's highest-need school districts: Bridgeport, Hartford, New Haven, New London and Waterbury. Core to the success of this reform effort is the ability to select staff, implement changes in the school day and year and create a positive school environment which engages families and promotes high student achievement.

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UCONN is Connecticut's flagship public university and its Neag School of Education is well positioned as an educational research-based institution to provide the foundation for exemplary curricula designed to improve urban schools. CommPACT schools are local education agency sponsored alternative schools staffed by faculty which agree at the outset to alter parts of the collective bargaining agreement in order to improve student learning. The Neag School of Education provides each CommPACT school with a customized set of educational supports which are research-based and designed to close the achievement gap. Participating schools have utilized the following resources to improve student success: Positive Behavior Supports, Accelerated Schools Plus, Atlas Learning Communities and the Schoolwide Enrichment Model. These programs are managed by teachers, community leaders, parents and administrators who share a collective vision of sparking educational innovation through flexibility and autonomy in curriculum, governance and school finance.

Selecting key staff willing to work outside the confines of the regular school day and year is the targeted purpose of the Neag School's CommPACT school model. By conducting intensive audits of each partner school through focus group surveys, administrators, teachers, students, parents and the community are invited to express their unified vision of school improvement. Once audits are completed and analyzed, the principal and 90 percent of the teachers and local education agency administrators of the CommPACT school must agree to the prescribed road to school reform. The result of the newly established CommPACT school is ownership in an educational enterprise autonomous from the traditional local or regional board of education rooted in a high degree of collaboration.

In only two years, CommPACT schools have engaged parents and communities in eight schools by embracing a new climate and culture. Early gains have come in the form of redesigning literacy and mathematics curricula to improved student performance. Moreover, each CommPACT school site has implemented a growth model for measuring student achievement. Improved student behavior and increased parent and community engagement have set the tone for this effort. CommPACT schools have challenged the traditional school structure providing Connecticut with another rich public school choice option.