



# Connecticut District Meta Analysis

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### **Summary**

This report will provide a set of emerging themes and recommendations derived from Quality Reviews commissioned by the Connecticut State Department of Education of 12 educational districts. The report will highlight strengths to build on and opportunities for improvement based on five criteria domains. It will also summarize the commonality of improvement opportunities, highlighting areas that will support the State Board of Education in addressing potential implications for state policy and legislative recommendations. The “themes” in this report are general trends highlighted in the 12 District Review Reports. Assumptions about individual districts should be based on the specific Review Report for that district.

The commissioning of this report highlights the sense of urgency among Connecticut state policy, education, and political leaders to improve the quality of education for students in the most challenging educational districts. The District Review is one part of the State program for school accountability and improvement.

### **Background Information**

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 have 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. The aim is to form partnerships between the State Education Department and local school districts, providing support, resources and guidance to close the gap in student achievement.

The Connecticut State Department of Education has identified twelve urban school districts where there is urgent need to improve the quality of educational programs and help students achieve at higher levels. The districts 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 enrolment. Each of the districts serves children with the greatest needs. Significant factors affecting progress are poverty, student mobility, limited English language proficiency, teacher turnover, and lack of resources. The Department has assigned teams to work with each district for the next several years to support local administrators and boards to implement their plans.

The Department has contracted with Cambridge Education to carry out assessments in each of the districts, as well as individual assessments of several schools in each district. The assessment reports were submitted to the State Department of Education and to the superintendent of each district for review during the months of January and February.

Prior to the commencement of Cambridge led assessments, the commissioner met with the superintendent and board chair of each district to discuss school and district improvement goals, and to review current improvement plans. In addition, assessment and demographic data was reviewed and evaluated by Department staff. As a consequence, a portion of each of the district's municipal ECS increase was directed to school improvement actions, as approved by the commissioner. Local districts will 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.

Following assessment, 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.

**Connecticut District Review Information**

The Cambridge Review process involved extensive study of what is working well in each district and where there are opportunities for improvement. Information was gathered from a variety of sources. 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. District Review also included discussions of internal operating procedures such as human resources, transportation, food and fiscal services.

Review Teams comprised a mixture of full-time Cambridge Education employees, Cambridge Consultants with wide ranging international experience of District Review processes and Connecticut State Education Department Consultants.

**District Reviews reported findings under the following criteria domain headings:**

- Domain 1:** How good is the district’s ability to provide high quality: Attainment, Learning, Teaching, Curriculum and Assessment?
- Domain 2:** How good is the district’s ability to provide high quality: Leadership, Culture and Accountability?
- Domain 3:** How good is the district’s ability to provide high quality: Management of Human and Fiscal Support?
- Domain 4:** How good is the district’s ability to provide high quality: Operational Services?
- Domain 5:** How good is the district’s ability to provide high quality: Stakeholder Engagement and Satisfaction?

Criteria domains include clusters of sub-criteria grouped together to encourage systems thinking and a focus on the impact of strategy and action on student learning. Each criteria cluster includes a set of two to six sub-criteria. Reviewers are required to provide a written report and progress judgment based a triangulation of evidence gathered in the process (using data, individual and group perceptions, and direct observation).

Each domain received an overall evaluation grade from the following possible outcomes:

Grade	Achievement	Criteria Domain Judgements
1	Below basic	in need of substantial improvement
2	Basic	in need of improvement
3	Proficient	meets requirements ( seen as meeting the basic or minimum level )
4	Goal	exceeds (minimum) requirements
5	Advanced	excellent

### Emerging Themes

#### Things go particularly well...

- When districts and schools make effective use of specialist coaches and external consultants, leaders and teachers are encouraged to be reflective of current practice, innovative in curriculum design and creative in developing their teachers' repertoire of strategies to meet students' needs.
- When teachers embrace their accountability to students, they strive to improve pedagogy and respond positively to monitoring and evaluation of their practice.
- When curriculum design includes planned opportunities for regular and meaningful assessment. This enables teachers to measure student progress, set realistically challenging goals and make adaptations to instruction to ensure an exact match to student needs.
- When students' good conduct, application to task and positive attitudes are consistently praised and rewarded they become engaged and motivated in their learning.
- \When periodic summative assessments are carefully paced alongside substantial periods of teaching input, supported by frequent formative assessment, teachers can effectively monitor student progress and plan for the next steps in learning.
- When data is carefully analyzed, it enables an exact understanding of student demographics and supports the setting of precise priority goals for student outcomes.
- When board, district and school leaders fully understand and adhere to their exact roles and carry out their responsibilities accordingly, strategy and action move forward at the necessary pace.
- When budget documentation is well organized and good accounting procedures exist, the use of financial resources is open and transparent.
- When there are good technology infrastructures, including computerized systems to carefully track student progress, this encourages well organized and smooth running operational services.
- When there are clear policy and procedures for internal and external communications, and effective use is made of email and web based information, stakeholders become positively involved in the work of the district.
- When food and nutrition services are well managed and there are well organized systems for transportation, students' daily learning experiences are positively influenced.
- When board members, district and school leaders facilitate suitable opportunities to seek and respond to the views of all stakeholders, this motivates stakeholder involvement and their commitment to student learning and achievement.

Domain 1					
How good is the district's ability to provide high quality: Attainment, Learning, Teaching, Curriculum and Assessment					
1.1		1.2		1.3	
Attainment		Provision of Curriculum and Instruction		Assessments Aligned with Curriculum and Instruction	
				Instructional Leadership/ Capacity Building	
Overall Score for Domain 1					
<b>Bridgeport</b> <b>Below Basic</b>	<b>East Hartford</b> <b>Basic</b>	<b>Hartford</b> <b>Below Basic</b>	<b>Meriden</b> <b>Basic</b>	<b>Middletown</b> <b>Basic</b>	<b>New Britain</b> <b>Below Basic</b>
<b>New Haven</b> <b>Proficient</b>	<b>New London</b> <b>Basic</b>	<b>Norwalk</b> <b>Below Basic</b>	<b>Norwich</b> <b>Below Basic</b>	<b>Waterbury</b> <b>Basic</b>	<b>Windham</b> <b>Below Basic</b>

**Emerging Strengths**

- The provision of literacy and numeracy coaches has proved a positive strategy in many districts.
- Where data teams exist, their work supports more precise understanding and strategic decision-making regarding student achievement.
- Where new curriculum programs have been carefully and successfully introduced, they facilitate good opportunities for assessment.
- Positive Behavioral Intervention Systems are successful where implemented.

**Opportunities for Improvement**

- Many districts fail to make adequate yearly progress, and where targets are met in reading and/or math, key sub-groups still fail.
- Black, Hispanic, special education students and, in some districts, English language learners consistently underachieve and there are high levels of suspensions and referrals for these groups.
- Measures of teacher accountability are not well established and there are wide discrepancies in the quality of instruction.
- Teachers have limited skills in gathering, analyzing and using student data to assess student progress and plan for learning.
- Variation in the quality and implementation of curriculum programs limits assessment reliability.
- Student learning is not supported fully by good provision of technology resources and curriculum.

**Commentary**

All districts failed to make adequate yearly progress in combined English and math scores in 2007. For the six districts where students made adequate yearly progress in either in reading and/or math, results do not reflect improving scores for the lowest achieving students. In most districts, English Language learners, special education students, Black and Hispanic students fail to make the progress that they should. A reason for this could be that in the drive to improve overall test scores and meet district targets, many schools focus on the band of students who will gain proficient levels with direct test coaching. The result of this is that achievement gaps widen and the progress made by the students who need most support diminishes further. While district leaders, principals and teachers share the vision of improving achievement for all students, there is little direct evidence as yet that strategy and action result in continually improving student outcomes. In all districts there are pockets of improvement in test scores. In New Haven, for example, there are encouraging signs that achievement gaps are closing for certain grade groups and English language learners make good progress. However, there is not yet a picture of steady improvement over time in any of the 12 districts.

The strategic decision to provide literacy and numeracy specialist coaches in some districts is proving a successful

model for enhancing curriculum programs, teaching practice and student outcomes. Where instructional specialists are assigned to schools by the district office, such as in Norwalk, they work alongside teachers to improve classroom practice and provide a range of high quality whole school professional development. In the best models, coaches meet regularly with administrators to ensure there is clear alignment between classroom practice and district policy on curriculum and instruction. In other districts, outside consultants are successfully used in a similar role to subject specialists and coaches. Consultants work directly with teachers and provide curriculum and instructional advice at leadership level. However, there is disparity in the effectiveness of externally assigned specialists and those who are internally appointed at school level. In districts such as East Hartford for example, where most elementary schools have school-assigned and based literacy coaches, progress still remains too slow for sub-groups of students despite small class sizes and good numbers of support staff.

The quality of teaching throughout the districts varies greatly and is essentially not good enough. District reports cite examples of teaching practice that ranges from good to poor in many schools. In some districts there appears to be a perception among staff that new initiatives are overwhelming. However, even though the change process is not handled as successfully as it might be in all districts, teachers are beginning to recognize that student achievement will only improve when teaching and learning are consistently effective. The real challenges for many districts are to improve pedagogy and ensure that teachers accept their accountability to students. Where teachers embrace their role in improving student outcomes, this must be backed up by differentiated opportunities for professional development so that skills and knowledge are continually updated. Where staff members are reticent to change and view new initiatives as tedious and hard work, principals need clear and useful accountability measures and support to implement them consistently.

A vital professional development necessity is training in the collection, analysis, interpretation and use of data. In some districts, staff have received good support and their skills are growing. Districts such as New Haven have placed considerable priority on establishing data teams in all schools to enable systematic analysis of students' progress. However there is still a lack of deep understanding of performance indicators for the most pertinent sub-groups; those who persistently underachieve. This is a clear indication that this development work needs much more attention.

In a number of districts, curriculum programming remains a work in progress. In some districts, the implementation of published curriculum models, such as the Response to Intervention literacy program in Bridgeport, show promising signs of improved provision. In some districts, such as East Hartford, concerted efforts have been made over the past three years to build comprehensive core curricula in English, math, science and social studies. The sensible approach of paying initial and thorough attention to core subjects has enabled the district to establish consistency in curriculum approaches. Where such programs and curriculum developments are working best, they include clear cycles for assessment that not only measure the effectiveness of the program itself, but assist schools in monitoring progress over time. However, curriculum development is not yet at the development forefront for all districts. Such is the case in Hartford, where there is no common district-wide curriculum and few district led initiatives to drive curriculum change, despite the fact that the decision has been taken to phase out the previously mandated literacy program. Schools have received little guidance in their choices for new programs and there are currently no expectations regarding review and evaluation of the impact of curriculum changes.

Student learning through the use of technology is underdeveloped in most districts. Curriculum programs and resources for the subject are limited in many schools, and students do not have consistent ease of access to computers and software to enhance their learning across all subjects. Not only is this limiting in terms of student engagement and motivation in lessons, but also many schools miss the opportunity to deliver effective intervention strategies through this medium. This is particularly the case for English language learners, special education students and disaffected students. Moreover, in some districts information technology is reserved ostensibly for learning within the gifted and talented programs. There is serious oversight in equality of access for all students through such decisions and denied opportunities for many students to learn skills that are transferable to adult lives and future employment.

For many districts, student behavior remains a pressing issue. Without doubt, behavior is severely affected by curriculum choices, teaching strategies, appropriately high expectations and good relationships. Some districts have thought strategically about the need to remold some acquired patterns of behavior instilled in students who may not have had the best educational experiences in the past and reignite their motivated involvement in the learning process. In districts where Positive Behavior Intervention Systems are being implemented, student conduct and attitudes are positively influenced. The program also leads to beneficial reflection on teaching practice and teacher/student relations. In schools where PBIS analysis has begun, it is very easy, for example, to pinpoint times of the day, subjects and particular teachers where significant numbers of “behavior incidents” happen. This data leads to reflection on systems and practices that mitigate against the aim to improve their achievement levels through positive student engagement.

Where curricula provision is improving, assessment procedures still require attention to ensure cohesion and reliability in the information gathered. In general, better assessment systems are in place for math and if it is this information that teachers use to plan for the next steps in student learning, this may explain the slightly better test results for math across the districts as a whole. Pockets of good practice now exist, such as in Waterbury and New Haven, where periodic assessments provide very useful information to guide coaches improving instruction and planning professional development. In New Haven, the process has moved one step further with the recognition that formal summative assessments need to be less frequent to allow for substantial teaching input with more room for formative teacher assessment. This process allows for interim adaptation of student goals, reestablishment of short term targets to reach these goals and adaptation of curriculum and lesson plans to ensure that targets are reached. In most districts, teachers require extensive support to design formative assessments that help them to understand how well students are learning to inform the goal setting process and planning for future instruction.

Domain 2					
How good is the district’s ability to provide high quality: Leadership, Culture and Accountability?					
2.1	2.2	2.3	2.4	2.5	2.6
Vision and Action	Culture	Strategic and Action Planning	Governance	Site Management And Coherence	Accountability
Overall Score for Domain 2					
Bridgeport Basic	East Hartford Basic	Hartford Basic	Meriden Basic	Middletown Proficient	New Britain Below Basic
New Haven Goal	New London Proficient	Norwalk Below Basic	Norwich Proficient	Waterbury Proficient	Windham Basic

**Emerging Strengths**

- There is generally an established vision for work at the district level, with a clear understanding that achievement must improve for all groups of students.
- Where consistent systems are in place, strategic thinking leads to effective action planning.
- District superintendents have good relations with school leaders and board members, and the culture for growth and development is positive.
- The importance of using data to guide decision-making is recognized at all levels.

**Opportunities for Improvement**

- Strategic plans are not fully aligned to priority goals for each district.
- Student data is not consistently used to carry out detailed and perceptive analysis for all student sub-groups and inform decision-making.
- Strategies and action plans are not monitored rigorously and regularly to measure success and make amendments.
- There are inconsistencies and confusion in the accountability measures within districts.
- Professional development for principals is not matched effectively to carefully analyzed needs.
- The roles, responsibilities and involvement of board members are not uniformly adhered to.

**Commentary**

With the legislated involvement of the State Education Department to support improvement for the 12 districts, the focus on establishing the vision for student outcomes has been a fundamental aspect of development initiation. Districts have a mix of long serving and newly appointed officers, some districts with relatively new superintendents. All have been charged with generating a vision that encapsulates the clear understanding that achievement for all students must improve, but most importantly, significant gaps in student achievement must close. In all districts, this vision is now clear. In Hartford, the communication of a lucid vision and focused goals has secured increased civic and business support. While there may be elements of the vision that are not yet shared by all stakeholders, and in districts such as Waterbury, East Hartford and Windham the vision must be continually re-established, there is general acceptance of the overall goals for improvement and development, encouraging each district to commit to appropriate strategy and action planning to realize its long term intentions for all students.

The determination and urgency to improve is very real in many districts. This more often manifests itself in clear strategic thinking and systems based action planning. Strategy and action are growing strengths in many districts, such as Norwich, where good relationships and the involvement of stakeholders in planning and decision-making processes translate into clear District Improvement Plans with appropriately prioritized goals. In some

districts, however, especially those where there is not yet appropriate distribution of control and decision-making processes at each organizational level, strategic plans are not yet fully aligned to the main district priorities. In some districts, this means that priorities need to be rationalized further, encouraging a more laser like focus on actions that will have maximum impact on student outcomes.

The essentiality of good data generation, collation, analysis, interpretation and use is recognized by all districts. The level to which this recognition is dynamically impacting on strategic decisions and actions varies across the districts. Variation is largely due to the sophistication of data expertise and tools. In districts where data is used most effectively, such as New Haven, student demographics are clearly understood, strategic goals prioritize developments in accordance with these demographics and there is good support for principals in using this data at school level. However, many districts do not use detailed data analysis as the starting point for decisions and plans, so there is no assurance that the established strategies and goals in the District Improvement Plans actually target specifically the district's priority student groups. This is the case in districts such as New Britain and Norwalk, where there is an urgent need to improve data driven decision making to influence overall outcomes. Generally, widespread use of data pertaining to the progress and achievement of Black, Hispanic, English language learners and special education students is insufficient. This is in juxtaposition to the absolute recognition that outcomes for each of these groups must improve significantly if all district are to make adequate yearly progress.

Good relationships are common to most districts. Collaboration and teamwork are strong, even in those districts where the overall vision is not 100 per cent aligned across all stakeholders. Regular, two-way communication between boards, district officers and superintendents effectively supports improvement. This positive culture is most evident in Meriden, Hartford and New Haven, but there are strengths in other districts. For the main part, superintendents have productive relations with principals, are respected by them and have worked successfully to engage school support. Many superintendents have had to work particularly hard to mend the broken relationships that characterized some districts in the past. In some districts the remnants of past difficulties are harder to discard. These are often the result of unclear or wrongly executed roles and responsibilities, especially at board level, that exacerbate mistrust and suspicion. In order to ensure that strategy and action move forward at the required urgent pace, it is essential that all board members, district officers and school leaders fully understand and adhere to their exact roles and carry out their responsibilities accordingly. This includes the roles of officers appointed by districts to support leadership and instructional developments in schools.

While strategic development and action planning have improved in many districts, there is an urgent need to develop monitoring and review processes in most districts. In only a few districts, such as New Haven, have clear procedures and key facilitators been established to aid the monitoring and evaluation of progress towards development goals. Most districts have not yet created clear cycles for gathering information that provides a clear picture of where the district is positioned at regular intervals. Boards do not regularly use such information to evaluate whether strategies are effective or whether progress towards goals is speedy enough. Not enough analysis is made of whether actions have positive impact on student learning and achievement. For this reason, many districts arrive at summative assessment periods, such as the publication of test results, only to be gravely disappointed by outcomes. District leaders and board members must urgently establish clear procedures for self-review, using clear success criteria to measure interim district progress. This process should lead to the adaptation of actions to ensure that overall goals can be achieved by the dates that were set for their achievement. Closely interwoven in these processes are the accountability measures between boards and superintendents, between superintendents and principals and between principals and school staff. Currently, in too many districts accountability systems are loosely adhered to, irregularly applied and do not serve to measure the effectiveness of appointed roles and responsibilities in relation to raising the standards that students achieve. This has a detrimental impact on the motivation to do every job well in order to meet established goals. The lack of clear and consistently applied accountability measures also hinders principals in their efforts to raise the quality of teaching and learning.

While principals mainly feel supported by superintendents and other district officers, there are aspects of their

work where continued professional development is not only desirable but essential to the improvement agenda. Induction programs for new principals are most often useful and supportive. New principals are guided in areas such as human resource, financial and operational procedures. However, instructional leadership is not as effectively developed and the ability to analyze the quality of teaching and learning is seriously lacking. With this absence of reliable accountability measures, this means that at the level of direct interaction with students, there is less input to ensure high quality. Additionally, where professional development is provided more regularly for principals, it is not always tailored to meet individual needs. Principals rarely undertake needs analyses and districts rarely prepare individualized professional development plans. In a climate where many new initiatives place great demands on principals to carry out more roles with increasing skill, and where principal accountability is ever increased, districts should make every effort to build leadership capacity through differentiated training to meet individual needs.

Domain 3					
How good is the district’s ability to provide high quality: Management of Human and Fiscal Support?					
3.1			3.2		
Human Resources			Fiscal		
Overall Score for Domain 3					
<b>Bridgeport Proficient</b>	<b>East Hartford Proficient</b>	<b>Hartford Basic</b>	<b>Meriden Basic</b>	<b>Middletown Goal</b>	<b>New Britain Goal</b>
<b>New Haven Proficient</b>	<b>New London Proficient</b>	<b>Norwalk Below Basic</b>	<b>Norwich Proficient</b>	<b>Waterbury Basic</b>	<b>Windham Basic</b>

**Emerging Strengths**

- Hiring process and recruitment and retention plans are generally effective.
- District officers maintain congenial relationships with union representatives and this enables productive negotiation.
- Fiscal management and overall budget decisions are open, transparent and, in most cases, clearly communicated to all stakeholders.
- Where new Human Resource and Fiscal systems have been implemented and there have been new appointments to key posts, initial developments are positive and progressive.

**Opportunities for Improvement**

- The disparity in teachers’ salaries seriously impacts on recruitment and retention in some districts.
- While efforts have increased, there is limited hiring of staff to reflect students’ ethnic and cultural diversity.
- Budget allocations are not always aligned to clearly identified priorities, nor based on detailed analysis of past performance.
- Areas of spending, particularly for special educational needs, are particularly difficult to track to measure the impact of financial decisions on student outcomes.
- Board members too often micro-manage Human Resource and Fiscal decisions.
- Use of benchmarking and systems for measuring the impact of spending and value for money gained are inconsistent.

**Commentary**

Human resource management is improving steadily across the districts. New appointments have brought with them a range of expertise and systems that are encouraging organized, efficient and effective working practice. Similarly the management and allocation of finances is generally clearly structured, open and transparent. Overall, there is good communication with stakeholders with regard to financial decisions. Budget information is most often carefully documented and there are good accounting procedures. However, old habits die hard and it is sometimes difficult for a few long standing board members to stand back from their involvement in the detail of spending decisions and remain focused on their role as strategic planners and evaluators of the impact of spending. For this reason, some financial resolutions are not clearly aligned to district priorities that have a sharp focus on student outcomes. In addition, budget allocations are sometimes unrelated to what a district knows that it must do as a result of careful analysis of past performance and the impact of previous spending decisions on achievement goals. In some cases, financial decisions are overturned following individual representations to the board. There is now a need to establish that all finances are allocated according to identified need and that success is measured only in terms of the increase in student achievement levels. It is only when the value gained from spending decisions can be clearly exemplified, especially when a district considers itself to be poorly funded,

that board members can put forward solid arguments to support requests for increased resources. Districts such as Bridgeport recognize the need to align budget plans with District Improvement Plans and cost out priorities more precisely. This is significant improvement on past practice.

In general, processes for measuring the success of financial decision making are underdeveloped. While there is careful monitoring to maintain balanced accounts, there are not yet consistent procedures for measuring what value has been gained from each spending decision. While financial outlay may appear to support fundamental educational priorities, there are limited evaluations made of just how much impact has been made on student learning. For example, small class sizes are maintained at great expense in some districts, but no evaluations are made of whether this strategy is effective in raising levels of achievement. In other districts, huge capital outlay has been afforded to school building development, yet teachers' salaries are lower than in other districts. Such districts spend large proportions of their budgets in recruiting and providing professional development for teachers who stay for limited amounts of time because salaries are higher elsewhere. In addition, in some districts salaries for substitute teachers are incredibly low. This not only diminishes the likelihood of employing good quality substitute staff, but also discourages school leaders from using substitute staff to enable teachers to attend professional development or work with colleagues for special curriculum and instructional based improvement projects in school. Districts must develop solid procedures to measure the cost-effectiveness of all finance related issues, in order to justify expenditure in relation to overall aims for student achievement. In addition, with the intention of ensuring consistent value for money, districts should make extended use of benchmarking data to compare expenditure with other districts where similar intervention programs are implemented for certain student subgroups. At present this would be very difficult to do for all student groups within a district, especially for special education students. This is because allocations of funding for this group are often subsumed in a variety of budget headings, making it very difficult to track overall expenditure over time. In some districts, the allocation of mandatory funding for special education is so difficult to monitor that there is risk of breaking federal legislation.

It is each district's aim to appoint staff of a calibre appropriate to encourage students' rapid progress and good achievement. Recruitment procedures in most districts are generally effectively executed. In some districts, such as Meriden and Middletown, procedures are extremely drawn out and time consuming. While this may appear a safe-guarding process on the surface, slow processes mean that appointments are often very last minute, not allowing for adequate induction. This district's procedures are also hampered by agreed union restrictions on the appointment of external candidates. These restrictions and other nuances in human resource policy mean that in some cases, schools are unable to appoint a candidate who would make the most impact on student outcomes. Such anomalies in procedures must be dealt with quickly and decisively to improve the quality of teaching overall. While there are many positive outcomes from the good relationships that many districts enjoy with administration and teachers union representatives, these should never be at the expense of procedures that ensure quality teaching and learning for students.

In the majority of districts, principals are now involved in the hiring of most new staff. As far as possible, this ensures that appointments closely match school needs and principals are able to recruit staff that fit the school culture and climate. However, efforts to secure appointments that reflect the diversity of students' ethnic and cultural backgrounds is not as successful. Some districts have gone to great lengths in their efforts to recruit staff to represent student diversity, including New Haven's recruitment visits to Puerto Rico and an annual recruitment fair. However, even in the districts where there is more success in this aspect of recruitment, staff from varied ethnic groups only make up 30 per cent of the overall staffing proportions. There are even fewer leadership roles filled by candidates of different ethnic and cultural origins.

Domain 4					
How good is the district's ability to provide high quality: Operational Services?					
4.1	4.2		4.3	4.4	
IT& Data Support	Communication		Operations	Service Culture	
Overall Score for Domain 4					
Bridgeport Proficient	East Hartford Basic	Hartford Below Basic	Meriden Proficient	Middletown Proficient	New Britain Basic
New Haven Goal	New London Proficient	Norwalk Basic	Norwich Proficient	Waterbury Basic	Windham Basic

**Emerging Strengths**

- By and large, information technology systems, with increased reliability, are in place and effectively managed to support schools at many levels.
- There is high impetus to provide healthy nutrition for students and effective management of services has brought about positive results.
- Transportation services are generally well organized and effective.

**Opportunities for Improvement**

- Most information technology systems lack or are limited in their ability to track student progress over time.
- Student behavior during transportation to and from schools remains a cause for concern in many districts.
- Internal and external communication policies are inconsistent and in some cases non-existent.
- Communication with parents is not personalized or regular enough.

**Commentary**

All districts are at various stages of development of technological infrastructures to support operational services. Some districts, such as Middletown and New Haven are close to the completion of more sophisticated computer systems that are of great benefit to the district's organizational and analytical procedures. These systems enable the district office to collect and monitor student data on attendance and suspensions for example. District Education Technology Plans outline goals and strategies for a period of up to three years. Many plans have been formulated in collaboration with schools. In some districts, East Hartford being one, Information Technology development teams consist of professionals with a range of expertise who provide valuable support to schools, especially high schools. Unfortunately, the level of support and resourcing at elementary school level is often rudimentary in comparison to high schools. In addition, in districts such as Hartford, partnerships between school based teachers and information technology support staff is barely non-existent. This means that there is little advancement in the use of technology to improve teaching and support learning.

The most advanced computerized infrastructures include systems that enable analysis of student progress, but this is currently not the case for all districts. In New Britain, the main data base holds student information, accessible and adaptable at school level. Other districts, for example Meriden have reliable networked systems that also allow access to the State network, but it is still not possible to track student achievements over time using computer technology. In Norwalk, the testing and evaluation specialist provides well presented data to schools and is skilled in supporting teachers' analysis of this information. Not all teachers are appreciative of such information. In some cases, teachers lack confidence and skills in accessing and using computerized data bases. Even where there are adequate resources and sufficient support opportunities available to schools, many

teachers still need help in making the most effective use of equipment, software and computerized information. In all new build schools throughout different districts, technology resources, hardware and high speed internet access are all in place. There is more work to be done to ensure that schools where intensive building programs are not planned for the immediate future have essential technological upgrades to ensure equity of access for all students and additional support for teaching and learning. Some districts, including New Haven, have assessed schools' technological needs and ensured that all resources are of a minimum standard. Focused professional development in this district ensures that all new systems are totally functional in schools within a four week period.

While there are few districts with agreed policies for internal and external communications, it is clear that technology has aided many districts and schools in making regular communication with stakeholders. Email communication is now more widely used and a growing number of districts have websites. Beyond use of technology, superintendents have often been instrumental in facilitating good communication with a wide range of community based links, such as the police, social services and health authorities. Communications with political entities, such as the city council are also well maintained. In Norwich, where a stringent two way communication protocol guides effective communications on all levels, board meetings are televised and there are good working relationships with the public media. In Waterbury, district leaders make good use of the local cable television channel and present the series "Spotlight on Schools". Communications with parents, however, are still not consistently effective. Beyond students themselves, parents should be each district's priority focus for communication, but this is not always the case. Communications are often irregular, too generic and do not address the language needs of all parents sufficiently. One example of good practice again points to Waterbury, where a parental survey to help with district website development was provided in English, Spanish and Albanian.

Within services to students, both the food and nutrition and transportation management are of generally good quality. The strong focus on healthy eating has led to some innovative catering ideas and high quality food services. Transportation is by and large effectively organized, enabling students to arrive at school on time and safely. Drivers take great pride in their work and recognize the need to maintain good levels of behavior while travelling to and from school. Unfortunately, due to supervision issues and in certain districts a lack of clarity in the expectations communicated by schools to ensure good conduct while students are on board school buses, many district vehicles are now fitted with surveillance cameras. In New London, a training course for drivers in behavior management has begun in order to maintain continuity from the school level approach to classroom behavior.

Domain 5					
How good is the district’s ability to provide high quality: Stakeholder Engagement and Satisfaction?					
5.1		5.2		5.3	
Internal Stakeholder Communications and Satisfaction		External Stakeholder Engagement		Political and Policy Alignment and Engagement	
Overall Score for Domain 5					
Bridgeport Proficient	East Hartford Basic	Hartford Basic	Meriden Proficient	Middletown Goal	New Britain Basic
New Haven Goal	New London Goal	Norwalk Below Basic	Norwich Goal	Waterbury Proficient	Windham Basic

**Emerging Strengths**

- In the majority of districts, superintendents understand the need to establish good engagement with all stakeholders and work effectively to do so.

**Opportunities for Improvement**

- Engagement and involvement of parents as key stakeholders is inconsistent.
- Attempts to involve and listen to the views of the most disaffected students are not as earnest as they should be.

**Commentary**

In line with the good communication upheld by many district superintendents, there is also a clear understanding of the need to establish good engagement with stakeholders, allowing regular opportunity for all groups to express their opinions and concerns. In the majority of districts, superintendents provide ample opportunity for the many stakeholders to do so. This is particularly well developed at community and political levels, where superintendents are generally knowledgeable of federal and state legislation. In some districts, however, tensions created by politically charged negative press serves to undermine the confidence that the public has in the education system and this is a serious issue. East Hartford is affected in this way.

Generally, there is robust consultation with union representatives that alleviates potential conflicts in many districts. In some districts, Human Resource managers have invested considerable time and energy in repairing relationships with unions. Despite this, union representatives report that a culture of fear still exists in some districts. District leaders would be well advised to be proactive in conducting more thorough canvassing of teacher opinion to gain a clearer picture of the extent to which this is true.

Opportunities for parents to share their ideas and views are less frequent. Districts have inconsistent approaches to canvassing parental opinion and parents express their dissatisfaction with this situation. Many feel they are not welcomed into school and some parents from minority ethnic groups feel that there are lower expectations for their children’s potential outcomes. In some districts like East Hartford, there is an overwhelming view that the board does not represent the interests of parents and that members are not committed to genuine consultation. Meriden has made serious efforts to reach out to Hispanic parents. Even so, there is still a long way to go to achieve the level of involvement these parents have in their children’s education. Ironically, one successful program in this district, providing resources and guidance to parents to support their children’s reading, was terminated by the board when the special grant that funded it was removed. In Middletown, there are examples of school based projects involving parents that result in productive links between home and school.

As the most important stakeholder, even when there are structures in place to allow the student voice to be heard, such as in Bridgeport where students helped to create the District Strategic Plan and on occasions address the board, the scope of student involvement is restricted to a narrow group. There are fewer opportunities, through direct discussion or surveys, to establish student views on suspensions, decisions to cut class or reasons for absence from school. Student opinion is very rarely sought to establish what constitutes good teaching, lessons that are most engaging and learning that prepares students for future education or work. Districts are neglecting their responsibility to respond to such views in a way that makes instructional programming and decision making totally relevant to the main client.

### Recommendations

#### Opportunities for improvement

- Schools should maintain a clear focus on the progress made by all students and sub-groups, rather than provide intensified coaching to “bump up” test scores. In this way they will ensure that all students make increased gains and achievement gaps close.
- Regular and detailed analysis should be made of performance data for Black, Hispanic, special education students and English language learners to ascertain that they all make continuous good progress.
- There should be planned review and evaluation of curriculum initiatives to measure their effectiveness in raising student achievement.
- There should be increased focus on the development of resources and curriculum for information technology to support student learning across all subjects.
- District leaders and board members should urgently establish clear procedures for self-review and evaluation.
- District leaders and board members should ensure that all principals receive effective professional development to support change process and secure improvement goals.
- The roles of board members, district officers and principals should be clearly defined and corresponding responsibilities carried out accordingly.
- Principals should have individualized professional development plans, compiled through detailed needs analysis.
- Innovative strategic plans should be created to recruit teachers and leaders who represent students’ varied ethnic and cultural backgrounds.
- Finances should consistently be allocated to support identified student need and success measured only in terms of increases in student achievement levels.
- District and boards should establish secure policy and procedure for the effective recruitment and long-term retention of teachers to ensure that best value for money is gained from all related expenditure.
- School leaders should focus on improving the overall quality of teaching and learning through regular observation, constructive feedback and the setting of professional development goals for teachers.
- School leaders and teachers should receive appropriate training, facilitating the regular and effective use of student data to establish baseline benchmarks, track progress and plan differentiated instruction.
- Board members, district officers and principals should seek the views of a wide range of stakeholders on a regular basis, paying particular attention to what students think and feel.