

Commissioner Update

December 22, 2008

Dear Connecticut Educator:

As the calendar year comes to an end, I want to wish you and your family a very happy holiday season. I hope you will have occasion to rest, enjoy loved ones, and reflect on the nature of our work and how important it is that we continue to be advocates for the students we serve. The New Year is certain to be a difficult one, but I am confident we will find ways to acknowledge how important a strong public school system will be for our future. Thank you for what you do for students, and on behalf of all of us at the Department and the State Board of Education, enjoy some much needed time off.

Sincerely,

Mark K. McQuillan
Commissioner of Education

I have two items for you in this update.

Financial, Legislative Proposals Approved By Board

Attached are two documents representing the State Board of Education's recent decisions regarding the financial and legislative proposals for fiscal years 2010 and 2011. The first document, the Board's reduction and expansion budget for the next biennium, outlines its strategy for reducing the State Department of Education's budget by \$284 million, while requesting \$37 million in new dollars for such items as magnet school support, interdistrict choice and secondary school reform. This was prepared in response to a directive to state agencies by the Office of Policy and Management. The second document, legislative proposals for magnet school funding, teacher certification and on-line learning, complements many, but not all of the items singled out in the 2010-2011 budget package.

Both documents provide insight to the Board's goals and objectives for the next two years. I especially urge you to read the Board's resolution concerning the budget, wherein it signals its determination to keep ECS funding intact while minimizing the effects of other reductions on items deemed essential to district operations and staffing, particularly in our Priority School Districts. I also urge you to note that, while the funding request for secondary school reform has been pared down drastically, we are nonetheless filing the legislation needed to get started with the plan. Rather than the eight-year implementation plan envisioned earlier in October 2008, we have extended the plan to 10 years, and will use the next two years to develop model curricula, write guidance documentation and complete the research needed to determine what additional funding will be required to allow all districts to make the program available to all students by 2016. The legislation

takes every precaution to ensure that secondary school reform initiatives will go forward only if funds are available to support districts in implementing them.

I hope you will agree that the Board's budget and legislative proposals offer measured responses to the serious financial difficulties we face in Connecticut and nationwide. We remain prepared to act decisively when the time is right to step forward with new policies, and to complete work that has been underway for years. We will do our utmost to keep you informed of events as they unfold, and we urge you to contact our offices should you require any other information. Please note that every two weeks the *Commissioner's Update* on the SDE Web site will be updated with new information. We expect that the *Update* and e-blasts like this one will keep you informed on the fast-breaking news and information impacting your schools.

http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/commish/dec3reductions_expansions.pdf
http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/commish/SBE_LegislativeProposals.pdf

State Board Approves Secondary School Reform Plan

On December 3, the State Board of Education approved the Ad Hoc Committee's Plan for Secondary School Reform, which has been the focus of much of the Department's activity over the past year. The plan incorporates several components the state regards as essential to a high-quality secondary school education for all Connecticut students. The plan can be accessed at:

<http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/pressroom/TheConnecticutPlan.pdf>.

The Secondary School Reform design requires new investments in public education to ensure that all students are continually engaged in rigorous courses of study designed to prepare them with both the academic and life skills to succeed in college and/or the workforce. The first step the State Department of Education is taking toward Secondary School Reform is to issue a request for proposals to create a partnership to develop a comprehensive model curriculum for Algebra I. This Algebra I Model Curriculum will set the standards for all students to participate in a rigorous and comprehensive Algebra I curriculum across Connecticut. It will include strategies to engage diverse learners, incorporate 21st century skills, and provide sample formative and summative assessments to monitor progress and adjust instruction. This model curriculum will be the prototype for developing seven additional model curriculums across content areas over the next few years. More information will be available in spring of 2009.

In addition, the Department is planning to establish guidelines and implement pilot programs for:

- student success plans;
- support systems and school environment; and
- capstone experiences for both middle and high school levels.

In early January, I will be inviting superintendents from across the state to nominate their districts to work with Department staff members on these pilot activities. The activities will be designed to provide flexibility for district implementation and to assist districts in tailoring the success plans, support systems and capstone experiences to meet the needs of all of their students.