

**CONNECTICUT STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
TURNAROUND OFFICE**

**Commissioner's Network  
January 2013**

**Frequently Asked Questions**

**Q: What is the Commissioner's Network?**

**A:** The Commissioner's Network is a partnership between local stakeholders and the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) to turn around up to 25 of the state's lowest performing schools. The Commissioner will select schools for inclusion in the network. The network offers additional resources, a vehicle for innovative initiatives, a platform for sharing effective practices, and a model for other schools and districts.

**Q: What is the purpose of the network?**

**A:** The purpose of the Commissioner's Network is to turn around chronically low-performing schools. Network Turnaround Plans must include intensive and transformative strategies that are necessary to turnaround schools that, to date, have been unsuccessful in their improvement efforts. These plans must reach beyond surface reforms to achieve dramatic and transformative outcomes, and should address past turnaround efforts and provide an explanation as to how the proposed interventions will succeed where previous efforts have failed.

**Q: How are schools selected for the network?**

**A:** The Commissioner will select schools. Eligible schools are those classified at the time of selection as category four schools or category five schools, pursuant to the state's classification system. Preference may be given to schools that volunteer to participate in the network and to schools located in a district where an existing collective bargaining agreement between the local or regional board of education for such school and the representatives of the exclusive bargaining unit for certified employees will have expired for the school year in which a turnaround plan will be implemented. The Commissioner may consider other factors in selecting schools for the network, including performance level, trends in performance, student populations, current interventions, and district capacity.

**Q: Do schools remain part of their local district?**

**A:** Yes. Schools remain part of their local school district while designated a network school, but schools will have the necessary autonomy to implement transformative strategies over a three- to five-year period. At the conclusion of the turnaround period, schools will transition back to full control by their local district.

**Q: Once a school is selected, what is the role of the local or regional board of education?**

**A:** The role of the local or regional board of education is to support the network school's turnaround. Upon initial selection, the local or regional board of education must establish a turnaround committee for the school district. The local or regional board of education may assist the CSDE in conducting the operations and instructional audit of the network school in consultation with the turnaround committee and the school governance council. Upon approval of the turnaround plan by the State Board of Education or after the Commissioner develops a plan, the local or regional board of education shall negotiate a memorandum of understanding with representatives of the exclusive bargaining unit for certified employees. If the network school is partnering with an approved not-for-profit educational management organization, the local or regional board of education shall enter into a contract with the partner. The local or regional board of education must continue to maintain the ordinary operating expenses of the network school.

**Q: Which schools are currently participating in the Commissioner's Network?**

**A:** Bridgeport's Curiale School, Hartford's Milner School, New Haven's High School in the Community, and Norwich's Stanton School.

**Q: Have additional districts expressed an interest in participating in the network?**

**A:** Yes. In late May 2012, the CSDE gave districts with eligible schools an opportunity to express their interest to participate in the network for either the 2012–13 school year or the 2013–14 school year. A number of districts expressed such interest. Although the Commissioner reserves the authority to select schools for participation in the network, a partnership approach, with a collaborative relationship between the state and the district, is preferred as a first resort.

**Q: When will schools be selected for the 2013–14 school year?**

**A:** The CSDE will make every effort to ensure that initial selection occurs by February 2013. Initial selection authorizes districts to convene their turnaround committees. Final selection of the district and school will be made by June 2013 based on the strength and feasibility of their

turnaround plan. The CSDE reserves the right to not select such plan, modify the plan, or develop a plan in its stead.

**Q: Will there be future opportunities for districts to express their interest in the network and for the state to select schools for the network?**

**A:** Yes. The CSDE will provide additional opportunities for districts to express their interest in having eligible schools join the network for the 2014–15 school year.

**Q: Once a district expresses an interest in joining the network, what are the next steps?**

**A:** The Commissioner may initially select the district’s school for participation in the network. Once initially selected, the district shall form a turnaround committee, and the CSDE shall conduct an operations and instructional audit of the school to understand why the school is chronically low performing. The audit is conducted in consultation with the turnaround committee, the School Governance Council, and the local board or regional board of education. The turnaround committee shall develop a turnaround plan based on the audit’s findings.

**Q: Who serves on a district’s turnaround committee?**

**A:** The committee is composed of a parent and administrative representative selected by the local board of education, two teachers and a parent representative selected by the local teachers’ union, the superintendent of schools or his or her designee, and the Commissioner or his designee. The superintendent is a nonvoting, ex-officio member who serves as chair of the committee. As necessary, the committee may involve other nonvoting participants to assist in its work and deliberations. Turnaround plans developed and supported by the consensus of the committee may be submitted to the CSDE for consideration. If such a plan is not submitted or if the plan is deficient, a Commissioner-developed plan may be implemented.

**Q: What must be included in a turnaround plan?**

**A:** Turnaround plans must include intensive and transformative strategies that are necessary to turnaround schools that, to date, have been unsuccessful in their improvement efforts. These plans must reach beyond surface reforms to achieve dramatic and transformative outcomes. These turnaround plans should address past turnaround efforts and provide an explanation as to how the proposed interventions will succeed where previous efforts have failed. The Department will issue a specific turnaround plan application. Plans must include:

1. Specific academic, developmental, and other student goals to be met in three years.
2. Specific interim objectives to be met in each year that the school is in the network.
3. In the seven areas described below, specific, dramatic, and transformative strategies to maintain or establish:

- a. a strong family and community connection to the school;
- b. a positive school environment;
- c. effective leadership;
- d. effective teachers and support staff;
- e. effective use of time;
- f. an effective curriculum and instructional program; and
- g. effective use of evidence to inform decision-making.

**Q: May turnaround plans include the support and involvement of partner, nonprofit organizations?**

**A:** Yes. Network schools may be supported by a regional educational service center, a public or private institution of higher education located in the state, or, in select instances, an approved not-for-profit educational management organization. For example, Hartford’s Milner School is partnering with Jumoke Academy, a highly successful charter school.

**Q: May turnaround plans propose changes to teachers’ workday and year?**

**A:** Yes. Turnaround plans may include proposals that change the hours and schedules of teachers and administrators at such school, the length and schedule of the school day, the length and calendar of the school year, the amount of time teachers shall be present in the school beyond the regular school day, and policies regarding the hiring or reassignment of teachers or administrators, including approaches such as election to work. Such changes, if different from the terms of existing collective bargaining agreements, will be negotiated on an expedited basis.

**Q: May the Commissioner appoint a special master to implement a Commissioner-developed turnaround plan?**

**A:** Yes. If the Commissioner deems necessary, the Commissioner may appoint a special master for the network school to implement the provisions of the turnaround plan developed by the Commissioner.

**Q: May a turnaround plan assign the management, administration, or governance of a network school to an approved not-for-profit educational management organization?**

**A:** Yes. Although a network school remains part of its local district for the three- to five-year turnaround period, the management, administration or governance of the school may be assigned to an approved not-for-profit educational management organization. Importantly, the school must continue the enrollment policies and practices that were in effect before the school joining the network, and the local district must employ all persons employed at the school. At the conclusion of the turnaround period, the school shall transition back to the full control of the local district.

**Q: How long will a school remain in the network?**

**A:** A school will remain in the network for a minimum of three years, which may be extended based on the status of turnaround efforts. Before the end of the third year that a school is participating in the network, the Commissioner shall conduct an evaluation to determine whether the school is prepared to exit the network. In determining whether a school may exit the network, the Commissioner shall consider whether the local or regional board of education has the capacity to ensure that the school will maintain or improve its student academic performance. If the Commissioner determines that a school is ready to exit the network, the local or regional board of education for the school shall develop, in consultation with the Commissioner, a plan, subject to approval by the State Board of Education, for the transition of the school back to full control by the local or regional board of education. If a school is not ready to exit the network and participates in the network for an additional year, the Commissioner shall conduct an evaluation of the school. Before the end of the fifth year that a school is participating in the network, the Commissioner shall develop, in consultation with the local or regional board of education, a plan, subject to approval by the State Board of Education, for the transition of the school back to full control by the local or regional board of education.

**Q: Are there additional resources available for network schools?**

**A:** Yes. The Commissioner shall provide funding, technical assistance, and operational support to schools participating in the network. In addition, the Commissioner may provide financial support to teachers and administrators working at network schools.

**Q: How can I get more information?**

**A:** Please contact Michelle Rosado, Education Consultant, Connecticut State Department of Education, Turnaround Office: 860-713-6748; [michelle.rosado@ct.gov](mailto:michelle.rosado@ct.gov). And please visit our Web site for more information: <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2754&Q=334364>.