



For Immediate Release:

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Connecticut Applies for Waiver from the Requirements of No Child Left Behind **Lays Out Vision for Revitalized, High Expectations Education System**

Today, Connecticut joins 36 other states and the District of Columbia in applying for a waiver from the requirements of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 from the United States Department of Education.

NCLB mandates that all schools achieve proficiency with 100% of their students by 2014, requires a series of sanctions for schools that do not meet that goal, and places restrictions on the use of federal funding. If Connecticut's request is successful, the waiver will provide the state flexibility to design a new and improved system of accountability, support, and intervention in schools and districts and the ability to target federal funds to better meet student needs.

Above all, the waiver will enable Connecticut to focus on improving student learning. Under NCLB, schools were measured only based on the percentage of students who score proficient on standardized tests. With the waiver, Connecticut will take a more comprehensive approach to closing the achievement gap and creating academic excellence for all students. In our application, the CSDE commits to increasing the rigor of learning standards, setting a high bar for student achievement with a greater focus on student growth, and supporting high quality educator evaluation and support systems.

Governor Dannel P. Malloy said, "Connecticut's submission of the waiver request is a critical next step for enacting real education reforms that will lead to dramatic gains for Connecticut's students. Combined with our state legislative package, the plans in the application will help our state improve our education system, better position our young people for the jobs of tomorrow, and, as a result, enhance our economic competitiveness."

Commissioner of Education Stefan Pryor said, "Our application presents and, if successful, will advance the important activities and reforms currently under way in our state. From the implementation of a curriculum and assessment system that prepares students for college and career to the establishment of an ambitious yet achievable set of performance goals, and from the development of supports and interventions in low-performing schools to the framing of an evaluation and support system for teachers and school leaders, this application lays out our vision on key fronts and sets forth a plan for us to elevate academic achievement in this state."

As required by the United States Department of Education, Connecticut's waiver application addresses four critical areas:

- (1) transitioning to college- and career-ready standards and assessments;
- (2) developing systems of differentiated recognition, accountability, and support;
- (3) evaluating and supporting teacher and principal effectiveness; and
- (4) reducing duplication and unnecessary burden.

Eleven states applied for waivers in the initial round in November of 2011. All states' waivers were approved in February 2012. A full copy of Connecticut's waiver application will be posted on the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) website on Wednesday, February 29, 2012.

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FACT SHEET: Connecticut's NCLB Waiver Request

Purpose of the NCLB waiver:

- The federal No Child Left Behind Act (2001) mandates that all schools achieve proficiency with 100% of their students by 2014; requires a series of sanctions for schools that do not meet that goal; and places restrictions on the use of federal funding.
- If Connecticut's request for the waiver is successful, the state will have the flexibility to design a new and improved system of accountability, support, and intervention in schools and districts and to target federal funds to meet student needs more effectively.

Process:

- 11 states applied for the NCLB waiver in November of 2011; their requests were granted in February after an iterative process that included months of feedback, revisions, and resubmissions.
- 26 states, including Connecticut, stated their intent to apply for NCLB waivers in the second round. The deadline for that round was Tuesday, February 28, 2012.
- A full copy of Connecticut's waiver application will be posted on the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) website on Wednesday, February 29, 2012.
<http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2683&Q=333862>

Overview:

- The CSDE consulted key stakeholders as it developed its waiver proposal including parents, teachers and their representatives, principals, superintendents, community organizations, and organizations that represent students with disabilities and English language learners.
- The waiver is organized around four principles: (1) college- and career-ready expectations; (2) state-developed differentiated recognition, accountability, and support; (3) supporting effective instruction and leadership; and (4) reducing duplication and unnecessary burden.

Principle 1: College- and Career-Ready Expectations

- In July of 2010, Connecticut adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), a set of rigorous learning standards for reading and math that define what students should know and be able to do in kindergarten through 12th grade. Forty-four states and the District of Columbia have adopted these standards. The CSDE believes that the implementation of the CCSS in every classroom will transform teaching and learning by providing all students the opportunity to gain a deep understanding of important content and develop higher-order thinking skills.
- Connecticut plans to administer new assessments that are aligned to the CCSS. These assessments are currently being developed by the SMARTER Balanced Consortium, of which Connecticut is a governing member.
- Connecticut proposes a plan to implement the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in classrooms throughout the state by ensuring that districts, principals, and educators have the resources and information they need to transition to the CCSS. To efficiently and effectively serve the needs of districts and relevant stakeholders, the CSDE has developed an approach to target four key areas of implementation: curriculum frameworks and materials, assessment, professional development, and communication.
- The state's adoption and plan for implementation signal Connecticut's belief that all students can learn and achieve at high levels. In addition to increasing rigor for all students, common standards will yield better results for highly mobile students and help decrease college remediation rates.

Principle 2: State-developed Differentiated Recognition, Accountability, and Support

The waiver request proposes a new accountability system that holds the state, districts, and schools accountable for improving the performance of all students and closing achievement gaps. The CSDE's aim is to provide the greatest support to and, when necessary, intervene in the lowest-performing schools in our system. The proposed system recognizes and rewards student progress at every level and eliminates a one-size-fits-all approach to accountability and support.

The new system features three components: (a) a set of measures for school performance and growth; (b) a classification system for all Connecticut schools; and (c) an accompanying intervention strategy.

(a) School Performance Measures

- The CSDE aims for all students and subgroups to achieve, in aggregate, the Goal level on the state standardized tests. This is a higher level of performance than NCLB's Proficient standard, and it indicates that students are prepared for college and career.
- Connecticut's goal over the next six years is to reduce our state's performance deficit by half by 2018 for all schools and subgroups. To meet this goal, the state's schools and subgroups will need to make sufficient progress each year such that, in six years, they are halfway to achieving our ultimate goal. This target requires the greatest gains for the students and subgroups that are the farthest behind and will result in a closing of the state's wide achievement gaps.
- Connecticut will aspire for even more than the above. Schools that make even higher performance gains will be recognized as "Schools of Distinction."
- Under the new system, school performance will be measured based on the following indicators: student achievement, changes in student achievement, student growth, graduation rates, and the performance of traditionally low-performing subgroups.
- Rather than focusing exclusively on mathematics and reading, our new system will hold schools accountable for mathematics, reading, writing, and science.

(b) School Classification

The CSDE will classify all schools into five levels – Excelling, Progressing, Transition, Review, and Turnaround – based on their performance in each of the dimensions described above.

(c) School Supports and Interventions

The newly reorganized CSDE will partner with districts to ensure that schools in each of these categories receive appropriate levels of support, and will act as a resource to districts as they plan for and monitor interventions in their struggling schools. Pending proposed legislation, the CSDE's Turnaround Team will intervene directly in a subset of its lowest performing schools through the Commissioner's Network. The Network will serve as a vehicle for innovative initiatives, a platform for sharing effective practices, and a model for other schools and districts throughout the state.

Principle 3: Supporting Effective Instruction and Leadership

Connecticut recognizes that teacher and principal evaluation and support systems are a critical part of its comprehensive plan to build an environment that ensures equal opportunity and excellence in education for all Connecticut students. The waiver request includes a description of Connecticut's progress to date in the development of a standard and fair model of teacher and principal evaluation based upon student learning.

- Connecticut's new teacher and administrator evaluation guidelines were proposed by a consensus of the Performance Evaluation Advisory Council (PEAC) – a legislatively enacted council of educators, policymakers, and advocates – and unanimously approved by the State Board of Education (SBE).
- Both the teacher and administrator evaluation systems place a strong emphasis on student learning (45%) and professional practice (40%).

- The CSDE will allow districts to adopt a state model or design their own evaluation systems based on the state-provided core requirements.
- The waiver request outlines a plan for ensuring that Connecticut districts effectively implement evaluation systems that are consistent with these guidelines. Pending proposed legislation, the state will provide \$7.5 million for piloting the evaluation and support system and for strengthening the professional development system in general.
- Connecticut will pilot the evaluation system in select districts in 2012–13, with statewide rollout in 2013–14.

Principle 4: Reducing Duplication and Unnecessary Burden

The waiver request also outlines the CSDE’s plan to reduce the burden of red tape and state mandates faced by school districts. Connecticut’s proposed changes to state policies will, in the short term, free districts from excessive and redundant data reporting and reform the teacher certification system. To ensure continued focus in this area, Governor Malloy will convene a Red Tape Review and Removal Taskforce to examine comprehensive solutions to fixing unnecessarily burdensome state regulations and mandates.