



For Immediate Release:

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State Board of Education Takes Action: Approves Two Commissioner’s Network Plans and One Local Charter Application; Authorizes Flexibility Requests Concerning State Standardized Tests for 2013-14

(HARTFORD, CT)—The State Board of Education yesterday approved the turnaround plans for Briggs High School in Norwalk and Walsh School in Waterbury for participation in the Commissioner’s Network, bringing the total number of schools in the Network to nine. The Board also approved the local charter school application for Elm City Montessori in New Haven—making it the first local charter school established in Connecticut under the new charter legislation passed in 2012.

Additionally, by a unanimous vote, the Board authorized the State Department of Education to seek flexibility from the US Department of Education so that school districts might avoid “double-testing” in 2013-14, as well as to provide districts the option not to use state test data in educator evaluations for 2013-14 school year.

The Commissioner’s Network is the state’s lead initiative to improve the state’s most chronically underperforming schools. It was proposed by Governor Dannel P. Malloy and enacted as part of last year’s bipartisan, landmark education reform legislation.

“We have a comprehensive set of tools available to turn around underachieving schools, but the keys to long-lasting education reform lie in the partnerships being built between teachers, administrators, local leaders, and state education officials,” said Governor Dannel P. Malloy. “We’ve committed hundreds of millions of dollars to improve education in Connecticut, and in doing so have made a tremendous promise to our students that they will leave school well-prepared and ready for a bright future.”

The biennial budget enacted by Governor Malloy and the General Assembly this legislative session included \$27.5 million dollars to fund the expansion of the Commissioner’s Network to over 20 schools over the next two years, and provided funding for up to five local charter schools and four new state charter schools over the biennium.

“We are greatly encouraged by the caliber of the plans presented today and by the clear commitment to fostering student success of those involved in the process. Turning around Connecticut’s lowest

performing schools is critical to ensuring that all of our students graduate college and career ready,” said Allan Taylor, State Board of Education Chairman. “Our ability to provide substantial support to districts through programs like the Commissioner’s Network, depends on the continued commitment of the Governor and General Assembly, for which we are greatly appreciative.”

“As a key part of our effort to close the achievement gap in this state, we must work to turn around our lowest performing schools and create more high performing public school choices. The addition of Commissioner’s Network schools, local charters, and other options will expand families’ access to high-quality educational models and, in so doing, help improve student outcomes,” said State Department of Education Commissioner Stefan Pryor. “We are grateful to Governor Malloy and to the General Assembly for their continued support for public education, including these measures, as a budgetary and policy priority.”

Both turnaround plans for the Commissioner’s Network approved during yesterday’s State Board of Education meeting focused on using the 2013-14 school year to build a strong infrastructure to support their respective models and turnaround strategies, to be followed by full programmatic implementation in fall of 2014.

Briggs High School in Norwalk, an alternative high school, will implement a model designed to improve outcomes for over-aged, under-credited students by taking an integrated approach to rigorous instruction, strong youth development, wraparound services for students and families, as well as post-secondary preparation and workforce development. Briggs will work with Our Piece of the Pie, a Connecticut non-profit organization, to implement the plan. The main goals of the turnaround plan are to improve student academic outcomes in reading, increase student attendance and engagement, and strengthen college and career readiness. Notable highlights of the plan include redesigning the school day and calendar to include additional school days, intensive outreach efforts to students with long-term absences or chronic tardiness, and new instructional methodologies such as blended learning, project-based learning, and mastery-based progression.

The turnaround plan for Walsh School in Waterbury outlines a model consisting of coordinated partnerships supported by a new District Turnaround Office; Walsh aspires to develop into a community school enhanced and enriched by its partnerships with parents, community organizations, school and district personnel, and turnaround experts. During the first year of the turnaround process, Walsh will invest heavily in academic strategies to personalize instruction; staff to ensure capacity for reforms; school climate to create an inviting learning environment; and partnerships to maximize resources for students, families, and staff. The main objectives of the turnaround plan are to increase student proficiency in reading and math and to improve student behavior. Highlights of the plan include extended learning time through Saturday Academies and additional time in math and English language arts classes, the creation of a new Walsh Teaching and Learning Institute for professional development opportunities for staff, and the launch of a new Family and Community Center with a community engagement coordinator.

With the Board's approval yesterday, Elm City Montessori became New Haven's first local charter school, and became the state's only local charter. Supported by the New Haven Board of Education, Elm City Montessori's mission is to provide a high quality, public Montessori program to New Haven families within a diverse school community that helps students realize their potential. In the Montessori model, instruction is tailored to the individual needs of students through specially designed, developmentally appropriate and concrete learning materials, and progressively sequenced lessons. The leadership of New Haven Federation of Teachers has been highly involved in the development of the application.

Local charter schools are public, nonsectarian schools that operate independent of any local or regional board of education, in accordance to charter and state law, and are accountable to the State Board of Education.

In other actions, the Board authorized the State Department of Education (CSDE) to make two flexibility requests to the US Department of Education (USED). The first request would enable the CSDE to provide districts a choice to administer the Common Core-aligned Smarter Balanced assessment rather than, or in addition to, Connecticut's legacy assessments, the CMT and CAPT, in the 2013-14 school year. Under current federal law, districts that wished to administer the Smarter Balanced filed test would be forced to administer both tests. The second request to the USED would allow districts the choice regarding whether to use state assessment data in the educator evaluation and support system in the 2013-14 school year.

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