

For the Children of Connecticut



A Master Plan to Eliminate the Achievement Gap in Connecticut

The Achievement Gap Task Force

Report to the Connecticut General Assembly

per Public Act 11-85: Executive Summary

Submitted on February 28, 2014¹

¹ Updated: January 16, 2015

Dear Colleagues,

State data on student achievement show alarming disparities in achievement along socioeconomic and racial lines. These disparities have existed for years. In 2011, the Legislative Achievement Gap Task Force was convened to address this issue in the State of Connecticut.

For three years, testimony from various community partners was heard with the intent to create a Master Plan that includes the expertise of professionals that work closely with children. We heard from educators, health practitioners, university administrators and professors. We also heard from mental health experts, housing experts, and those in the field of corrections. Perhaps most importantly, we heard from children.

We heard from children who are not content with predictions of their success being based on their zip code or color of their skin. We heard from children whose faces represent the beautiful diversity of Connecticut. We heard from children whose dreams and aspirations are dependent on our willingness to act on our promise to serve them.

Addressing the achievement disparities in CT is more than just our moral obligation. It makes fiscal sense. In Connecticut, the costs of remediation or incarceration are greater than education. In order to address the conditions that perpetuate underachievement, we must confront poverty and systemic barriers while constantly improving upon our practices in all State agencies. We must also develop a collaborative engagement within public and private agencies, and our public education system. This collaboration must propel our collective goal of addressing the gaps.

This Master Plan does not assign technical fixes to adaptive issues in our State. Rather, it seeks to create a tapestry of collaboration in the State of Connecticut, one that shapes our collective values and beliefs. There is no shortage of good ideas in the State; however, without a synchronized approach, our efforts will continue to be fragmented and students will continue to wait.

Our charge was to develop a Master Plan. This Plan is organized to provide recommendations that can influence policy at the State level for the next seven years. Through a systemic embrace of these recommendations, and a careful implementation plan that support and extend the missions of the various partners in the State, the Plan can move our State forward in addressing the gaps. It can also show that Connecticut is leading the charge in the country to provide a holistic and whole-child approach to addressing achievement gaps, as opposed to expecting schools to fix the problem alone. While this report does not point a finger, it does presume leadership and high expectations of all stakeholders, at every level.

The following Master Plan recommendations will help narrow and close the achievement gaps by 2020. The Achievement Gap Task Force will remain in existence until January 1, 2020, to assure implementation of approved policies, locate opportunities that align with this direction and to improve upon these recommendations, as the data further inform the process.

With a great deal of urgency, and an understanding that it will take the entire village to address the achievement gaps in the State of Connecticut, we submit this Plan.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Miguel A. Cardona". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr. Miguel A. Cardona

CT Legislative Achievement Gap Task Force Co-Chairperson

Table of Contents

Introduction 1

FACT Sheet..... 4

Achievement Gap Facts..... 5

A Tapestry of Results to Close the Achievement Gap..... 5

The Cost of the Achievement Gap..... 7

OUTSIDE THE SCHOOLHOUSE..... 9

 Poverty 10

 Hunger and Food Insecurity..... 12

 Housing..... 14

 Family Engagement..... 16

 Early Care and Education..... 20

 Social Emotional Health Prevention and Intervention..... 23

INSIDE THE SCHOOLHOUSE 26

 Principal and Teacher Hiring and Retention for Schools that Demonstrate Persistent Gaps 27

 English Language Learners (ELL) 29

 Use of Curriculum in Closing Achievement Gaps in Low Performing Schools..... 31

 Role of Time in Closing Achievement Gap..... 33

 Reading..... 36

 STEM Subjects..... 39

 Creativity and Innovation and the Achievement Gap Synopsis 41

 Chronic Absence..... 43

 School Climate and the Achievement Gap..... 46

 Narrow the High-End Opportunity Gap-Find the Missing Advanced Placement Students 48

INSIDE HIGHER EDUCATION 50

 Leaders that Close the Gap: Administrator Preparation and Development 51

 Highly Effective Teacher Preparation Programs 53

INSIDE STATE GOVERNMENT 55

 Students in State Care..... 56

Ending the Achievement Gap..... 59

Policy Recommendations: Year One and Two 81

References..... 85

Introduction

The gap in scores in Connecticut between white students and students of color, as well as between low-income and non-low-income students, is the largest of any state in the nation and is unacceptable. Race and class are not destiny, but it appears again and again as the largest gap in school achievement. And the gap does not reveal itself in second or third grade, but much earlier. These glaring gaps in academic achievement and graduation rates separate low-income students and students of color from other students.

Avoidable shortfalls in academic achievement impose heavy and often tragic consequences, including lower self-regard, lower earnings and poorer health. For many students, though not all, lagging achievement evidenced as early as 4th grade appears to be a powerful predictor of high school and college graduation rates, as well as lifetime earnings.

Closing Connecticut's achievement gap would produce clear and immediate social and economic gains. For instance, significantly reducing the number of high school dropouts would lessen the need for costly remedial education while boosting the employment rates and earnings of poor and minority youth in our state. Each additional year of completed education translates into 11 percent higher annual earnings over a person's lifetime.

The Context

The legislature established the Achievement Gap Task Force to address the academic achievement gaps in Connecticut by considering effective approaches to closing the achievement gaps in elementary, middle and high schools. The legislature assigned the task force with the creation of a master plan to eliminate the academic achievement gaps by January 1, 2020. The master plan will:

- Identify the achievement gaps that exist among and between identified cohorts;
- Focus efforts on closing the achievement gaps; and
- Establish annual benchmarks for implementation of the master plan and closing the achievement gaps

Only 70% of low-income students graduate.

The percentage of third grade Hispanic students who met goal in reading (27%) is roughly 40 percentage points lower than White students (67%).

Hispanic and African American students score on average 28-35 points lower than white students in standardized reading and math tests.

Students eligible for free lunch are three times as likely as their peers who are not eligible for lunch subsidy to be chronically absent.

80% of English Language Learner students are American-born.

Connecticut's low-income students rank among the bottom 3rd of states in eighth grade math.

Approximately 65% of children in state care are children of color.

Caucasian students have a graduation rate of 91%, compared to 69% for Hispanic students and 73% for African Americans.

28% of foster children were suspended from school at least once in 2012-2013.

African American and Hispanic students have half the enrollment rate in Advanced Placement courses as White students.

English Language Learners and Students with Disabilities show much higher school absentee rates than their peers.

Only 23.6% of African American students and 30.6% of Hispanic students graduate college on time compared to 40.6% of

Only 23.6% of African American students and 30.6% of Hispanic students graduate from college on time, compared to 40.6% of White students.

FACT:	Before entering kindergarten, the average cognitive scores of preschool-age children in the highest socioeconomic group are 60% above the average scores of children in the lowest socioeconomic group.
FACT:	At age 4, children who live below the poverty line are 18 months below what is normal for their age group; by age 10 that gap is still present. For children living in the poorest families, the gap is even larger.
FACT:	Third grade Hispanic students who met reading goals (only 27%) is roughly 40 percentage points lower than White students (67%).
FACT:	By the time children from middle-income families with well-educated parents are in third grade they know about 12,000 words. Third grade children from low-income families with undereducated parents have vocabularies of around 4,000 words; one-third as many words as their middle-income peers.
FACT:	Hispanic and African American students score on average 28-35 points lower than White students in standardized reading and math tests.
FACT:	African American and Hispanic students have half the enrollment rate in Advanced Placement courses as White students. Middle- and high-income students are three times more likely to enroll in an AP course than low-income students when schools offer AP courses.
FACT:	Approximately 65% of children in state care are children of color.
FACT:	Students eligible for free lunch are three times as likely to be chronically absent as their peers who are not eligible for lunch subsidy.
FACT:	Connecticut's communities in poverty are concentrated in 30 out of the 163 municipalities. These communities are stressed environments that put children at risk for poor academic performance.
FACT:	Connecticut's low-income students rank among the bottom third of states in grade 8 math.
FACT:	Only 70% of low-income students graduate.
FACT:	Middle and high income students who attend schools with Advanced Placement classes are three times more likely to enroll in an AP course as are low-income students.
FACT:	English Language Learners and Students with Disabilities show much higher school absentee rates than their peers.
FACT:	White students have a graduation rate of 91% compared to 69% for Hispanic students and 73% for African American students.

FACT:

Only 23.6% of African American students and 30.6% of Hispanic students graduate college on time compared to 40.6% of White students.

FACT: Connecticut was only one of only two states where there was no significant increase in either 4th or 8th grade math scores in ten years, despite having the widest Hispanic-White math score gaps at 39 points.

Achievement Gap Facts

A Tapestry of Results to Close the Achievement Gap

The following results statements show the vision and beliefs of this Task Force that all children can excel in school if the contributing factors to the achievement gap are comprehensively addressed, both inside and outside of the school house. If the policies and programmatic changes in this report are implemented, methodically and with fidelity over the next seven years, it is anticipated that the achievement gap will close and opportunity will open.

Result will be: Every child will be school-ready upon entry to kindergarten.

Result will be: All principals and administrative leaders will be prepared to work in schools with achievement gaps.

Result will be: All children will live in safe and stable housing.

Result will be: Children will live with their families in economic stability.

Result will be: Families will actively engage in their children's learning and partner with their children's schools for educational excellence.

Result will be: All pre-service teachers accepted to teach in CT schools will be trained in closing persistent gaps in academic achievement.

Result will be: School districts with persistent gaps will be able to grow and retain the effective leaders and teachers they need.

Result will be: English Language Learners will become fully proficient in English.

Result will be: Model curriculum will be available for schools and districts with persistent achievement gaps.

Result will be: Time will be maximized as a resource, for all students, to optimize their mastery of skills and content.

Result will be: All students will have opportunities to learn in classroom environments that promote a culture of creativity and innovation.

Result will be: All students will attend school at least 90% of the school year.

Result will be: Every child will read at goal level by the end of third grade.

Result will be: Students in state care will meet goal level in school performance.

Result will be: All students will learn in a positive school climate.

Result will be: Minority and low-income children will take and pass Advanced Placement classes, improving access and options to college.

Result will be: All students will graduate from high school and attend college or technical schools.

Result will be: All children will be food secure.

Result will be: All children will be emotionally stable, resilient and capable of self-regulation.

Result will be: something about STEM subjects

The Cost of the Achievement Gap

Students who are college and career ready are critical to the economic future of our state and its' citizens. Nationally, one in four students drops out of high school. In Connecticut, graduation rates are higher – for example, the graduation rate in Connecticut among all students is approximately 85%; however, White and Asian students graduate in four years at a much higher rate than students from traditionally underperforming groups. 91% and 92%, respectively of White and Asian students graduate high school on time, compared to 73% of African-American students, 69% of Hispanic students, 63% of ELL students, 70% of low-income students, and 64% of students with disabilities. Indeed, the gap between low-income students and non-low income students graduating on time is 24 percentage points, 70% and 94% in 2012.

The disparity in graduation rates among the different subgroups is cause for alarm. A number of reports have outlined the differences in the economic and social well-being of young adults who drop out of high school versus those who attend complete college. As the Center for American Progress's (2014) analysis suggests, "If the United States were able to close the educational achievement gaps between native-born white children and black and Hispanic children, the U.S. economy would be 5.8 percent – or nearly \$2.3 trillion – larger in 2050. The cumulative increase in GDP from 2014 to 2050 would amount to \$20.4 trillion" (p. 2). Educational success increases human and social capital, enhancing the potential productivity of the state's workforce and fostering economic growth.

In 2012, 3.7 million U.S. jobs went unfilled due to a lack of skilled workers. Researchers found in 2012 that the rate of employment for high school dropouts versus high school graduates was 48% and 64% respectively, while those who went on to complete college was as high as 87%. Further, employment rates of high school dropouts by race, gender, and household income indicated that the least likely group to be employed were African-Americans (31%), followed by Asians (43%), Whites (46%), and Hispanics (53%). The employment rate for high school dropouts was 22 percentage points below high school graduates and 41 percentage points below those with a four year college degree (Sum, Khatiwada, McLaughlin, and Plamer, 2009).

For students who fail to finish high school the economic fallout to the nation and to our state is staggering both on an annual and lifetime basis. For example, on average a high school dropout can expect to earn on an annual basis a little over \$20,000—approximately \$10,000 less than a high school graduate and approximately \$36,000 less than an individual with a bachelor's degree.

Over the course of a lifetime it is estimated that a high school dropout earns about \$260,000 less than a high school graduate. It is estimated that high school dropouts will cost the nation

more than 337 billion dollars in lost wages. If high school and college graduation rates among Hispanic, African-American, and Native American students raised to the level of White students by the year 2020, it is estimated that it would add more than 310 billion dollars to the U.S. economy.

Health care costs and incarceration rates associated with high school dropouts are costly and unacceptable. High school graduates have a longer life expectancy and report being in better health with a lower percentage of life-threatening diseases than high school dropouts who are more taxing on the healthcare system. In addition, although there is no correlation between prison and the decision to leave high school prior to graduation, it is estimated that among dropouts between the ages of 16-24 years of age incarceration rates were 63 times higher than for college graduates. It is estimated that a high school dropout will cost the taxpayer approximately \$292,000 over a lifetime due to incarceration rates and lost tax revenue.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP:

OUTSIDE THE SCHOOLHOUSE

Some factors contribute to children’s school performance before they open the school house door. These factors include poverty, unstable housing, institutional racism and limited access to early care, and education for low-income children. Other factors influence school performance, but do not ordinarily receive adequate focus, such as school and community safety, parents as authentic school partners, alignment between pre-kindergarten and grade three, and two generational approaches.

Closing the achievement gap is a large task that requires supporting children from birth. It requires strategic planning and action at local, state, and federal levels. For children in the highest-risk families and poorest communities, only the best early care and learning opportunities will prepare them to perform on a level consistent with more advantaged peers.

Poverty

Results statement – Children will live with their families in economic stability.

Poverty is the most extreme form of family economic insecurity, and it may be the single most detrimental influence on a child's development. Poverty itself – independent of other factors such as family structure and parents' educational level – has severe and long-term effects on children's cognitive abilities and school achievement, and it often limits children's economic self-sufficiency as adults.

Poverty has profound effects on young children. These include greater likelihood of low birth weight, stunted growth, infectious diseases, missed immunizations, anemia, and asthma. Health-related problems that are higher among children in poverty, such as lead poisoning, have a significant impact on children's school attendance and ability to learn. Children in poverty also face greater food insecurity and an increase in emotional and behavioral problems. .

Additionally, there is a correlation between children's level of poverty and the coexistence of a learning disorder; in 2013, 6% of children in families at or above the poverty line have learning disabilities, compared to 12 % of children living in poverty. Further, children qualifying for free or reduced school lunch programs performed 24 points lower on national math scores in 4th grade and 29 points lower in reading scores in 2013

The impact of poverty on academic achievement must be viewed through an intergenerational lens, with the cyclical implications of low-education leading to higher poverty levels, which continues the cycle of lower academic achievement. Studies show consistently that there is a direct correlation between parents with higher level of education and improved child outcomes. High school graduates are more likely to contribute to the economy, drawing less in the form of state assistance annually, realize a greater lifetime earning potential, have access to better healthcare, and experience a reduced impact from crime. The National Center for Education Statistics research shows a link between parental education levels and child outcomes such as educational experience and academic achievement.

Policy Recommendations

Follow the national research and economic model analysis performed by the Connecticut Poverty and Prevention Council and support the following research-based proposals:

- Ensure income tax-based assistance for workers, including Connecticut's existing refundable state earned income tax credit to supplement low-wage earnings of parents.
- For families with incomes of less than 50 percent of the state median, provide child-care subsidies. This will increase access to employment opportunities as well as reduce family expenses.
- Expand rental assistance, structured in ways to increase poor families' income and their incentives to work.
- Bolster two generational approaches to poverty reduction by assuring that all parents have a high school degree. Study obstacles and promote all avenues and efficiencies to meet this goal.
- Increase participation to 85 percent in safety-net programs like SNAP (food stamps), LIHEAP, WIC, subsidized housing, and Medicaid.
- Promote co-parenting of both mother and father when possible, regardless of marital status.
- Help fathers pay child-support awards by bolstering job training and employment for those fathers who are not paying due to lack of skills, employment and/or employability.
- Reassess TANF policy to avoid abrupt income cliffs and bolster authentic opportunities for job training and education. Consider expanding the 21 month TANF time limitation to support training for sustainable employment.
- Enroll more youth in programs shown to reduce teen births.
- Adopt programs that help young men complete high school and enter the workforce.

Hunger and Food Insecurity

Results statement—Children will be food secure and fueled to learn.

Poverty's most immediate consequence is food insecurity. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) defines food insecurity as "the limited or uncertain availability of nutritionally adequate and safe foods." The USDA notes that in 2011, 14.9% of all households in the country were food insecure. In Connecticut, 11.9 % of households are food insecure, representing more than 415,000 individuals.

Low income families can experience food insecurity due to strained budgets and volatile income and expenses. Federal food assistance typically covers only part of a family's food needs.

Food insecurity in early childhood (ages 0-3) is associated with impaired cognitive development that can negatively impact a child's future academic and economic success. Research done by Children's HealthWatch shows food insecure children have greater difficulty acquiring social and academic skills necessary to successfully transition to pre-school or kindergarten. Hungry children are sick more often and are 31% more likely to be hospitalized; their school attendance is poorer and their ability to focus on learning is hampered. Across children of all ages, food insecurity is linked with lower academic achievement..

The USDA administers the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and the School Breakfast Program (SBP), which offers free and reduced-price meals to low-income students. Historically, more low-income children eat school lunch than school breakfast. A recent social impact analysis conducted by Share Our Strength and Deloitte indicates that students who eat school breakfast on average attend 1.5 more days per year, score 17.5% higher on standardized math tests, and have a 20% higher high school graduation rate.

In a 2013 study done by APCO Insight for the Share Our Strength/No Kid Hungry campaign, 50% of teachers reported that hunger is a serious issue in their classrooms, 67% see hunger as a cause of disciplinary problems, and 88% state that concentration is severely compromised.

Connecticut ranks 51st (including the District of Columbia) in the nation when measuring the percentage of schools that participate in the NSLP and also have SBP in place. Currently, 68.3% of our 1,089 schools offer some type of SBP, compared to the national average of 89.8% of schools providing both programs. Clearly, this situation needs to change. The overwhelming research associated with the benefits of SBP demands that our schools act. The academic, social, and behavioral positives are formidable tools in the struggle to conquer the achievement

gap. The Connecticut Education Association and American Federation of Teachers both endorse the "Breakfast in the Classroom" model, where the most effective results are seen in classrooms where breakfast becomes part of the school day routine.

Additional tools to fight food insecurity and help children learn are extended day programs. Federal reimbursements are available for these programs in the form of after school snacks and/or suppers provided to participants. The food often serves as an added incentive for students to become involved in these extra lessons.

Current research strongly indicates that low-income students are the victims of significant knowledge and skill loss over the summer months, called the "summer slide." Federally funded Summer Meals Programs are key in tackling this problem, with school related activities, Park and Recreation offerings, YMCA camps, outings and other programs falling under the reimbursable Summer Meals Programs, where all children 18 years old and younger can eat free.

Schools can also facilitate a family's use of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formally Food Stamps). The Department of Social Services and the State Department of Education "directly certify" a student for free meals if his or her family are accessing SNAP benefits. It would be helpful to the family unit if those students receiving free or reduced meals were helped to apply for SNAP benefits in order to reduce the problem of food insecurity.

Policy Recommendations

- Schools will ensure that all students receive the nutrition required to be active learners from the opening bell of the day.
- Schools will incorporate the most appropriate school breakfast delivery options given their unique characteristics for optimizing student participation levels.
- Extended Day programs will employ the federally reimbursable snacks/meal programs needed to make the extra time productive.
- Schools will actively assist in the marketing of the Summer Meals Programs in their communities. This effort will receive support and outreach by local and state officials promoting the benefits for children.
- Schools will assist families of students participating in free or reduced price meals to apply for SNAP benefits through the Department of Social Services.

Housing

Results Statement – All children will live in safe and stable housing.

Connecticut has an affordable housing shortage. 27% of renters spend more than half of their incomes on housing and, thus, teeter on the edge of homelessness. Half of Connecticut's occupations do not pay an average wage equal to the "housing wage" — the hourly wage needed to afford a typical two-bedroom apartment.

137 of Connecticut's 169 municipalities have little to no affordable housing. The 32 municipalities that do have affordable housing also have overburdened schools and community services that are stretched thin. Housing insecurity exacerbates the achievement gap because students who need the most help are confined to the schools with the greatest needs, lowest tax bases, and fewest resources. Poor children live in overcrowded homes with no place to do homework. When rent is so expensive — even for substandard homes with lead paint and allergens — little is left for nutritious food and a warm coat.

As a result of local zoning standards in too many of our communities—sometimes fueled by the fears and misconceptions of residents and municipal policymakers—an overwhelming majority of low and moderate-income households are segregated in 32 of our 169 municipalities that have a reasonable number of affordable homes. Connecticut is missing one of the significant, low-cost solutions to the achievement gap: creating mixed-income housing in high-resource school districts that will have enormous, underutilized capacity in the next two decades. Concurrently, there is opportunity to improve the resources of urban neighborhoods to complement the increased attention and financing given to urban schools.

Policy Recommendations

- The state should 1) increase incentives provided to municipalities that zone for and create affordable and mixed-income housing under HOMEConnecticut and other housing programs, 2) give significantly higher priority for discretionary grants and other benefits to municipalities that similarly zone and create affordable mixed-income housing, and 3) support Sect. 8-30g and other statutes that strongly encourage such zoning and housing creation.
- The state should take advantage of the higher demand for multifamily housing-ownership and rental that comes from economic and demographic imperatives and

provide incentives like cash grants, infrastructure capital, and technical assistance where towns are inclined.

- Use investments in new commuter rail and Bus Rapid Transit lines to ensure affordable and mixed-income housing is built near those stations. In addition to lower housing costs, families can enjoy lower transportation costs, avoid substandard housing hazards, and benefit from generally high-resource schools in communities with stations.
- Schools should collect data to become aware of housing and home situations of students in order to learn whether students live in overcrowded or substandard homes, if housing is perceived as unsafe by the children and family, whether parents pay so much for housing that there is little income left for necessities, and if parents are unable to be around to supervise homework, meals and/or recreation due to employment demands of high rent.
- Fully utilize the McKinney-Vento Act, working with Congress to expand available federal resources to ensure that homeless children have access and transport to school to minimize the deleterious effects of being forced to change schools with the accompanying loss of trusted teachers, friendships, and routines, lowered school expectations, and inconstancy during transiency.
- The Commissioner of Housing may develop initiatives that will improve access to higher performing schools for families using the RAP certificate and federal Section 8 vouchers by including information about public school choice as part of a Mobility Counseling Program; undertaking a pilot program to link vouchers and certificated to housing opportunities in neighborhoods with high performing schools; and convening an inter-agency working group with the Commissioner of Education to propose new initiatives to better connect fair housing and the promotion of educational diversity and achievement.

Family Engagement

Results Statement – Families will actively engage in their children’s learning and partner with their children’s schools for educational excellence.

Family engagement is the involvement of parents and other extended kin with children at home, in the community and in the school house. It is relational, dignified, and often crosses generations. The continuum of family engagement begins with the focused connection between caring adults and their children, and then expands, by personal choice and interest area, to neighborhood, school, and community. The most accurate predictor of student academic achievement is the degree to which families encourage learning, communicate high, achievable expectations to children, and become involved in their children's education.

Parents significantly impact students' learning, regardless of socioeconomic status, ethnic or racial background, or parents' education level. Parents not only need to be involved, but engaged in their children's education and schools for students to be successful. A recent study by Anthony Bryk, *Organizing Schools for Improvement: Lessons from Chicago*, found that schools that had strong family and community ties, regardless of anything else, were four times more likely to improve on reading and ten times more likely to improve in math. Parent engagement outcomes reveal improvements in student attendance, social skills and behavior, graduation rates, continuation to post-secondary education, and teacher morale.

Family engagement can vary at different points, depending on age of child, needs and hopes of the family, and opportunities that avail themselves in community. This might include information gathering, sharing ideas with other parents and agencies regarding good child outcomes, and active civic leadership in program and model policy. Parents who are successful at ensuring a quality education for their children are savvy at navigating the educational system, know who and where to ask for resources, and become involved at various levels.

According to Ann Henderson, parent engagement scholar at the Annenberg Institute, schools that succeed in engaging families from very diverse backgrounds focus on building trusting collaborative relationships among teachers, families, and community members. They recognize, respect and address the family's needs as well as their differences, and embrace a philosophy of partnership where power and responsibility are shared in learning.

In addition, research has shown that the expectations parents have for their children's attainment in school greatly influence their children's own expectations and achievement, and has been recently shown to be a critical predictor for academic achievement. Half of parents

with yearly incomes of less than \$25,000 expect their child will attain a college degree, compared with over 85% of parents with incomes over \$75,000. These expectations include willingness to engage in the learning, providing out-of-school learning opportunities for their children, and framing goals students may have for their own high school and post-secondary studies.

Policy Recommendations

- Provide parent universities in low-income and public housing sites that support parents as partners in the schoolhouse. Such parent universities teach parents how to partner with schools, what to expect, how to determine quality, and how to prepare children for daily and year-long schoolwork.
- Ensure that every parent utilizing a home visitation program knows the component of a quality early childhood setting and how to place their child in an early care setting, if desired. Create a formal placement trajectory from home visitation to quality early care for vulnerable families with very young children.
- Review each School Readiness Council's parent engagement plan and ensure that parents are partners in early care and education within both formal and informal learning settings.
- Ensure that providers are trained in authentic family engagement to maximize partnerships with families in learning.
- Within Alliance and Network schools, create incentives for community/school family strengthening and engagement plans, pre-natal to grade three. Consider matching Title 1 dollars and/or expanding the Parent Trust Act to finance such plans. Plans would offer parents information on school excellence, how children learn, education policies, linkages, resources, and supports for parents to meet and converse with one another.
- Build fatherhood audits into birthing hospitals, home visiting programs and early care settings to reflect on how fathers are welcomed and brought in as partners for a child's optimal development. (Fatherhood audits have been launched in our state through DPH and reveal significant gains in systems change with increased participation among fathers).

- Ensure that the parents on School Governance Councils are trained and inform other parents, K-3, on educational excellence, how children are faring in reading and math, and what policy and program challenges and strengths avail themselves in the schoolhouse. Ensure that all members of School Governance Councils are trained to reach out to parents.
- Expand the availability of resources and public-private partnerships in Connecticut's model Parent Trust so all low-income districts can compete and provide family engagement and leadership training.
- Utilize existing structures and policies to enhance family engagement, such as family resource centers, community family centers, family programs in housing projects, Parents Supporting Educational Excellence, and other model programs and initiatives that see parents as assets and partners in education.
- Assure that the current LEAD program, working with school leaders on leadership, includes leadership with families as partners.
- Review family engagement plans in schools written in school profiles to assess trends and quality in family engagement. Ensure that existing public school requirements for school-family compacts and policies are enforced and evaluated (SDE).
- All teacher and administrator preparation programs should provide opportunities for students to gain competency in family engagement(DHE).
- Encourage and incentivize school districts to develop district-wide programs that support family involvement in partnership with community agencies and family resource centers.
- Allow up to 2% of Title 1 funds to be used to support parent involvement programs, as is federally recommended. Title 1 funds can be used to hire family-school coordinators and can help the school to develop a family-friendly school climate.

Ensure that schools and school districts include parent engagement as a key component of any strategic plan to improve student achievement, with a shared vision for interaction between parents, teachers, schools, administrators, and school boards from Pre-K through high school.

Require local Boards of Education, with School Governance Councils, to review, assess, and improve upon parent involvement and engagement policies every two years.

- Ensure that all activities and policies to engage parents (school governance councils, parent universities, family civics, etc.) are aligned and coordinated across districts and within schools.
- Create a map and access points for parents to gain information about ways to be involved in schools.
- Include parent involvement in teachers', administrators', and front office staff's annual performance evaluation process.
- Train school staff on strategies to engage fathers in their child's education.
- Conduct periodic surveys inviting parents to assess the degree to which they have been able to “engage” with their school in a meaningful way on matters of importance to them.

Early Care and Education

Results Statement – Every child is school-ready upon entry to kindergarten.

Providing young children with consistent positive relationships, rich learning opportunities, and safe environments is critical to school readiness. Quality early childhood services are a public good that requires public support. Many low-income families with young children are unable to afford the true cost of quality early care and education programs. This is particularly true for African-American, Hispanic and other minority children, who are disproportionately impacted by fewer resources, distressed neighborhoods, and poorer performing schools.

Many young children face an opportunity gap. Before entering kindergarten, the average cognitive scores of preschool-age children in the highest socioeconomic group are 60 percent above the average scores of children in the lowest socioeconomic group. At age 4, children who live below the poverty line are 18 months below normal benchmarks for their age group; by age 10 that gap is still present. For children living in the poorest families, the gap is even larger.

The achievement gap is exceptionally wide in oral language and vocabulary exposure. Language development begins in the earliest years through sound, talking, and exposure to print; early literacy facilitates success for young children. Further, regularly reading aloud to young children boosts their literacy development (larger vocabulary, higher levels of phonological, letter name, and sound awareness, and better ability to decode words), as well as improves socio-emotional gains and increases ones likelihood for overall school success. Unfortunately, not all children have the same access to rich early literacy environments. Many parents are working more than one job; others are not fully literate themselves. Family life stressors, compounded by economic constraints, lead some children to miss exposure to language, dialogue, or books.

By the time children from middle-income families with well-educated parents are in third grade, they know about 12,000 words. Third grade children from low-income families with undereducated parents who do not talk to them very much have vocabularies of around 4,000 words; one-third as many words as their middle-income peers.

Closing the achievement gap is a large task that requires supporting children from birth. It requires strategic planning and action at local, state, and federal levels. For children in the highest-risk families and poorest communities, only the best early care and early learning opportunities will prepare them to perform on a level consistent with more advantaged peers. Often two generational strategies help bolster early learning and workforce readiness for the parent(s).

Policy Recommendations

- Provide full day, full year accredited quality preschool for all low income children, including children in foster care.
- Ensure that teachers know the research and practice in working with young immigrant preschoolers and their families. Train teachers in research-based skills to support and begin to teach English to ESL preschoolers.
- Build two generational strategies of school readiness and workforce readiness for children and their parents in poverty. Within this, assure Care for Kids access for low income parents attending school.
- Provide full day kindergarten for all low-income children to ensure continuous learning from pre-K to elementary school. Assure full day kindergarten in the Alliance School Districts.
- Increase wages of early care and education professionals based on years of education and practice. Ensure that early childhood teaching is valued and that professionals with bachelor's degrees do not 'jump ship' for a higher salary in elementary school.
- Create an assessment system that sets baselines and institutional targets and produces evaluative information that can be used to adjust teacher training and classroom practices. Select and implement a formative Kindergarten Entry Assessment tool to help inform teachers about a child's starting point.
- Enforce legislation requiring by 2020 that all early childhood head teachers must hold a bachelor's degree in an early childhood degree program approved by the State Department of Education.
- Create a pre-K through third grade literacy approach. Stress early literacy, beginning in early care settings to increase language exposure and expand time devoted to literacy.
- Implement the Ed. Reform law in reading, PA 12-116, to ensure a transition plan in oral language and vocabulary development between the early care provider and the kindergarten teacher, and to develop and provide practical literacy courses for both pre-service and practicing providers in language development and early literacy.

- Facilitate center based and family child care provider training in cultural competence with attention to research-based practice with bilingual children, from infancy through kindergarten.
- Ensure that every early care and education setting has a family liaison to involve parents as assets in school readiness, early literacy, and a developing partnership with the schoolhouse.
- Provide for an infant/toddler system of care, employing best practices and training within both licensed centers, licensed family childcare, and family, friend and neighbor care.
- Ensure that screening, assessment, and monitoring of children's health and development occur where they are most likely to be seen, including in the home through a coordinated system of home visitation as well as pediatric visits.
- Build up regional training and supports for various kinds of care and access to provider training in quality, adequate resources, supports, and to become part of a pipeline of accreditation and licensing. Use the Regional Accreditation Facilities Project for this.
- Improve routine and high level oversight of early care and education programs, due to Connecticut's current system of high standards by very low oversight Sites, both center and family child care, need to be visited at least once a year for child safety.
- Use info-finder, public health service providers, and Social Service Providers, create a campaign to increase the number of students who have limited target language exposure access to early childcare services and language-developing family support. Monitor access until 2020 to assess impact of campaign.

Social Emotional Health Prevention and Intervention

Results Statement: All children will be emotionally stable, resilient and capable of self-regulation.

Connecticut youth are facing a mental health crisis that is arguably among the most severe in the U.S. There are countless barriers to accessing high quality mental health prevention and treatment services in our state, putting additional, undue strain on families, students, and the educational and juvenile justice systems. Unidentified and untreated emotional-behavioral problems among children and adolescents interfere with their ability to learn and too often result in unnecessary contact with the juvenile justice system.

About 1 in 5 children and adolescents aged 9 to 17 years have a diagnosable mental or addictive disorder that causes at least minimal impairment. In Connecticut, that translates to 110,000 children who meet criteria for a diagnosable and treatable emotional-behavioral problem, but only 30,000 of these children may be receiving mental health services. The prevalence of these conditions is increasing.

About 1 in 10 youth have serious mental health problems that are severe enough to impair how they function at home, school, or in the community. About 2/3 of youth in the juvenile justice system have a diagnosable mental health disorder. Yet, up to 80% of children and adolescents in need of mental health services do not receive them.

Children in elementary school with mental health problems are more likely to be unhappy at school, be absent, or be suspended or expelled. Up to 44% of youth in high school with mental health problems drop out of school.

One in 7 Connecticut high school students seriously considered attempting suicide in the last 12 months; 1 in 15 attempted suicide in that time. Utilization of Emergency Mobile Psychiatric Services (EMPS), a crisis mental health program for children and adolescents, has nearly doubled since 2009. (20)

There is a critical shortage in Connecticut of mental health and substance abuse prevention and treatment services. Over the last five years, problems related to accessing mental health services have outpaced all other complaints filed with the Connecticut Office of the Healthcare Advocate.

Schools represent a natural option for linking youth to mental health prevention and intervention. Receiving services through schools removes many barriers to accessing traditional community-based services, including: lack of transportation, cost, and limited family

engagement. Remarkably, about 75% of children and adolescents who are able to access mental health services do so in a school setting.

A focus on "expanded school mental health" provides policymakers and clinician-leaders with the best chance to extend services to Connecticut's most vulnerable children and adolescents. The field of school mental health has undergone significant growth and development over the last 20 years, moving beyond services and supports provided by school-employed staff such as social workers, counselors, and school psychologists to include those delivered by community-based providers. The most widely accepted framework for meeting the mental health needs of children in schools is referred to as "expanded school mental health."

Expanded school mental health is a way of looking beyond traditional therapeutic approaches. It means exploring a host of possibilities for collaborating with school staff, students, families, and community members to promote overall well-being for students and a positive school climate. It includes a continuum of care, ranging from prevention to acute treatment, driven by interdisciplinary collaboration. This model ensures that the burden for meeting socio-emotional needs is not placed solely on the school, rather school-based mental health programs are coordinated with community-based services.

Policy Recommendations

- Expand access to high quality mental health care through school settings using:
 - School-Based Health Centers (SBHC), which have been shown to improve school climate, reduce the stigma of mental illness, and boost academic outcomes among students who utilize their services. SBHCs are known to reduce Medicaid costs associated with emergency room use and hospitalization.
 - Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS). PBIS is a school-wide model for choosing and integrating research-based methods to provide the best academic and behavioral outcomes for all students. PBIS uses a three-tiered model to put in place strategies to prevent academic and behavioral difficulties for all students, including those at risk of developing problems or with high levels of need.
 - Community-based Wraparound Initiatives. Initiatives such as Community Schools, CommPACT Schools, and Coordinated School Health (CSH) systems are designed to incorporate quality wraparound services into the school setting whereby

individualized plans are developed that incorporate community services and informal supports.

- Train and build the capacity of school mental health staff. School psychologists, counselors, social workers, guidance staff, special education teachers, nurses, and support staff work closely with children in school settings who have mental health needs. One example is the statewide effort of Child Health and Development Institute of CT (CHDI) in collaboration with the State Department of Education to train school nurses and support staff in identifying, understanding, and referring children who may be suffering from traumatic stress reactions.
- Link school and community resources. Many schools across Connecticut have formal and informal relationships with community-based mental health providers, including EMPS Crisis Intervention Service teams, to provide services in schools, community-based settings, and homes. These linkages are at times formalized with a Memoranda of Understanding and also rely on relationships between school staff and local mental health provider organizations.
- Help youth receive mental health treatment rather than correctional assignments, when the behavioral problem is due to a lack of mental health intervention. The Connecticut School-Based Diversion Initiative (SBDI) helps schools revise disciplinary policies and practices to divert youth from in-school arrest and other exclusionary discipline (e.g., out-of-school suspension, expulsion) and connect them to community mental health services.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP:

INSIDE THE SCHOOLHOUSE

The achievement gap can be significantly narrowed through educational excellence at the schoolhouse. This includes highly effective teachers and administrators, focus on a clear mission, data driven decision making, proven curriculum, cultural competence, on-going professional development, and high expectations of every student. A coordinated statewide reading plan, with focus on every K-3 teacher knowing how children learn to read, coupled with proven ELL strategies incorporated in pre-K to grade 12, would ensure that children are reading at goal by 2020.

An intentional focus on the achievement gap for inspired school leaders and teachers, with incentives for change, will create a 'think tank' of scholars and practitioners working intentionally to assure that all children excel in Connecticut.

Principal and Teacher Hiring and Retention for Schools that Demonstrate Persistent Gaps

Results Statement – School districts with persistent gaps will be able to grow and retain the effective leaders and teachers they need.

Districts identified as failing or underperforming, need to be provided with tools and incentives to recruit and retain talented and effective leaders. By supplementing, not supplanting, the local ability to compensate school principals at a competitive level, the State can assist districts with greater achievement gaps to hire and retain such principals.

Financial compensation, however, is not the only motivating factor in retaining talented and effective employees. Research is clear that professionals require autonomy, mastery and purpose if they are to feel satisfied and successful in their employment (Pink, 2009). By incentivizing and supporting involvement of local principals in regional, national or international professional learning opportunities, school districts with persistent gaps will be able to both grow and retain the effective and talented leaders they need.

Often times districts with the greatest need lose high quality teaching staff to more affluent communities. Research has shown that even signing bonuses and increased salary may not be enough to keep skilled teachers from leaving hard- to- staff schools (Berry, 2013). Research also may suggest, however, that a sense of belonging, and community, and purpose can be as motivating, if not more so, than direct financial compensation (Pink, 2009).

Administrators who lead such hard-to-staff schools need leverage to compete with more affluent school districts and higher achieving schools if they are to attract and hire the most talented teachers. By incentivizing teachers to both teach and live in communities that house schools with identified achievement gaps, school districts with persistent gaps may be better able to attract and retain the effective and talented teachers that students in those communities need.

Policy Recommendations

- The CT State Department of Education will develop incentives to be provided to Principals who are hired into, or who reach identified benchmarks of longevity and effectiveness, in schools or districts identified as failing, underperforming or showing unacceptable achievement gaps. Such incentives shall be made available to the school district, shall not supplant any local funding, and may be in the form of direct salary increases as well as funding for participation in regional, national or international professional learning opportunities.
- Enhance the Learn Here, Live Here Program created under PA 12-75 by developing incentives through the CT State Department of Education to be provided to teachers who are hired into, or who reach benchmarks of longevity and effectiveness, in the lowest-performing K-12 districts and schools, or those schools that demonstrate persistent gaps in academic achievement. Such incentives shall not supplant any local funding. Such incentives may take the form of hiring bonuses, enhanced longevity payments, and/or student loan payment reimbursement. In cases where a teacher both works in a local public school system and purchases a home in the same local community such incentive may include mortgage assistance.
- Principals and teachers receiving any of the above incentives will be required to participate in a statewide seminar program, to be developed and implemented by the CSDE, intended to share experiences across districts and to develop a cohort of educators with a shared mental model and expertise in closing the achievement gap. These incentives may also be extended to include paraprofessionals and coordinated with the School Paraprofessional Advisory Council.

English Language Learners (ELL)

Results Statement – English language learners will become fully proficient in English.

National and state data suggest that Hispanic students are underperforming. Fry (2007) found in his analysis of the National Association of Educational Progress data that English Language Learner (ELL) students —most from Hispanic backgrounds— were struggling more than other groups on standardized achievement tests. He noted in 2005, 46% of ELL students nation-wide achieved at the “below basic” level, the lowest of four levels, in 4th grade math. In reading, 73% of ELL students scored in the “below basic” category. In contrast, among White students, only 11% scored in the “below basic” category in math and only 25% were in the “basic” category in reading. On the 8th grade test, 71% of ELL students scored in the “below basic” category for both math and reading. In contrast, about 20% of 8th grade White students scored in the “below basic” level for math and reading.

The Connecticut achievement gap data show patterns similar to the national trends. According to the Connecticut State Department of Education, there are notable gaps in achievement between Hispanic and White students (CT Reports, 2009). On average, large differences exist between the percentages of 3rd grade Hispanic students (39% at goal in Mathematics), and their White counterparts (75% at goal in Mathematics). The percentage of third grade Hispanic students who met goal in reading (27%) is roughly 40 percentage points lower than White students (67%). As outlined in the report, this same trend continues for reading and mathematics in grades four and five) (CT Reports, 2009).

Strategies aimed at addressing the needs of our diverse ELL students are necessary to address the achievement gaps that exist and lead the nation in addressing this longstanding disparity.

Policy Recommendations

- Establish a center to develop (a) educational methods that are culturally relevant to English language learners; (b) effective learning strategies to help students with low achievement make up lost ground; and (c) a leadership program and teacher preparation program that incorporates effective, research-based child development and reading instruction tools and practices.
- Engage in an audit of the services for Bilingual and ELL programs in the State of CT. Audit should be performed by independent third party whose background includes an

understanding of the research and best practices for instructing ELL students and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy.

- Require the State Department of Education to develop high-quality model K-5 curricula in reading and math with considerations for students learning English as a Second Language. The curriculum will be evidence based with language, literacy, content instruction strategies, and relevant curriculum materials, aligned with state standards. These curricula should reflect the best practices and most up-to-date research and methods, and should be ready for teachers to use in classrooms. The curricula should include authentic CCSS aligned assessments and progress monitoring indicators that lend themselves to the data-driven decision-making process and SLO implementation. Curriculum will be recommended to districts with limited resources, high transiency, and large achievement gaps.
- School leaders should be trained in evidence based program models for ELL students and should assure their teachers receive professional development in educational methods that are culturally relevant this population.
- Create and disseminate a robust menu of assessments aligned to model curricula. These assessments, following the teaching best practices of Darling-Hammond (2014), should include a variety of balanced formats including portfolios, performance tasks, oral presentations, art works, and other learning artifacts that encourage higher level thinking.) Assessments should include scales and benchmarks to determine language proficiency development in addition to content mastery.
- Using info-finder, public health service providers, and Social Service Providers, create a campaign to increase the number of students with limited target language exposure access to early childcare services and language-developing family support. Monitor access until 2020 to assess impact of campaign.
- Allow Alliance Funding to be aimed at serving ELL students if districts are not able to secure funds from local municipalities. Require the inclusion, implementation, and monitoring of strategies aimed at supporting ELLs in Alliance Plans.
- Incentivize dual certification in Bilingual Education/TESOL for pre-service teachers in the form of grants. Create subsidized accelerated certification route for Bilingual Education/TESOL advanced degrees for teachers in Alliance districts.
- The state must implement results-based strategies that identify ELL children in state care who are performing substantially below grade level and provide targeted supports to improve their academic performance.

Use of Curriculum in Closing Achievement Gaps in Low Performing Schools

Results Statement – Model curriculum is available for schools and districts with persistent achievement gaps.

Curricula is most appropriately written at the local level; however, struggling schools and districts would benefit tremendously from models developed at the State level from which they could draw and to which they could align local curricular and instructional decisions. The curriculum is a launching point that a well-trained teacher can use to then engage experience and pedagogy to create teachable material and close persistent gaps in academic achievement.

The Common Core State Standards, adopted by the State of Connecticut, provide the targets to which local curricula will be written, but the standards in and of themselves do not constitute a curriculum.

Examples of successful curriculum documents exist in districts across Connecticut, and as States across the country implement the Common Core, such work is being completed in schools and districts from coast to coast.

The CSDE should glean what is best from this work, compile recommended curricular documents and re-articulate that work into a curricular model for each grade level,. This would serve as a model or a working starting point for districts within the State. Districts or schools recognized as failing, or underperforming, should be encouraged to adopt the State model or align their local documents to the State model.

Policy Recommendations

- The CT State Department of Education shall develop or identify model curriculum documents aligned to the Common Core State Standards and national subject area standards for grades K–8, to be provided to districts with the greatest achievement gaps or lowest performance overall, for local adoption.
- CSDE shall provide fully developed model units of study within these documents, for each grade level, around the major concepts of the grade in alignment with the Common Core for implementation and replication at the school level. CSDE will collaborate with local districts and REACs to provide training and ongoing support, including debriefing with teachers, for schools with the greatest achievement gaps or lowest overall performance as they implement these model units.
- School districts recognized as underperforming, or with persistent achievement gaps, will be encouraged and incentivized to undergo curriculum audits with the CSDE. Efforts should be made to encourage local and regional collaborations within this effort.
- Require the State Department of Education to develop high-quality model K-5 curricula in reading and math with considerations for students learning English as a Second Language. Curriculum will be recommended to districts with limited resources, high transiency, and large achievement gaps.
- Create and disseminate a robust menu of assessments aligned to model curricula. These assessments should include a variety of balanced formats including portfolios, performance tasks, oral presentations, art works, and other learning artifacts that encourage higher level thinking. Assessments should include scales and benchmarks to determine language proficiency development in addition to content mastery.

Role of Time in Closing Achievement Gap

Results Statement –Time will be maximized as a resource, for all students, to optimize their mastery of skills and content.

There is a growing body of research about the role that time plays in successful learning and in closing persistent gaps in academic achievement, including the particularly significant role of summer learning. When used well, time can help to narrow and close both the opportunity and academic achievement gaps prevalent in low-income schools.

Regarding summer learning, research studies reveal a consistent pattern: regardless of socioeconomic status (SES), students learn basic skills at the same rate during the school year; however, students' preservation and continuation of these academic skills during the summer are markedly different. During the summer, low-SES students fall behind their higher-SES peers who have greater exposure to academic and enrichment opportunities. Called "summer learning loss" or "summer slide," this trend is important in addressing educational disparities and supporting all students in their efforts to learn and achieve optimally.

The Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS) spoke before The Achievement Gap Task Force and stressed that a student's progress is based on demonstrated competency, not seat time. Dr. Ciarasulo stated, "Time should be the variable and learning the constant. It will take different amounts of time for different students to master skills and content." This directional thinking has caught on in many circles in Connecticut and has spawned a number of initiatives and pilots.

One such initiative has been the public-private partnership between the Ford Foundation and the National Center on Time & Learning (NCTL) to develop high quality and sustainable expanded learning time schools in five states, including Connecticut. Through the TIME Collaborative (Time for Innovation Matters in Education), the partnership – supported by the ESEA waiver process - is committed to adding at least 300 hours of more learning time for all students in participating schools. Those schools in Connecticut are located in Meriden, East Hartford, and New London. Concurrently, many of Connecticut's Alliance Districts and the Commissioner's Network Schools have, as part of their "turn around plans," included expanded time initiatives.

Arguably, one of the challenges high-poverty schools face is the diverse array of academic skills and skill-deficits their students bring to the classroom. Schools can no longer rely on a one-size-fits-all model for educating their student populations that demonstrate below-grade-level reading and writing performances, varying levels of English proficiency, and learning disabilities.

The teachers and administrators at high-performing, expanded-time schools recognize that in order to help all students achieve at enhanced levels, each student must have a schedule and an academic program which is tailored to address their individual needs.

An expanded schedule is the linchpin to this individualized approach, allowing schools to offer double, and sometimes triple, doses of instruction depending on student skill levels and knowledge gaps. The resulting academic program appears like a layer cake, with all the students benefiting from one or two layers, and some students getting three or even four.

Not only does the number of layers vary for each student, so does the content of each layer. Teachers constantly adjust what they teach, and how they teach it, to ensure that each student achieves mastery.

Teachers across high-performing, expanded-time schools emphasize that they need to modify their approach to teaching to fully leverage the additional time. High-performing, expanded-time schools align academic support periods to core academic classes. Schools make time for teachers to communicate about student needs, identify the strands and standards they need to review, and strategize about the most effective teaching strategies to employ.

Research demonstrates that teacher quality is the most significant school-related factor influencing student achievement and that the time schools invest in building teacher skills, when used well, can meaningfully improve student outcomes. In fact, building teacher skills takes time. The hard work of refining lesson plans, analyzing student data to identify areas for improvement, and sharing instructional strategies requires that teachers and administrators have sufficient time to meet and work together. An expanded school schedule affords the time needed for this type of collaboration.

Policy Recommendations

- The Achievement Gap Task Force will lead in sharing best practices, research, and outcome data to help build statewide understanding, dialogue and direction for expanded learning time, both within the classroom and school year and outside. Participants, at a minimum, should include state legislators, SDE officials, union representatives, community and business leaders, Boards of Education, Superintendents, and Connecticut's TIME Collaborative.
- The SDE shall offer policy guidance in developing a statewide framework to support time and learning innovations at the district and school levels.

- Support for School Improvement Grant (SIG) efforts to increase learning time: NCTL works directly with state education agency (SEA) leaders to develop guidelines for districts and schools to effectively increase learning time.
- OPM and SDE shall offer guidance and support to SEA leaders on using federal resources to increase learning time, including Race to the Top, supplemental education services (SES), and 21st Century Community Learning Center.
- Briefings on research in time and learning shall be presented to education and policy leaders, including state legislators, Department of Education officials, and union, community, and business leaders.
- Written proposals on time and learning innovations, based on national and state research, shall be integrated into state's application for federal funds or waivers.

Reading

Results Statement – Every child will read at goal by the end of third grade.

The future success of all students hinges upon their ability to become proficient readers. As such, teaching children to read is undoubtedly one of the most important tasks assigned to elementary schools. According to the National Institute of Health, the lack of reading skills is a major public health issue. As with any undiagnosed health problem, as it persists it becomes worse. For young children who are not able to read, if intervention does not happen early, there is a risk of it becoming quite difficult to ever catch up.

Brain research is now teaching us much about how children learn to read. Scientists estimate that reading is teachable to 95 percent of our youngsters (Fletcher & Lyon, 1998). Regular reading out loud to children from a young age has been shown to be critical in all areas of learning, including vocabulary, decoding skills, recognition of letters, and sound awareness. There are significant differences along racial and poverty lines in terms of this early engagement with literacy skills. Only 35% of Black children and 37% of Hispanic children were regularly read to out loud, versus 67% of White children. Similarly only 40% of children below the poverty levels were read to, versus 50% of those at the poverty line and 64% of those 200% or above the poverty line (Child Trends, 2014).

Based on these differences, it is not surprising that more than 1/3 of children from low-income communities enter formal kindergarten classes already behind their peers. A child who is not reading by the end of first grade has a one in eight chance of ever becoming a proficient reader. By fourth grade more than 50% of these children will not meet the standard for reading proficiency. Lower-income students eligible for free and reduced lunches had much lower NAEP reading scores than students not eligible, ranging between 22-29 percentage points in 2013 (Child Trends, 2014). The impact of low literacy is seen at many levels including absenteeism, school retention, special education, drop outs, unemployment, and crime.

The State of Connecticut must build upon existing literacy reform efforts, replicating piloted, evidence-based interventions and instruction statewide to close the achievement gap in reading. Successful literacy reform includes dynamic and involved literacy leadership; coherent instructional design (sufficient amounts of teaching and research-based curriculum); interventions for at-risk students; valid/reliable assessments to guide instruction; coaching/embedded professional development which provides in-depth theory based knowledge of literacy; a quality, organized, literacy environment; and parents as critical partners in developing and sustaining lifelong literacy behaviors.

The importance of the role of parents engaging in home-based reading practices should not be under-stated. Research suggests that home-based literacy programs which use a two-generational approach contribute to children’s literacy, improved vocabulary, listening comprehension, decoding skills, spelling, comprehension and other positive academic and socio-emotional outcomes (Hood, Conlon, & Andrews, 2008; Kalb & Van Ours, 2014; Walker, Gooze, & Torres, 2014). Priority should be given to programs that consider the importance of a two-generational approach to closing the literacy achievement gap.

Policy Recommendations

- Grow a tier one, embedded reading coach model of teacher training in the classroom that prepares all teachers, Pre-K-3, in early literacy assessment, intervention, and practice. This model, which is based on proven research in our state and nationally, has led to the greatest number of children moving forward, not entering special education, and successfully mastering the skills necessary to become proficient in reading.
- Grow a tier two and tier three model of reading intervention for every student not reading at proficiency, in K-3rd grade. Assure each student has an individualized reading plan and that each school has the professional capacity and literacy team to assess, intervene, and continuously monitor the on-going literacy gains of each student.
- Develop a Reading Director for SDE in charge of literacy across all divisions, policies and programs to review data, implement policies, support schools, and assure professional development and fidelity to best practices. This position will report directly to the Commissioner and will work in collaboration with the State Turnaround Officer and Chief Academic Officer.
- Utilize the document “Connecticut’s Blueprint for Reading Achievement: The Report of the Early Reading Success Panel” as the focal point for student and teacher competencies and update the research behind it.
- Increase Pool of Literacy Specialists: Authorize Literacy/How as an Alternative Route to Certification (ARC) institution to increase the supply of well-trained, embedded literacy specialists utilizing research based practice.
- Address time and content quality together in reading- students who are behind do not learn more in the same amount of time as students who are on track or ahead. Catch-up growth is driven by proportional increases in direct instructional time. Quality instruction, assessment and intervention, coupled with increased time, ensure sufficient daily instructional minutes to achieve additional annual growth at the appropriate grade level.

- Work with Institutes of Higher Education to ensure that new and current faculty members have expertise in the science of reading and research-based practices (as recommended by Connecticut’s Blueprint and codified in statute).
- Allocate sufficient instructional time for language arts (a minimum 2 hour block for language arts/reading).
- Require routine formative assessments in reading for all students in K-3 to inform and ensure differentiated instruction, using research-based assessment tools that are teacher friendly, electronic, less costly, and that offer more information to teachers on intervention.
- Collect statewide longitudinal data on universal screening and progress monitoring assessments that inform instruction and can be analyzed to highlight schools that are “beating the odds.”
- Build strong, committed school leadership that are knowledgeable in K-3 literacy on the administrative level to make reading a school priority. Link reading assessments to the state’s leadership strategy so that school superintendents and principals fully know how to assess the gains in their schools and how to intervene where gains are not evident.
- Hold each district and school accountable for reading achievement.
- Create incentives for teachers who consistently improve reading outcomes for students in kindergarten through grade three. For example, create a master teacher designation for those teachers who show that they have turned the curve in reading within their classroom.
- Provide performance bonuses for teachers who produce improvement in reading scores and award a ten-year recertification, rather than a five-year recertification, for teachers with the master teacher designation.
- For teachers in K-3rd grade who do not show improvement in the reading outcomes of their students, ensure they receive appropriate professional development based on the results of reading surveys designed to identify teaching gaps in the science of teaching reading.
- Create a partnership with parents on literacy in low performing schools so that parents know how and what to do at home and at school to facilitate literacy gains.
- Develop two generational strategies where parents and children are supported in ELL and in overall literacy gains.

STEM Subjects

Results Statement – Every child will ?

The importance of teaching science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) is critical for the innovation and continued success of the American workforce. As of 2012, 600,000 manufacturing jobs remained unfilled, despite unemployment levels, due to a lack of training for in-demand fields requiring STEM subject capacities (U.S. News and World Report, 2012). Further, the National Academy of Science, National Academy of Engineering, and the Institute of Medicine (2007) highlighted the U.S.'s slide in global competitiveness in science and technology industries and call for shifts in public education to meet this need. The National Academies of Science (2007) writes, "To succeed in this new information-based and highly technological society, all students need to develop their capabilities in science, technology and mathematics (STEM) to levels much beyond what was considered acceptable in the past" (p. 1).

Multiple studies point to the achievement gap in STEM subjects for students of color, pointing to the need for increased exposure, teaching, and mentorship in these skills (Center for Education Policy Analysis, 2008; Child Trends & Hispanic Institute, 2014; Gasbarra & Johnson, 2008; National Academies of Science, 2007). Math is the one of the most important subjects for students, yet there is a shortage of qualified teachers.

Math achievement is a strong predictor of African American and Latino students' college attendance, with significant national achievement gaps in math noted by 4th grade. According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress, African American students are between 19 and 24 percentage points and Hispanic students are between 14 and 16 percent points below the national achievement average in math. Child Trends (2014) notes that Black students had the lowest math scores in 2013, 26 points below White students in 4th grade. Gasbarra & Johnson's (2008) research points to Hispanics being largely under-represented in STEM fields.

Specific to Connecticut, our state has the highest Hispanic-White achievement gap in math at 39 points. According to the 2014 report detailing national progress for Hispanic students in math, most states have seen increases in Hispanic students over the last ten years. Despite this, Connecticut has seen no progress. In fact, Connecticut was only one of four states (along with California, Utah and Rhode Island) which made both bottom tier lists, defined as having lower average scores significantly lower than other states for both 4th and 8th graders (Pane, Child Trends, 2014). Worse, in only two states – Connecticut and Michigan – there was no significant increase in either 4th or 8th grade math scores in ten years.

Research has pointed to the importance of building mentorship opportunities for students with adults in STEM-related careers in order to help students see the link between what they learn in

the classroom and future employment opportunities (Bridgeland et al., 2006). This is particularly critical given that a primary cause of high school dropout is the lack of connection between classroom work and application to the working world.

Policy Recommendations

- Connect students of color with role models in STEM fields by growing mentorship opportunities?
- Promote STEM subject learning in tangible, job-oriented ways, including internships, on-site learnings, and teaching subjects through real-life applications (e.g. teaching mathematics through construction)?
- Incentives for math teachers? Lack of qualified teachers
- Need for specific math interventions?

Creativity and Innovation

Results Statement – All students have opportunities to learn in classroom environments that promote a culture of creativity and innovation

Researchers have documented, and educators and policymakers are increasingly concerned about, a narrowing of the curriculum that has taken place in American schools over the past several decades. The standards and accountability movements have placed increased scrutiny on standardized test scores leading many schools to shift time to the tested subjects—particularly math and English language arts (ELA)—at the expense of non-tested subjects, such as social studies, science, foreign language, music, and the arts. Research shows that the time spent on these non-tested subjects across the nation’s elementary schools has been cut by one-third since the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB).

While many students do, in fact, need more time on task to become proficient in math and ELA, to be successful in today’s knowledge-based economy they also need time to develop the scientific knowledge, the historical awareness, and the creative thinking and problem-solving skills that come from a well-rounded education. Low-income students, in particular, need exposure in school to a rich array of topics, skills, and knowledge, because they are less likely than their more affluent peers to receive this exposure at home or through extracurricular activities pursued outside of school. By offering students engaging learning opportunities that appeal to their diverse skills, interests, and learning styles, well-rounded schools may combat the high dropout rates that plague low-income communities.

The arts promote a culture of creativity and innovation and draw upon and develop a capacity for pattern recognition that can be applied to other disciplines. For this reason, the best medical schools have their students take art classes to improve their diagnostic capabilities. Furthermore, as Ken Robinson showed in the UK, the schools with the best art programs have the best math and science results. Similarly, in a longitudinal study published in 2012, 71% of low-SES students with arts-rich experiences attended college, versus only 48% of the low-arts, low-SES group (NEA, 2012). Eighth grade students with high-arts, low-SES from K-8th showed higher test scores in science and writing; while high school students who earned few or no arts credits were 5 times more likely to not graduate than those with arts credits (NEA, 2012). While more research is needed to understand the cause-and-effect relationship between arts involvement and academic and civic achievements, this correlation is statistically significant across four longitudinal data groups (NEA, 2012).

The state should aggressively exploit this connection, using art along with other project-based learning to help make K-12 schools that show persistent gaps in academic achievement the best schools at developing pattern recognition skills, producing an innovation-capable workforce, and serving as a mechanism for promoting upward mobility and reducing income inequality.

Policy Recommendations

- The State Department of Education, in collaboration with the Department of Economic and Community Development, shall ensure that all students have opportunities to learn in classroom environments that promote a culture of creativity and innovation, and creativity should be included as a criterion, assessment tool, and emphasis for the classroom.
- K-12 districts and schools that show persistent gaps in academic achievement should provide rich and diverse arts and extracurricular programming that promotes innovation and creativity.

Chronic Absence

Results Statement – All Students will attend school at least 90% of the school year.

Good attendance is essential to student achievement and graduation. Children must be in school to thrive academically. But too often, students, parents, and school leaders and teachers do not realize how quickly absences – excused or unexcused – can leave children and youth falling behind. Chronic absence – missing 10 percent of the school year, or just 2-3 days each month – predicts lower third-grade reading proficiency, course failure, and eventual dropout. Indeed, research has shown that dropping out of school is usually a gradual process of disengagement and chronic absence may be an early indicator of this process (Building a Grad Nation, 2014; Bridgeland et al., 2006).

Although attendance is typically considered the province of local education agencies, state policymakers can play key roles in ensuring that schools track the most reliable attendance data and intervene in meaningful ways. Essential to this is looking beyond the traditional measures of attendance: the number of students who show up every day (average daily attendance) and the number of students skipping school (truancy).

Schools and districts must also look at how many students are missing 10 percent of the school year in unexcused and excused absences. Research shows that 10 percent is the threshold where absenteeism correlates to poor academic outcomes. This measure is known as chronic absence.

Families need to be informed so that they can partner with schools on attendance. Often parents do not realize how quickly absences add up, or the potential impact of this lost learning time. Helping families understand what they can and should do to ensure their children are in school so they have an equal opportunity to learn is a critical ingredient of a two-generation approach to ending the achievement gap. This awareness must be coupled with outreach to ensure parents know how to improve attendance or where to turn for help.

The impact hits low-income students and children of color particularly hard, especially if they do not have the resources to make up for lost time in the classroom and are more likely to face systemic barriers to getting to school – such as unreliable transportation or conflicting parent work schedules. Nationally, in schools where at least $\frac{3}{4}$ of the students were eligible for reduced or free lunch, 23% of 8th graders missed at least three days of school in the month. While the overall percentage of absences three or more times per month has decreased since 1994 for Hispanic and African American students, the racial gap in attendance remains significant when compared to White students.

Chronic absence can develop for myriad reasons ranging from hunger, a parent's depression, transportation problems, lack of winter clothing, to a child raising the younger children while a parent works. Chronic absence is a social and economic barometer of the families in Connecticut. Indeed, chronic absence due to children taking on more traditional parental responsibilities, is disproportionately found in families facing poverty and in Latino and African American families. With careful attention and personal outreach, each child's situation can often be turned around promptly. Treating an absent child as a problem or placing family fault through a punitive approach misses both the root cause and the intervention for chronic absence.

In some cases, chronic absence is a symptom of a student's general unhappiness with or disengagement from school. Improvement plans should include efforts to determine underlying reasons for excessive absenteeism, including concerns about: 1) safety, 2) belonging and friendship, 3) academic engagement and progress, 4) freedom to make choices, 5) opportunities to have fun, and 6) learning differences.

For many students, there is a need for mentorship and positive role models in order to assist with reengagement with school, as well as provide increased opportunities to develop social and emotional skills. Only 41% of high school dropouts had an adult in the school environment that they could talk to about personal problems that may impact school (Bridgeland et.al, 2006). Multiple studies have shown the impact of mentors in having positive impacts on school attendance, academic success, engagement with school, college preparation, and workforce readiness (Balfanz et al., 2007; Bridgeland et al., 2006; Bridgeland, Bruce & Hariharan, 2013; Building a Grad Nation, 2014). More than $\frac{3}{4}$ of poor and/or racial minority students with a mentor aspire to enroll in college, versus on 56% without a mentor (Building a Grad nation, 2014).

Community partners, including non-profit, public, or civic organizations focused on health, youth development, parent engagement, social services, volunteer mobilization, community building, and economic development groups, should be invited to participate in the process from a strengths-based perspective in partnering with families and students (Attendance Works, 2014). Additional support might include: peer or adult mentors or attendance buddies, out of school activities (research demonstrates engaging programs pre- or post- school can improve school day performance), health supports available within the school when possible, and connection to case coordination or additional social supports as necessary. Beginning in 2012, New Britain implemented a chronic absenteeism two-generational intervention and has already seen dramatic drops in chronic absenteeism from its baseline year of 2011-2012; chronic absenteeism rates have changed from 30% to 18% in kindergarten, 24% to 13% in 1st grade, and 19% to 14% in 2nd grade.

Policy Recommendations

- Build public awareness of chronic absence and why it matters across schools and communities.
- Track individual student attendance and absences in state longitudinal student databases, ensuring that data are entered accurately and consistently.
- Adopt a standard definition of chronic absence (missing 10% of the school year) to be used statewide and by each school district. The definition should clarify how chronic absence is different from unexcused absences (truancy) and ensure the inclusion of absences due to suspensions out of school and in school suspensions when conducted in an environment where student learning is ineffective as well as absences that come when children switch schools and do not immediately start at a new school.
- Regularly calculate and share chronic absence data statewide, providing information by district, school, grade, and subgroup. Make the information publicly available through school and district report cards.
- Encourage districts to provide families with real-time data on their child's attendance, as well as an alert if their child may be accruing too many absences.
- Require school improvement plans to include chronic absence data, strategies that will be used to identify causes for such absence, build a culture of attendance, and fashion effective interventions for chronically absent students.
- Promote dissemination and learning to educators and parents about evidence-based and promising practices for reducing chronic absence, including strategies that engage community organizations as partners in the work.
- Schools should not have to solve chronic absence alone. State policymakers and advocates should encourage schools, public agencies, civic organizations, businesses, and non-profits to jointly review data on chronic absence and discuss the implications for action, policy, and allocation of resources that can improve school attendance such as health supports, early education programs, afterschool programs, and mentoring efforts.
- Promote opportunities for interagency support and building relationships with schools in order to provide mentorship opportunities for students with chronic absence problems.

School Climate and the Achievement Gap

Results Statement – All students learn in a positive school climate.

Research has found a correlation between school climate and student achievement, with negative school climate impacting student performance in English and mathematics. Maximizing academic outcomes and closing the achievement gap are linked to improving social-emotional health to promote schools that are safe, respectful, and conducive to learning.

Promoting a positive school climate, through research-based behavioral and emotional supports and interventions, improves school safety and student learning, reduces the likelihood of depression and suicide in youth who are targets of bullying, and strengthens communities, now and well into adulthood.

In 2011, Governor Malloy signed into law a measure that strengthened our efforts to improve school climate and prevent and address school bullying. The law required—among other things—that each school board assess climate at the District and School level, develop and implement a safe school climate plan, establish a school climate committee, and collect data on specific incidents of bullying and interventions.

In 2013, in response to Newtown, the legislature enacted Public Act (P.A.) 13-3 – *An Act Concerning Gun Violence Prevention and Children's Safety*, which provides an opportunity to link and integrate our school climate laws and school safety.

Policy Recommendations

To address external and internal stressors that impact an individual student's readiness to learn, and improve school climate overall, the following implementation recommendations should be considered:

- School Climate Committee should use school climate assessments and school-specific data on bullying to create a concrete School-based Climate Improvement Plan to help improve school climate.
- Support the development of a pilot program to test school-based models focusing on social-emotional learning, self-awareness, and self-regulation.
- Districts should revise their climate improvement plans to the CSDE every three years, to incorporate updated data and showcase best practices at their individual schools. SDE

should develop and implement a high quality statewide school climate assessment instrument, and work with districts to collect information related to policies and practices that are successful in contributing to school climate improvement.

- Clarify the definition of bullying in Section 10-222d of the C.G.S. to align with language governing protected classes and harassment under civil rights laws.
- Provide guidance and support to implement the state's school climate and anti-bullying statute, with fidelity, in pre-K through 12, with a resource emphasis in districts and schools that experience persistent gaps in academic achievement. Support may include professional development, including teacher training.
- In underperforming districts and schools, climate assessments could be used to help identify and create connections between student, classroom, school, district, and the community and external resources, in an inside/outside the school gap closing strategy. This strategy may include access to after-school programs, evening family and community supports, and to neighborhood vocational and recreation programming.
- Survey students, if possible annually, in order to obtain their views on the extent to which the climate for learning in their schools is conducive to their success.

Narrow the High-End Opportunity Gap-Find the Missing Advanced Placement Students

Results Statement – Low income and Black and Hispanic students will enroll in and pass Advanced Placement courses.

As the United States seeks higher standards for college and career in this global and transforming economy, Advanced Placement (AP) courses and their success rates become a significant metric for strong and stimulating curriculum. AP is a program of the College Board system which offers more than 30 courses across subject areas, including foreign languages, history and calculus.

Connecticut must not just narrow the achievement gap that reveals the need to lift poor school performance among low-income and Black and Hispanic students. The state must also address the opportunity gap, where some students have access to stimulating courses with high expectations, and others do not.

Though there has been a significant increase in students taking the AP exam, this increase is not reflected in the participating rates of minority students and poor students.

Middle and high income students are three times more likely to enroll in an AP course than low-income students. The opportunity gap rests not largely between schools but within them. If low income students participated in AP at the same rate as other students, more than a half million more low-income students would benefit from advanced study. These same patterns hold for Black, Hispanic and Native American students who are not from low income families.

Opportunities to participate in rigorous classes can help students significantly with postsecondary options. Yet, the data reveals opportunity gaps between schools, within schools and in the types of programs offered. There are fewer AP classes in school serving students of color and low income students. As a nation and certainly in Connecticut, we have endorsed a college-and career-ready agenda. Yet there are large gaps in our most rigorous existing courses and curriculum.

Policy Recommendations

- Automatically enroll students who score proficient on state exams and allow for an opt out. Build supports and train teachers for AP classes.
- Provide higher level learning opportunities for all students. Prepare all students for AP coursework.
- Require schools to examine data on AP enrollment patterns and strategize what needs to be done to close the opportunity gap.
- Assure that students know about accessing AP courses, what the benefits are, and how to sign up.
- Include the preparation gap in long term strategy and build rigorous courses as the norm.
- Build a culture of high expectation, find missing students in AP classes, and determine professional development and staff supports to make this possible.
- Require all high schools to offer a minimum number of AP classes and provide the necessary supports.
- Identify model schools that are closing the high end opportunity gap for others to learn from.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS
CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP:
INSIDE HIGHER EDUCATION

Leaders that Close the Gap: Administrator Preparation and Development

Results Statement – All principals and administrative leaders will be prepared to work in schools with achievement gaps.

“Principals influence learning, both for students and teachers. They are key to any reform that focuses on teaching and learning” (Killion, 2012).

Researchers have long reported that “high-achieving schools have strong, competent leaders” (Jackson & Davis, 2000). It is an intuitive truth supported by research. And in an era of implementation of the Common Core State Standards and wide-spread change in teacher evaluation, the direct effect of principals as instructional leaders within their schools is at an unparalleled level. This is especially true of any reform aimed at closing Connecticut’s persistent gaps in academic achievement.

School districts, however, continue to find it difficult to fill principal positions with proficient individuals. Eighty percent of superintendents nation-wide reported finding a qualified school principal a problem (Roza, 2003), and administrative preparatory programs are not preparing candidates for these positions (Houchens, 2012). Sixty-two percent of aspiring principals reported that they were not ready to assume a principal position upon completion of a preparatory program (Brown-Ferrigno & Muth, 2006), and successful practicing principals were unable to articulate any connection between their proficiency and the way in which they were prepared for the job (Tucker & Coddling, 2002).

Schools and districts identified as failing or underperforming experience these difficulties more significantly than more affluent or highly achieving districts. Administrator preparatory programs can do a better job exposing aspiring principals to the realities of schools and districts in which persistent gaps in achievement exist, and school districts themselves can grow and prepare the next generation of principals within their own systems.

Intentionally broad based assistant principalships, focused on professional learning, provide the best incubators for preparing strong and confident principals. The experience of working in a well-designed assistant principalship that focuses on gap-closing principles can both amplify and accelerate the development of the proficiencies needed to be successful in the principalship (Freeman, 2009).

Policy Recommendations

- Schools of education will ensure that aspiring principals and administrators have internship experiences that expose them to school settings with marked gaps in academic achievement.
- Connecticut schools identified as failing, underperforming, or exhibiting persistent gaps in academic achievement shall be encouraged and incentivized to engage in partnerships with Connecticut Universities to provide internship experiences for aspiring principals and administrators.
- School districts with schools that are identified as failing or underperforming or with persistent achievement gaps shall be encouraged and incentivized to provide instructionally focused Assistant Principal positions in all schools in which such gaps are identified, including elementary schools. These positions will, by design, be instructional leaders and not simply disciplinarians or monitors. Districts that receive support for such positions must use such support to supplement, not to supplant administrative spending.
- There will be a special seminar program on the achievement gap for school leaders. New administrators will have an opportunity to share experiences, develop mental models related to instructional leadership, and receive professional development in the area of instructional leadership aimed at closing persistent gaps in academic achievement. All administrators, whose positions are funded through such incentives, will participate in the seminar program. The CSDE will collaborate with one or more schools of education and/or RECS's or CAS, to develop and support this seminar program on the achievement gap for school leaders.
- The preparation of school administrator should include a focus on the psychology of human behavior, with an emphasis on ways to build positive relationships, promote high levels of student engagement, and improve student behavior in a non-coercive manner.

Highly Effective Teacher Preparation Programs

Results Statement – All pre-service teachers accepted to teach in CT schools will be trained in closing persistent gaps in academic achievement.

Research has long held that the teacher is one of the single most important variables to student learning. Unsurprisingly, skillful teaching leads to student gains in performance (Hattie, 2009).

Closing persistent gaps in academic achievement in Connecticut schools is an investment in the state's future economic success. This will require Schools of Education in Connecticut to develop highly effective evidenced-based preparation programs that will recruit the brightest students to the profession, be representative of the student population, focus on student learning outcomes, and prepare prospective teachers to stay in the profession.

Pre-service teachers need to have a deep understanding of content knowledge, subject specific methods, learning theories, foundations of education, and classroom management. They need to have effective written and verbal skills and be exceptionally bright. They need to have a deep understanding of subject specific methods, learning theories, foundations of education, and classroom management. Such teachers would need to be trained in best practices and in proven methods of teaching in low-performing schools. New teachers must also be facile in best practice with English Language Learners and respectful of all student cultures.

Policy Recommendations

Characteristics of highly effective teacher preparation programs aimed at closing persistent gaps in academic achievement should include, at a minimum:

- At our Schools of Education, employ highly rigorous and comprehensive admissions standards, which include, in addition to any statutory minimums, a high grade point average, appropriate dispositions for teaching, strong written and verbal skills, and teaching-related experiences, as necessary components of admission.
- Require prospective teachers to acquire a deep understanding of content and subject-specific teacher knowledge, as well as effective pedagogical preparation.
- Create a mechanism by which pre-service teachers are able to develop strong working relationships with faculty from Schools of Education and content area experts in schools and colleges in their respective Institutions of Higher Education.

- Require prospective teachers to acquire strong pedagogical content preparation through university coursework, and subject-specific methods courses, learning theories, foundations of education, and classroom management techniques. In addition, pre-service teachers should acquire instructional strategies to teach effectively in low-performing schools, and in schools with diverse student populations and with English-Language Learners.
- Leadership and faculty in Institutes of Higher Education shall collaborate with the lowest performing K-12 districts and schools to define, identify, develop, and support a strong clinical relationship aimed at closing persistent gaps in academic achievement.
- Conduct systematic formative and summative assessment of pre-service teachers, cooperating teachers and university supervisors, throughout the teacher training program and through competency-based portfolio review on the capacity to teach and succeed in schools with persistent gaps in academic achievement.
- Schools of Education shall ensure that aspiring teachers have internship experiences that expose them to diverse school settings. Connecticut schools identified as failing or underperforming shall be encouraged and incentivized to engage in partnerships with teacher preparation programs at Schools of Education to provide such experiences.
- Create an achievement gap closing module within the Teacher Education and Mentoring Program [TEAM], which would include, at a minimum, specialized professional development and incentives for teachers that choose to teach in low performing K-12 schools.
- Establish The Next Generation is Here project, an initiative that would prepare highly effective teachers who commit to and devote their careers to working in schools where persistent gaps in academic achievement exist.
- The preparation of teachers should include a focus on the psychology of human behavior, with an emphasis on ways to build positive relationships, promote high levels of student engagement and improve student behavior in a non-coercive manner. This emphasis should infuse both pre-service and in-service training for teachers, including the TEAM program.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS
CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP:
INSIDE STATE GOVERNMENT

Students in State Care

Results Statement – Students in state care will meet goal in school performance.

More than 4,000 children are in the custody or supervised care of the State of Connecticut. These are the most vulnerable children as they are no longer with their families, have been uprooted, and often feel a missing context and community.

Students in the state's care or custody include abused or neglected children living in DCF custody; DCF committed children living in DCF-contracted residential treatment centers, group homes, STAR homes, and SAFE homes; youth on parole under DCF supervision; youth on probation who are in public school district "alternative schools"; and others.

Historically, Connecticut has neither tracked nor required local school districts to report the academic performance of children in foster care or the juvenile justice system. Of these students, approximately 65% are children of color. As a result, the state has lacked the basic data necessary to determine whether it is meeting the educational needs of its children. However, a 2014 report by Connecticut Voices for Children includes data which demonstrates a clear achievement gap for children committed to DCF. In 2013, DCF-involved students were less likely to score proficient on standardized tests than the average CT student, the average CT student eligible for free or reduced lunches, and the average of students attending comparable school districts (Feder, 2014).

In 3rd grade math, 54.4% of children committed to DCF were proficient, compared to 85.8% of the total CT population. In writing, 47.4% were proficient in state care versus 83.2% and in reading, 41.8% were proficient versus 74.4% in the total population. By 10th grade, this gap widens dramatically, with youth committed to DCF less likely to reach proficiency in math, science, reading and writing by 34 to 47 percentage points. Children attending Unified School District 2, the school district operated by DCF for children living in detention or a psychiatric facility, demonstrated an even larger achievement gap, with less than a third achieving proficiency in any core subject. It should be noted that while this data depicts a large disparity, it does not determine whether this achievement gap existed prior to DCF-involvement or if entering the foster care system has changed the academic experience of these children. Further tracking and analysis of the academic challenges and needs for serving this population is needed in order to target appropriate interventions.

We do know that students in state care often lack a consistent adult or advocate who can ensure they are getting the help they need in school to succeed, or who can help them apply to a school or program that is right for them. Children in foster care are often relocated rapidly,

which can cause disruptions in school attendance. 24% of DCF-involved students are chronically absent (missing more than 10% of school days), versus the average CT of 11%. Many students in state care live and attend schools in residential facilities that are not rigorously monitored as to whether they are meeting children's educational needs.

Furthermore, national literature suggests that many youth in state care have not only experienced at least one form of trauma, but ¼ meet criteria for PTSD, impacting academic achievement and correlating with higher levels of chronic absence and exclusionary discipline (Feder & Kramer, 2014). Given that traumatic experiences and stress are commonly correlated with acting out behaviors and discipline problems, DCF-involved students should be screened for mental health needs and PBIS supports should be used throughout the state in order to address root causes and preventative measures prior to exclusionary discipline acts. In 2013, the legislature approved a DCF, SDE Raise the Grade pilot program (P.A. 13-234) for the cities of Hartford, Bridgeport and New Haven for a two-year period beginning July 1, 2013, to increase the academic achievement of children and youth who live in DCF custody or who are being served by the Court Support Services Division in those cities. The pilot includes the use of full-time coordinators who identify youth and develop plans to improve the child's academic performance.

At the conclusion of the pilot, a report will be submitted to the Achievement Gap Task Force on the number and educational profile of children served by the program and the impact on their educational performance, including on (1) achievement, (2) absenteeism, and (3) adverse disciplinary measures.




Policy Recommendations


- The Interagency Council should monitor the implementation with fidelity of the Raise the Grade Pilot Program in the pilot cities, with a plan toward using data and lessons learned from the pilot to bring the Raise the Grade Program to scale.
- DCF, in consultation with SDE should focus on embedding best practices in the pilot cities, which should serve as demonstration sites.



- State agencies must continue to effectively coordinate to track, share and report achievement data to ensure that children in state care in the pilot cities and throughout the state do not fall through the cracks of our educational system.
- The state must require quality, transparency and accountability from alternative school programs” administered by public schools as well as private educational programs that are run by the state or state contractors.
- DCF should create a smaller ratio between foster students and teachers devoted to their school success in the DCF Education Division.
- DCF-involved students should be screened for Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), and mental health needs met in order to provide appropriate socio-emotional support and address underlying problems that may lead to high anxiety, high absenteeism, discipline problems and subsequent poor academic achievement.
- PBIS supports should be used in schools throughout the state in order to address root causes and preventative measures prior to exclusionary discipline acts.
- Foster care liaison role (used in CA) – similar to homeless youth liaison in each school district after federal McKinney-Vento act? CT Voices for children rec – Do we want this?
- Law passed in 2010 to have students stay in home school districts if in best interest of child – however often in lower performing school districts – this should be taken into account in terms of best interest? CT Voices for children rec – do we want this?

Ending the Achievement Gap




Master Plan Policy Summary


Poverty Reduction	
<i>Result: All children will live with their families in economic stability.</i>	
Ensure income tax-based assistance for workers, including Connecticut's existing refundable state earned income tax credit to supplement low-wage earnings of parents.	
For families with incomes of less than 50% of the state median, provide childcare subsidies. This will increase employment as well as reduce family expenses.	
Expand rental assistance, structured in ways to increase poor families' income and their incentives to work.	
Bolster two generational approaches to poverty reduction by assuring that all parents have a high school degree. Study obstacles and promote all avenues and efficiencies to meet this goal.	
Increase participation to 85% in safety-net programs like SNAP (food stamps), LIHEAP, WIC, subsidized housing, and Medicaid.	
Promote co-parenting of both mother and father when possible, regardless of marital status.	
Help fathers pay child-support awards by bolstering job training and employment for those fathers who are not paying, due to lack of skills, employment, and/or employability.	
Reassess TANF policy to avoid abrupt cliffs in income and bolster authentic opportunities for job training and education. Consider expanding the 21 month TANF time limitation to support training for sustainable employment.	
Enroll more youth in programs shown to reduce teen births.	
Adopt programs that help young men complete high school and enter the workforce.	
Hunger and Food Insecurity	
<i>Result: Children will be food secure and fueled to learn.</i>	
Schools will ensure that all students receive the nutrition required to be active learners from the opening bell of the day.	
Schools will incorporate the most appropriate school breakfast delivery options given their unique characteristics for optimizing student participation levels.	
Extended Day programs will employ the federally reimbursable snacks/meal programs needed to make the extra time on task productive.	

<p>Schools will actively assist in the marketing of the Summer Meals Programs in their communities. This effort will receive support and outreach by local and state officials promoting the benefits for children.</p>	
<p>Schools will assist families of students participating in free or reduced price meals to apply for SNAP benefits through the Department of Social Services.</p>	
<p>Housing <i>Result: All children will live in stable housing.</i></p>	
<p>The state should 1) increase incentives provided to municipalities that zone for and create affordable and mixed-income housing under HOMEConnecticut and other housing programs, 2) give significantly higher priority for discretionary grants and other benefits to municipalities that similarly zone and create affordable mixed-income housing, and 3) support Sect. 8-30g and other statutes that strongly encourage such zoning and housing creation.</p>	
<p>The state should take advantage of the higher demand for multi-family housing-ownership and rental that comes from economic and demographic imperatives and provide incentives, such as cash grants, infrastructure capital, technical assistance, etc., where towns are inclined.</p>	
<p>Use investments in new commuter rail and Bus Rapid Transit lines to ensure affordable and mixed-income housing is built near those stations. In addition to lower housing costs, families can enjoy lower transportation costs, avoid substandard housing hazards, and benefit from generally high-resource schools in communities with stations.</p>	
<p>Schools should collect data to become aware of housing and home situations of students: to learn whether students live in overcrowded or substandard homes, whether housing is perceived as unsafe by the children and family, whether parents pay so much for housing that there is little income left for necessities, and whether parents are unable to be around to supervise homework, meals and recreation due to employment demands of high rent.</p>	
<p>Fully utilize the McKinney-Vento Act, working with Congress to expand available federal resources to ensure that homeless children have access and transport to school to minimize the deleterious effects of changes in school with accompanying loss of trusted teachers, friendships and routines, and to work against the lowered school expectations and inconstancy during transiency.</p>	

<p>The Commissioner of Housing may develop initiatives that will improve access to higher performing schools for families using the RAP certificate and federal Section 8 vouchers by including information about public school choice as part of a Mobility Counseling Program; undertaking a pilot program to link vouchers and certificated to housing opportunities in neighborhoods with high performing schools; and convening an inter-agency working group with the Commissioner of Education to propose new initiatives to better connect fair housing and the promotion of educational diversity and achievement.</p>	
<p>Family Engagement <i>Result: Families will actively engage in their children's learning and partner with their children's schools.</i></p>	
<p>Provide parent universities in low-income and public housing sites that support parents as partners in the school house. Such parent universities teach parents the culture of learning in the school house, and help facilitate parent learning about how to partner with schools, what to expect, how to determine quality, and how to prepare children for daily and year-long schoolwork.</p>	
<p>Ensure that every parent utilizing a home visitation program knows what a quality early childhood setting contains and how to place their child in an early care setting, if desired. Create a formal placement trajectory from home visitation to quality early care, for vulnerable families in learning.</p>	
<p>Review each School Readiness Council's parent engagement plan and ensure that parents are partners in early care and education within both formal and informal learning settings.</p>	
<p>Ensure that providers are trained in authentic family engagement to maximize partnerships with families in learning.</p>	
<p>Within Alliance and Network schools, create incentives for community/school family strengthening and engagement plans, pre-natal to grade three. Consider matching Title 1 dollars and/or expanding the Parent Trust Act to finance such plans. Plans would offer parents information on school excellence, how children learn, education policies, linkages, resources, and supports for parents to meet and converse with one another.</p>	
<p>Build fatherhood audits into birthing hospitals, home visiting programs and early care settings to reflect on how fathers are welcomed and brought in as partners for a child's optimal development. (Fatherhood audits have been launched in our state through DPH and reveal significant gains in systems change with increased participation among dads).</p>	

Ensure that the parents on School Governance Councils are trained and can inform other parents, K-3, on educational excellence, how children are faring in reading and math, and what policy and program challenges and strengths avail themselves in the schoolhouse. Ensure that all members of School Governance Councils are trained to reach out to parents.	
Utilize existing structures and policies to enhance family engagement such as family resource centers, community family centers, family programs in housing projects, Parents Supporting Educational Excellence, and other model programs and initiatives that see parents as assets and partners in education.	
Assure that the current Lead program, working with school leaders on leadership, includes leadership with families as partners.	
Review family engagement plans in schools and what is written in school profiles to assess trends and quality in family engagement. Ensure that existing public school requirements for school-family compacts and policies are enforced and evaluated.. (SDE)	
All teacher and administrator preparation programs should provide opportunities for students to gain competency in family engagement. (DHE)	
Encourage and incentivize school districts to develop district-wide programs that support family involvement, in partnership with community agencies and family resource centers.	
Allow up to 2% of Title One funds to be used to support parent involvement programs, as is federally recommended. Title 1 funds can be used to hire family-school coordinators and can help the school to develop a family-friendly school climate.	
Ensure that schools and school districts include parent engagement as a key component of any strategic plan to improve student achievement, with a shared vision for interaction between parents, teachers, schools, administrators, and school boards from Pre-K through high school.	
Expand the availability of resources and public-private partnerships in Connecticut's model Parent Trust so all low-income districts can compete and provide family engagement and leadership training.	
Require local Boards of Education, with School Governance Councils, to review, assess, and improve upon parent involvement and engagement policies every two years.	
Reward school districts that make family leadership available to support parent involvement in schools.	
Ensure that all activities and policies to engage parents (school governance councils, parent universities, family civics, etc.) are aligned and coordinated across districts and within schools.	
Create a map and access points for parents to easily access information and ways to be involved in schools.	






Include parent involvement in teachers', administrators', and front office staff's annual performance evaluation process.	
Train school staff on strategies to engage fathers in their child's education.	
Conduct periodic surveys inviting parents to assess the degree to which they have been able to "engage" with their school in a meaningful way on matters of importance to them.	
Early Care and Education	
<i>Result: All children will enter school ready to learn.</i>	
Provide full day, full year accredited quality preschool for all low income children, including children in foster care.	
Ensure that teachers know the research and best practice in working with young immigrant preschoolers and their families. Train teachers in research-based skills to support and begin to teach English to ESL preschoolers.	
Build two generational strategies of school readiness and workforce readiness for children and their parents in poverty. Within this, assure Care for Kids access for low income parents attending school.	
Provide full day kindergarten for all low-income children to ensure continuous learning from Pre-K to elementary school. Assure full day kindergarten in the Alliance School Districts.	
Increase wages of early care and education professionals based on years of education and practice. Ensure that early childhood teaching is valued and that professionals with bachelor's degrees do not 'jump ship' for a higher salary in an elementary school.	
Create an assessment system that sets baselines and institutional targets and produces evaluative information that can be used to adjust teacher training and classroom practices.	
Select and implement a formative Kindergarten Entry Assessment tool to help inform teachers about a child's starting point.	
Enforce legislation requiring by 2020 all early childhood head teachers must hold a bachelor's degree in early childhood degree programs approved by the State Department of Education.	
Create a Pre-K through third grade literacy approach. Stress early literacy, beginning in early care settings to increase language exposure and expand time devoted to literacy. Implement the Ed. Reform law in reading, PA 12-116, to ensure a transition plan in oral language and vocabulary development between the early care provider and the kindergarten teacher, and to develop and provide practical literacy courses for both pre-service and practicing providers in language development and early literacy.	
Facilitate center based and family child care provider training in cultural competence with attention to research-based practice with bilingual children, from infancy through kindergarten.	


Ensure that every early care and education setting has a family liaison to involve parents as assets in school readiness, early literacy, and a developing partnership with the school house.	
Provide for an infant toddler system of care, employing best practices and training within both licensed centers, licensed family childcare, and family, friend and neighbor care.	
Ensure that screening, assessment, and monitoring of children’s health and development occur where they are most likely to be seen, including in the home through a coordinated system of home visitation as well as pediatric visits.	
Build up regional training and supports for various kinds of care and access to provider training in quality, adequate resources, supports, and to become part of a pipeline of accreditation and licensing. Use the Regional Accreditation Facilities Project for this.	
Improve routine and high level oversight of early care and education programs in order to transform the current trend of high standards but very low oversight. Both center and family child care sites need to be visited at least once a year for child safety.	
Using info-finder, public health service providers, and Social Service Providers, create a campaign to increase the number of students with limited target language exposure access to early childcare services and language-developing family support. Monitor access until 2020 to assess impact of campaign.	
Social Emotional Health Prevention and Intervention <i>Results Statement: All children will be emotionally stable, resilient, and capable of self-regulation.</i>	
Expand access to high quality mental health care through school settings using School Based Health, Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports and community-based wraparound initiatives.	
Train and build the capacity of school mental health staff, including the school psychologists, counselors, social workers, guidance staff, special education teachers, nurses, and support staff who work closely with children in school settings who have mental health needs. One example is the statewide effort of CHDI in collaboration with the State Department of Education to train school nurses and support staff in identifying, understanding, and referring children who may be suffering from traumatic stress reactions.	

<p>Link school and community resources to ensure clear, cross-collaborative efforts between schools and community parents to best meet the mental health needs of students. Many schools across Connecticut have formal and informal relationships with community-based mental health providers, including EMPS Crisis Intervention Service teams, to provide services in schools, community-based settings, and homes. These linkages are at times formalized with a Memoranda of Understanding and also rely on relationships between school staff and local mental health provider organizations.</p>	
<p>Help youth receive mental health treatment rather than correctional assignments, when the problem is lack of mental health intervention. The Connecticut School-Based Diversion Initiative (SBDI) helps schools revise disciplinary policies and practices to divert youth from in-school arrest and other exclusionary discipline (e.g., out-of-school suspension, expulsion) and connect them to community mental health services.</p>	
<p>Leaders that Close the Gap: Administrator Preparation and Development <i>Result: All principals and administrative leaders will be prepared to work in schools with achievement gaps.</i></p>	
<p>Schools of education will ensure that aspiring principals and administrators have internship experiences that expose them to school settings with marked gaps in academic achievement.</p>	
<p>Connecticut schools, identified as failing, underperforming, or exhibiting persistent gaps in academic achievement shall be encouraged and incentivized to engage in partnerships with Connecticut Universities to provide internship experiences for aspiring principals and administrators.</p>	
<p>School districts with schools that are identified as failing or underperforming or with persistent achievement gaps, shall be encouraged and incentivized to provide instructionally focused Assistant Principal positions in all schools in which such gaps are identified, including elementary schools. These positions will, by design, be instructional leaders and not simply disciplinarians or monitors. Districts that receive support for such positions must use such support to supplement, not to supplant administrative spending.</p>	
<p>There will be a special seminar program on the achievement gap for school leaders. New administrators will have opportunity to share experiences, developmental models related to instructional leadership, and receive professional development in the area of instructional leadership aimed at closing persistent gaps in academic achievement. All administrators, whose positions are funded through such incentives, will participate in the seminar program. The CSDE will collaborate with one or more schools of education and/or RECS's or CAS, to develop and support this seminar program on the achievement gap for school leaders.</p>	

<p>The preparation of school administrator should include a focus on the psychology of human behavior, with an emphasis on ways to build positive relationships, promote high levels of student engagement and improve student behavior in a non-coercive manner.</p>	
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<p>Highly Effective Teacher Preparation Programs <i>Result: All pre-service teachers prepared to teach in CT schools will be trained in closing persistent gaps in academic achievement</i></p>	
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<p>At our Schools of Education, employ highly rigorous and comprehensive admissions standards, which include, in addition to any statutory minimums, a high grade point average, appropriate dispositions for teaching, strong written and verbal skills, and teaching-related experiences, as necessary components of admission.</p>	
<p>Require prospective teachers to acquire a deep understanding of content and subject-specific teacher knowledge, as well as effective pedagogical preparation.</p>	
<p>Create a mechanism by which pre-service teachers are able to develop strong working relationships with faculty from Schools of Education and content area experts in schools and colleges in their respective Institutions of Higher Education.</p>	
<p>Require prospective teachers to acquire strong pedagogical content preparation through university coursework, and subject-specific methods courses, learning theories, foundations of education, and classroom management techniques. In addition, pre-service teachers should acquire instructional strategies to teach effectively in low-performing schools and in schools with diverse student populations and English-Language Learners.</p>	
<p>Leadership and faculty in Institutes of Higher Education shall collaborate with the lowest performing K-12 districts and schools to define, identify, develop, and support a strong clinical relationship aimed at closing persistent gaps in academic achievement.</p>	
<p>Conduct systematic formative and summative assessment of pre-service teachers, cooperating teachers, and university supervisors throughout the teacher training program and through competency-based portfolio review on capacity to teach in and succeed in schools with persistent gaps in academic achievement.</p>	
<p>Schools of Education shall ensure that aspiring teachers have internship experiences that expose them to diverse school settings. Connecticut schools identified as failing or underperforming shall be encouraged and incentivized to engage in partnerships with teacher preparation programs at Schools of Education to provide such experiences.</p>	

<p>Create an achievement gap closing module within the Teacher Education and Mentoring Program [TEAM], which would include, at a minimum, specialized professional development and incentives for teachers that choose to teach in low performing K-12 schools.</p>	
<p>Establish The Next Generation is Here project, an initiative that would prepare highly effective teachers who commit to and devote their careers to working in schools where persistent gaps in academic achievement exist.</p>	
<p>The preparation of teachers should include a focus on the psychology of human behavior, with an emphasis on ways to build positive relationships, promote high levels of student engagement, and improve student behavior in a non-coercive manner. This emphasis should infuse both pre-service and in-service training for teachers, including the TEAM program.</p>	
<p>Principal and Teacher Hiring and Retention for Schools that Demonstrate Persistent Gaps <i>Result: School districts with persistent gaps will be able to grow and retain the effective leaders and teachers they need.</i></p>	
<p>The CT State Department of Education will develop incentives for Principals who are hired into, or who reach identified benchmarks of longevity and effectiveness, in schools or districts with unacceptable achievement gaps. Such incentives shall be made available to the school district, shall not supplant any local funding, and may be in the form of direct salary increases as well as funding for participation in regional, national, and/or international professional learning opportunities.</p>	
<p>Enhance the Learn Here, Live Here Program created under PA 12-75 by developing incentives through the CT State Department of Education to be provided to teachers who are hired into or who reach benchmarks of longevity and effectiveness, in the lowest-performing K-12 districts and schools, or those schools that demonstrate persistent gaps in academic achievement.</p>	
<p>Such incentives shall not supplant any local funding. Such incentives may take the form of hiring bonuses, enhanced longevity payments, and/or student loan payment reimbursement. In cases where a teacher both works in a local public school system and purchases a home in the same local community such incentive may include mortgage assistance.</p>	
<p>Principals and teachers receiving any of the above incentives will be required to participate in a statewide seminar program, to be developed and implemented by the CSDE, intended to share experiences across districts and to develop a cohort of educators with a shared mental model and expertise in closing the achievement gap. These incentives may also be extended to include paraprofessionals and coordinated with the School Paraprofessional Advisory Council.</p>	

English Language Learners

Result: English language learners will become fully proficient in English.


<p>Establish a center to develop: (a) educational methods that are culturally relevant to English Language Learners; (b) effective learning strategies to help students with low achievement make up lost ground; and (c) a leadership program and teacher preparation programs that incorporate effective, research-based child development and reading instruction tools and practices.</p>	
<p>Engage in an audit of the services for Bilingual and ELL programs in the State of CT. Audit should be performed by independent third party whose background includes an understanding of the research and best practices for instructing ELLs and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy.</p>	
<p>Require the State Department of Education to develop high-quality model K-5 curricula in reading and math with considerations for students learning English as a Second Language. These curricula will reflect best practices and be ready for teachers to use in classrooms. The curricula will include authentic CCSS aligned assessments and progress monitoring indicators that lend themselves to the data-driven decision-making process and SLO implementation. Curriculum will be recommended to districts with limited resources, high transiency, and large achievement gaps.</p>	
<p>School leaders should be trained in evidence based program models for English Language Learners and should assure their teachers receive professional development in educational methods that are culturally relevant to English Language Learners.</p>	
<p>Create and disseminate a robust menu of assessments aligned to model curricula. These assessments should include a variety of balanced formats including portfolios, performance tasks, oral presentations, art works, and other learning artifacts that encourage higher level thinking. Assessments should include scales and benchmarks to determine language proficiency development in addition to content mastery.</p>	
<p>Using info-finder, public health service providers, and Social Service Providers, create a campaign to increase the number of students with limited target language exposure access to early childcare services and language-developing family support. Monitor access until 2020 to assess the impact of the campaign.</p>	
<p>Allow Alliance Funding to be aimed at serving ELL students if districts are not able to secure funds from local municipalities. Require the inclusion and monitoring of strategies aimed at supporting ELLs in Alliance Plans.</p>	
<p>Incentivize dual certification in Bilingual Education/TESOL for pre-service teachers in the form of grants. Create subsidized accelerated certification route for Bilingual Education/TESOL advanced degrees for teachers in Alliance districts.</p>	

<p>The state must implement results-based strategies that identify children in state care who are performing substantially below grade level and provide targeted supports to improve their academic performance.</p>	
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<p>Use of Curriculum in Closing Achievement Gaps in Low Performing Schools <i>Result: Model curriculum is available for struggling schools and districts</i></p>	
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<p>The CT State Department of Education shall develop or identify model curriculum documents aligned to the Common Core State Standards and national subject area standards for grades K– 8, to be provided to districts with the greatest achievement gaps or lowest performance overall, for local adoption.</p>	
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<p>CSDE shall provide fully developed model units of study within these documents, for each grade level, around the major concepts of the grade in alignment with the Common Core for implementation and replication at the school level. CSDE will collaborate with local districts and REACs to provide training and ongoing support, including debriefing with teachers, for schools with the greatest achievement gaps or lowest overall performance as they implement these model units.</p>	
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<p>School districts recognized as underperforming or with persistent achievement gaps will be encouraged and incentivized to undergo curriculum audits with the CSDE. Efforts should be made to encourage local and regional collaborations within this effort.</p>	
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<p>Require the State Department of Education to develop high-quality model K-5 curricula in reading and math with considerations for ELL students. Curriculum will be recommended to districts with limited resources, high transiency, and large achievement gaps.</p>	
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<p>Create and disseminate a robust menu of assessments aligned to model curricula. These assessments should include a variety of balanced formats including portfolios, performance tasks, oral presentations, art works, and other learning artifacts that encourage higher level thinking. Assessments should include scales and benchmarks to determine language proficiency development in addition to content mastery.</p>	
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<p>Role of Time in Closing Achievement Gap <i>Result: Time will be maximized as a resource, for all students, to optimize their mastery of skills and content.</i></p>	
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<p>The Achievement Gap Task Force will lead in sharing best practices, research, and outcome data to help build statewide understanding, dialogue, and direction for expanded learning time, both within the classroom and school year and outside. Participants, at a minimum, should include state legislators, Department of Education officials, union, community, and business leaders, Boards of Education, Superintendents, and Connecticut’s TIME Collaborative.</p>	
<p>The State Department of Education shall offer policy guidance in developing a statewide framework to support time and learning innovations at the district and school levels.</p>	
<p>Support for School Improvement Grant (SIG) efforts to increase learning time should be provided. NCTL will work directly with State Education Agency (SEA) leaders to develop guidelines for districts and schools to effectively increase learning time.</p>	
<p>OPM and SDE shall offer guidance and support to SEA leaders on using federal resources to increase learning time, including Race to the Top, supplemental education services (SES), and 21st Century Community Learning Center/strong.</p>	
<p>Briefings on research in time and learning shall be presented to education and policy leaders, including state legislators, Department of Education officials, and union, community, and business leaders.</p>	
<p>Creativity and Innovation and the Achievement Gap <i>Result: All students have opportunities to learn in classroom environments that promote a culture of creativity and innovation.</i></p>	
<p>The State Department of Education, in collaboration with the Department of Economic and Community Development, shall ensure that all students have opportunities to learn in classroom environments that promote a culture of creativity and innovation, and creativity should be included as a criterion, assessment tool, and emphasis for the classroom.</p>	
<p>K-12 districts and schools that show persistent gaps in academic achievement should provide rich and diverse arts and extracurricular programming that promotes innovation and creativity.</p>	
<p>Chronic Absence <i>Result: All Students will attend school at least 90% of the school year.</i></p>	
<p>Build public awareness of chronic absence and why it matters across schools and communities.</p>	
<p>Track individual student attendance and absences in state longitudinal student databases, ensuring that data are entered accurately and consistently.</p>	

<p>Adopt a standard definition of chronic absence (missing 10% of the school year) to be used statewide and by each school district. The definition should clarify how chronic absence is different from unexcused absences (truancy) and ensure the inclusion of absences due to suspensions, as well as absences that come when children switch schools and do not immediately start at a new school.</p>	
<p>Regularly calculate and share chronic absence data statewide, providing information by district, school, grade, and subgroup. Make the information publicly available through school and district report cards.</p>	
<p>Encourage districts to provide families with real-time data on their child's attendance, as well as an alert if their child may be accruing too many absences.</p>	
<p>Require school improvement plans to include chronic absence data, strategies that will be used to identify causes for such absences, build a culture of attendance, and fashion effective interventions for chronically absent students.</p>	
<p>Promote dissemination and learning to educators and parents about evidence-based and promising practices for reducing chronic absence, including strategies that engage community organizations as partners in the work.</p>	
<p>Promote interagency resource allocation and coordination so that schools are not left isolated in the problem of chronic absenteeism. State policymakers and advocates should encourage schools, public agencies, civic organizations, businesses, and non-profits to jointly review data on chronic absence and discuss the implications for action, policy, and allocation of resources that can improve school attendance such as health supports, early education programs, afterschool programs, and mentoring efforts.</p>	
<p>Reading <i>Result: Every child will read at grade level by third grade.</i></p>	
<p>Grow a tier one, embedded reading coach model of teacher training in the classroom that prepares all teachers, PreK-3, in early literacy assessment, intervention and practice. This model, which is based on proven research in our state and nationally, has led to the greatest number of children moving forward, not entering special education, and successfully mastering the skills necessary to become proficient in reading.</p>	
<p>Grow a tier two model of reading intervention for every student not reading at proficiency, in K-3rd grade. Assure each student has an individualized reading plan and that each school has the professional capacity and literacy team to assess, intervene, and continuously monitor for on-going literacy gains of each student.</p>	













Utilize the document "Connecticut's Blueprint for Reading Achievement: The Report of the Early Reading Success Panel" as the focal point for student and teacher competencies and update the research behind it.	
Increase the pool of literacy specialists by authorizing a Literacy or an Alternative Route to Certification (ARC) institution to increase the supply of well-trained, embedded literacy specialists utilizing research based practice.	
Address time and content quality together in reading; students who are behind do not learn more in the same amount of time as students who are ahead. Catch-up growth is driven by proportional increases in direct instructional time. Quality instruction, assessment, and intervention coupled with increased time ensure sufficient daily instructional minutes to achieve additional annual growth at the appropriate grade level.	
Work with Institutes of Higher Education to ensure that new and current faculty members have expertise in the science of reading and research-based practices (as recommended by Connecticut's Blueprint and codified in statute).	
Allocate sufficient instructional time for language arts (2 hour block for language arts/reading).	
Require routine formative assessments in reading for all students in K-3 to inform and ensure differentiated instruction, using research-based assessment tools that are teacher friendly, electronic, less costly, and that offer more information to teachers on intervention.	
Collect statewide longitudinal data on progress monitoring assessments that inform instruction and can be analyzed to highlight schools that are "beating the odds."	
Build strong, committed school leadership on the administrative level to make reading a school priority. Link reading assessment to state's leadership strategy so that school superintendents and principals fully know how to assess the gains in their schools and how to intervene where gains are not evident.	
Hold each district and school accountable for reading achievement.	
Create incentives for teachers who consistently improve reading outcomes for students in kindergarten through grade three. For example, create a master teacher designation for those teachers who show that they have turned the curve in reading within their classroom.	
Provide performance bonuses for teachers who produce improvement in reading scores and award a ten-year recertification, rather than a five-year recertification, for teachers with the master teacher designation.	
For teachers who do not show improvement in the reading outcomes of their students, ensure that teachers in K-3rd grade receive appropriate professional development in the science of teaching reading based on the results of reading surveys designed to identify teaching gaps.	










Create a partnership with parents on literacy in low performing schools so that parents know how and what to do at home and at school to facilitate literacy gains.	
Develop two generational strategies where parents and children are supported in ELL and in overall literacy gains.	
Develop a Reading Director for SDE in charge of literacy across all divisions, policies and programs to review data, implement policies, support schools, and assure professional development and fidelity to best practices. This position will report directly to the Commissioner and will work in collaboration with the State Turnaround Officer and Chief Academic Officer.	










Students in State Care	
<i>Result: Students in state care meet goal in school performance.</i>	
The Interagency Council should monitor the implementation with fidelity of the Raise the Grade Pilot Program in the pilot cities, with a plan toward using data and lessons learned from the pilot to bring the Raise the Grade Program to scale.	
DCF, in consultation with CSDE should focus on embedding best practices in the pilot cities, which should serve as demonstration sites.	
State agencies must continue to effectively coordinate to track, share and report achievement data to ensure that children in state care in the pilot cities and throughout the state do not fall through the cracks of our educational system.	
The state must require quality, transparency, and accountability from alternative school programs administered by public schools as well as private educational programs that are run by the state or state contractors.	
DCF should create a smaller ratio between foster students and teachers devoted to their school success in the DCF Education Division.	
School Climate and the Achievement Gap	
<i>Result: Students are ready to learn in a positive school climate free of bullying and harassment.</i>	
School Climate Committee should use school climate assessments and school-specific data on bullying to create a concrete School-based Climate Improvement Plan to help improve school climate.	
Support the development of a pilot program to test school-based models focusing on social-emotional learning, self-awareness, and self-regulation.	










<p>Districts should revise their climate improvement plans to the CSDE every three years, to incorporate updated data and showcase best practices at their individual schools. SDE should develop and implement a high quality statewide school climate assessment instrument, and work with districts to collect information related to policies and practices that are successful in contributing to school climate improvement.</p>	
<p>Clarify the definition of bullying in Section 10-222d of the C.G.S. to align with language governing protected classes and harassment under civil rights laws.</p>	
<p>The State Department of Education shall provide guidance and support to implement the state’s school climate and anti-bullying statute, with fidelity, in pre-K through 12, with a resource emphasis in districts and schools that experience persistent gaps in academic achievement. Support may include professional development, including teacher training.</p>	
<p>In underperforming districts and schools, climate assessments could be used to help identify and create connections between student, classroom, school, district, and the community and external resources, in an inside/outside the school gap closing strategy. This strategy may include access to after-school programs, evening family and community supports, and to neighborhood vocational and recreation programming.</p>	
<p>Survey students, if possible annually, in order to obtain their views on the extent to which the climate for learning in their schools is conducive to their success.</p>	

Policy Recommendations: Year One and Two

Early Care and Education	Provide full day, full year accredited quality preschool for all low income children.	
Family Engagement	Provide parent universities in low-income and public housing sites that support parents as partners in the school house.	
Poverty	Launch an initiative for every CT parent to have at least a high school degree.	
Poverty	Reassess TANF policy to avoid abrupt cliffs in income and bolster authentic opportunities for job training and education.	
Housing	Increase incentives provided to municipalities that zone for and create affordable and mixed-income housing under HOME Connecticut and other housing programs	
Housing	Develop initiatives that will improve access to higher performing schools for families using the RAP certificate and federal Section 8 vouchers, through the Commissioner of Housing.	
Early Care and Education	Provide full day kindergarten for all low-income children to ensure continuous learning from pre-K to elementary school.	
Early Care and Education	Build two generational strategies of school readiness and workforce readiness for children and their parents in poverty. Within this, assure Care for Kids access for low income parents attending school.	
Ed. Leadership & Teachers	Develop an internship program in school settings with marked achievement gaps for aspiring principals, administrators and pre-service teachers.	
Ed. Leadership & Teachers	Create a ' <i>close the achievement gap module</i> ' within TEAM, which would include, minimally, specialized professional development and financial and other incentives for teachers that choose to teach in low performing K-12 schools.	
Ed. Leadership & Teachers	School districts with schools identified as failing, under-performing, or with persistent achievement gaps shall be incentivized to provide instruction-focused Assistant Principal positions in schools in which such gaps are identified, including elementary schools.	
Ed. Leadership & Teachers	Develop a special seminar program on the achievement gap required for all new school leaders and teachers interested in excelling in and narrowing educational achievement gaps.	

Ed. Leadership & Teachers	Incentivize principals and teachers who reach identified benchmarks of longevity and effectiveness, in schools or districts that were identified as showing unacceptable achievement gaps.	
ELL	Engage in audit of services for Bilingual and ELL programs in CT. Audit should be performed by independent third party whose background includes an understanding of the research and best practices for instructing ELL and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy.	
ELL	Incentivize dual certification in Bilingual Education/TESOL for pre-service teachers in the form of grants. Create subsidized accelerated certification route for Bilingual Education/TESOL advanced degrees for teachers in Alliance districts.	
Use of Curriculum	School districts recognized as underperforming, or with persistent achievement gaps, will be encouraged to undergo curriculum audits with the CSDE. Efforts should be made to encourage local and regional collaborations within this effort.	
Time as Resource	The Achievement Gap Task Force will lead in sharing best practices, research, and outcome data to help build statewide understanding and direction for expanded learning time, both within the classroom and school year and outside.	
Chronic Absence	Adopt a standard definition of chronic absence (missing 10% of the school year) to be used statewide and by each school district. The definition will clarify how chronic absence is different from unexcused absences (truancy) and ensure the inclusion of absences due to suspensions, as well as absences that come when children switch schools and do not immediately start at a new school.	
Chronic Absence	Regularly calculate and share chronic absence data statewide, providing information by district, school, grade, and subgroup. Make the information publicly available through school and district report cards.	
ELL	Require the State Department of Education to develop high quality model K-5 curricula in reading and math with considerations for students learning English as a Second Language. Curriculum recommended to districts with limited resources, high transiency and large achievement gaps.	
Reading	Grow a tier one, embedded reading coach model of teacher training in the classroom that prepares all teachers, K-3, in early literacy assessment, intervention, and practice.	

Reading	Grow a tier two model of reading intervention for every student not reading at proficiency, in K-3rd grade. Assure each student has an individualized reading plan and that each school has the professional capacity and literacy team to assess, intervene, and continuously monitor for on-going literacy gains of each student.	
Reading	Increase Pool of Reading Specialists: Authorize Literacy/How as an Alternative Route to Certification (ARC) institution to increase the supply of well-trained, embedded reading specialists utilizing research based practice.	
Reading	Require routine formative assessments in reading for all students in K-3 to inform and ensure differentiated instruction, using research-based assessment tools that are teacher friendly, efficient, and that offer more information to teachers on immediate intervention and groupings.	
Reading	Collect statewide data on progress monitoring assessments that inform instruction and can be analyzed to highlight schools that are "beating the odds."	
Reading	Link reading assessment to state's Lead program, which works with school leadership with families as partners, so that school superintendents and principals fully know how to assess the gains in their schools and how to intervene where gains are not evident.	
Reading	Create incentives for teachers who consistently improve reading outcomes for students in kindergarten through grades three. For example, create a master teacher designation for those teachers who show that they have turned the curve in reading within their classroom.	
Youth in State Care	The Interagency Council will monitor the Raise the Grade Pilot Program, to assure that children and youth in state care are receiving excellent education. Use data and lessons learned from the pilot to bring the Raise the Grade Program to scale, embed best practices in the pilot cities, and develop demonstration sites.	
School Climate & Early Care and Ed.	The Office of Early Childhood and the State Department of Education will partner on a K-3rd grade strategy to create alignment, training, and leadership development on social emotional learning for teachers, school leaders, community agencies and families.	
Advanced Placement	SDE will create an incentive plan for schools that show an increase of low income and minority students taking and passing Advanced Placement classes, utilizing the national research.	

School Climate	Develop collaboration in schools between the committees on school safety and the committee on school climate to focus more on prevention and intervention models to make school safe for every student as a right and practice.	
School Climate	Provide guidance and support to implement the state's school climate and anti-bullying statute, with fidelity, in pre-K through 12, with a resource emphasis in districts and schools that experience persistent gaps in academic achievement. Support may include professional development, including teacher training.	
Pre-service	Require prospective teachers to acquire strong pedagogical content through university coursework, and subject-specific methods, learning theories, foundations of education, and classroom management techniques.	
Pre-service	Pre-service teachers should also acquire instructional strategies to teach effectively in low-performing school, and in schools with diverse student populations and English-Language Learners.	
Pre-service & Ed. Leadership and Teachers	Leadership and faculty in Institutes of Higher Education shall collaborate with the lowest performing K-12 districts and schools to define, identify, develop, and support a strong clinical relationship aimed at closing persistent gaps in academic achievement.	
Reading	Develop a Reading Director for SDE in charge of literacy across all divisions, policies and programs to review data, implement policies, support schools, and assure professional development and fidelity to best practices. This position will report directly to the Commissioner and will work in collaboration with the State Turnaround Officer, Chief Academic Officer.	
Hunger & Food Insecurity	Extended Day programs will employ the federally reimbursable snacks/meal programs needed to make the extra time on task productive.	
Hunger & Food Insecurity	Schools will incorporate the most appropriate school breakfast delivery options given their unique characteristics for optimizing student participation levels.	
Social Emotional Health	Expand access to high quality mental health care through school settings using School Based Health, Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports, and community-based Wraparound initiatives.	

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Achievement Gap Task Force Members

Co-Chair: Dr. Miguel Cardona, Principal, Hanover Elementary School

Co-Chair: Senator Andrea Stillman, Co-Chair, Education Committee

Representative Marilyn Giuliano, Ranking Member, Education Committee and School Psychologist, Lyme-Old Lyme Public Schools

Dr. Paul Freeman, Superintendent, Guilford Public Schools

Mr. David Kennedy, Chief Operating Officer, United Way of Coastal Fairfield County

Ms. Elaine Zimmerman, Executive Director, Connecticut Commission on Children

Representative Jason Rojas, Member, Education Committee and Director of Community Relations, Trinity College

(Former) Senator Mary Ann Handley, Co-Chair of the Elementary and Secondary Education Subcommittee (fmr.)

Mr. Gary Highsmith, Principal, Hamden High School

Commissioner Stefan Pryor, Commissioner, Department of Education

Special Thanks to the AGTF Master Plan Writers' Group:

Dr. Tom DeFranco, Dean, University of Connecticut Neag School of Education

Dr. Paul Freeman, Superintendent, Guilford Public Schools

Steven Hernández, Esq., Connecticut Commission on Children

Mr. David Kennedy, Chief Operating Officer, United Way of Coastal Fairfield County

Representative Jason Rojas, Member, Education Committee and Director of Community Relations, Trinity College

Ms. Elaine Zimmerman, Executive Director, Connecticut Commission on Children