

*Framework for
Connecticut's High
Schools: A Working Guide
for High School Redesign*

Connecticut State Department of Education

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Background

Connecticut is very proud of its successful public education system. Serving almost a half-million students from preschool through Grade 12, schools, school districts and communities are striving to meet the diverse needs of their student populations. Every year, however, schools in our state lose hundreds of young men and women who choose to leave school without graduating or without mastering the skills and knowledge needed to succeed in a global economy and in life. In addition, thousands of Connecticut high school graduates are leaving our schools without the necessary skills and knowledge to be contributing citizens in our state and local economies.

The state's dropout rate has been declining; however, when we put names and numbers on the percentages, it becomes apparent that Connecticut schools are losing too many young men and women. In 2003, 169,423 students were enrolled in our public high schools, Grades 9–12. The cumulative dropout rate was 8.8 percent of the students enrolled.¹ This number represents about 13,553 young men and women who left our schools. This loss is a threat to our state's health. The primary focus of Connecticut's high schools must be to ensure Connecticut's high school graduates will be second to none in a global marketplace.

Throughout our state many ask why we need to change. Some note that graduation rates are up, more students are taking the SAT and ACT, or that our schools have been successful for generations, so why change? Redefining Connecticut's high schools is critical at this point in time, as our schools were not designed to prepare all of our young people to be successful citizens in today's challenging world.

In a recently published document by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills titled *Results that Matter: 21st Century Skills and High School Reform* it was reported that the challenge for America's high schools is to prepare each graduate for citizenship, work, and postsecondary education into a different world.² Consider how things have changed:

The nature of education is changing internationally. The United States is falling behind on critical comparisons of educational performance, particularly when it comes to higher level thinking and problem solving skills.

1. Connecticut State Department of Education, *Statewide Cumulative Dropout Rates*,

2. National Association of Secondary School Principals, *Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High School Reform*, 2004.

The nature of the competition is changing internationally. Although the United States historically has been a world leader in offering broad access to higher education, many other countries now provide comparable access – and results. The graduates in these countries are in direct competition for jobs with U.S. graduates. The United States no longer holds the corner on the market for highly qualified workers.

The nature of the workforce, jobs, and skill demands is changing internationally. Industrial workers were measured for their **efficiency** at getting the job done, according to the Education Trust. The value-added of knowledge workers is **effectiveness**, which requires a very different skill set.

Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High School Reform published by the National Association of Secondary School Principals, cites a number of facts addressing the need for high school change:

1. Only 24 percent of all high school graduates report expectations for learning in high school were high.
2. The racial and economic disparity in graduation rates is as wide as ever. Half of all African-American and Hispanic students will drop out and only 18 percent will graduate from high school ready for college. Students from affluent families are 11 times more likely to earn a bachelor's degree than are students from low-income families.
3. College instructors estimate 42 percent of recent high school graduates are not prepared for college-level classes.
4. Employers estimate that 45 percent of high school graduates are not prepared with skills to advance beyond entry level jobs.
5. In the last five years the number of U.S. manufacturing jobs has dropped by 2.7 million jobs to 16.5 million.³
6. The job market is changing:
 - 50 years ago – 20 percent professional, 20 percent skilled labor and 60 percent unskilled labor
 - Today – 20 percent professional, 65 percent skilled labor and 15 percent unskilled labor
7. Even as some students are achieving less, the economy is demanding more. Jobs requiring a college degree are the fastest growing sector of the economy. Over a lifetime a college graduate will earn nearly \$1 million more than a high school drop out.

The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education on November 16, 2005, released the following data on Connecticut's workforce. These workforce

3. National Association of Manufacturers, NAM, 2006.

trends will have a tremendous impact on Connecticut's high schools and our state's continued economic growth.

- In Connecticut today, among individuals between the age of 25 and 64:
 - 47 percent of the white population has a college degree and makes up 90 percent of the workforce;
 - 16-21 percent of the minority population has a college degree and makes up 10 percent the workforce.
- In Connecticut, in 2020, the white population will make up 71 percent of the workforce and the minority population will make up 29 percent of the workforce.

Connecticut's economy is dependent on a highly skilled and highly educated workforce. As the demographics of the job market and Connecticut's workforce change, it will become even more important to ensure there is a new vision for Connecticut high schools:

Each student entering high school will graduate as a contributing citizen in a democratic society and be prepared for college and work in a global society.

Therefore, **the mission of Connecticut high schools is:**

to ensure that each student graduates with post secondary skills, prepared for life long learning and success in the global economy as a result of learning in a school culture of high expectations that is safe, personalized, and designed to meet the needs of the individual student.

To this end, Connecticut high schools will:

- transform their school communities to prepare all graduates for careers in a competitive, global economy;
- develop rigorous literacy-based curriculum that encourage authentic, real-life experiences and include performance-based assessments; and
- create a climate in which personal and social responsibility is practiced.

We believe graduates of Connecticut high schools should:

- be independent and collaborative learners who are able to problem solve, draw conclusions, think critically, communicate effectively, and think and act creatively to become productive, responsible citizens;
- be motivated, responsible, well-prepared with post-secondary ready skills and knowledge and be ready to continue their learning;

- have an awareness of and respect for the diverse world in which they are entering;
- be open-minded and behave ethically in the world in which they live and work; and
- have self-confidence and be self-directed and self-sufficient.

The Beginning

In 2001, then Connecticut Associate Commissioner of Education, Betty Sternberg assembled a committee of dedicated educational leaders to develop Connecticut's first published position on redesigning Connecticut's high schools. This monograph focused on the re-conceptualization of high schools in Connecticut. The monograph (Appendix A) provided readers:

- a re-conceptualized look at Connecticut high schools
- a focus on six areas for improvement
 - school culture
 - curriculum
 - instruction
 - professional development
 - assessment
 - leadership
- specific recommendations for improvement

In 2005, a new high school advisory committee was established to develop a new vision and framework for Connecticut's high schools. The committee determined that using the current research conducted around the country on high schools would provide the committee a clear picture for the development of this framework. Two documents, currently available to schools and communities, also provided tremendous support to the development of this framework. These documents are the recently revised New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) *Standards for Accreditation* and the National Association of Secondary School Principals' (NASSP) *Breaking Ranks II* (Appendix B). Practitioners will recognize that both of these documents have been fully integrated into the Connecticut Framework.

Introduction

The 2005-06 the Connecticut High School Advisory Committee developed this *Framework for Connecticut's High Schools: A Working Guide for High School Redesign* for school communities. This research-based framework has been developed for school practitioners as a guide for conversation, continued improvement and change.

For each “Expectation” there are three parts to guide the school community in its discussion:

1. **“The Framework for Connecticut’s High Schools”** sets the expectation for each of Connecticut’s high schools to begin planning for and implementing the framework.
2. **“The Guide to Planning and Implementation”** provides the school community with clearly identified practices that schools must have in place, or plan for and implement to ensure the expectation can be actualized. In addition, suggestions on how a school community may implement each practice are provided.
3. **“Recommended Policy Changes”** provides state and local leaders with a list of specific recommendations to ensure that the framework expectations will be implemented. Those practices that require additional funding will be prefaced with the symbol, ~.

Redesigning today’s high school is not a new concept. Schools and communities have been reading the research for years, yet today’s high school looks much the same as it did when its primary function was to sort and classify future workers. The focus of today’s redesign must be the student and the student’s future. If change is going to be successful the student must be at the center of our discussions and planning.

Mike Buckley, Associate Executive Director of the Connecticut Association of Schools (CAS) has said,

It is clear that some students see high school as important and some do not. Those that do, more often than not, have a vision for themselves in the future, connect what they are being asked to do in their studies to its fulfillment, and have adults in their lives supporting them in its achievement. The challenge is to provide the same for those who do not. If there’s progress to be made with the Connecticut high school, it will come by providing the latter with the same clear ideas about what is possible in the future, engaging and challenging academics, and adults who believe in them enough to offer the assistance they need to succeed.

The time has come for dramatic change in our high schools that will ensure a more challenging, engaging and supportive experience for each high school student in Connecticut.

- *Our high schools must provide more rigorous choices for our students from the moment they enter the high school up to and including their senior year.*

- *Our high schools must provide a safe, positive environment that supports students' growth and development, not only academically, but also socially, emotionally and physically.*⁴

Connecticut high schools continue to slowly embrace the fundamental changes needed to ensure each student will be prepared for a successful life after high school. While there is much to be proud of in Connecticut high schools there is still much to be accomplished. The time for action is now!

The Connecticut High School Advisory Committee has reviewed significant literature, high school frameworks from other states, and has heard from hundreds of practitioners and students. In the committee's reading and listening to students and colleagues a common message was heard - high schools must be engaging for all students, expectations must be higher, learning must be personalized and positive, and leadership must be strong.

The Connecticut State Department of Education has provided schools a number of documents that provide guidance to educators in their efforts to increase student achievement. Three of the most important documents are:

- The Connecticut Frameworks: K-12 Curriculum Goals and Standards
- The Common Core of Learning
- The Common Core of Teaching

This *Framework for Connecticut's High Schools* is designed to set clear expectations for high schools in their continued efforts to increase student achievement. Using this framework, in conjunction with *Breaking Ranks II* and the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) *Standards for Accreditation*, will provide high schools the needed direction for change.

The Framework for Connecticut's High Schools has established seven expectations for all high schools. By the year 2014, each high school in Connecticut will have:

- 1. A mission that clearly defines the essence of what the school seeks to achieve and is aligned with Connecticut's mission for high schools**
- 2. Curriculum that is standards-based, rigorous and challenging with an emphasis on learning that is authentic, relevant and includes exploration of post secondary opportunities**

4. Re-Conceptualizing Connecticut's High Schools: A Blueprint for Continuous Change 2002

- 3. Strong, educational leaders who have developed the capacity of teachers, parents and student to enable all stakeholders to achieve the school's mission and expectations for student learning**
- 4. Small, safe, personalized and positive learning communities**
- 5. Embedded professional development programs with the single purpose of improving teaching and learning**
- 6. Purposeful and regular use of data to form and transform teaching, learning, leadership and management practices to provide a rationale for educational decisions**
- 7. Learning opportunities for all students that extend into the community**

In the following pages, each of these expectations is further developed to provide high school leadership teams a definition of each expectation, specific direction and recommended strategies to assist in planning and implementation.

EXPECTATION 1: Mission

Every high school in Connecticut will have a mission that clearly defines the essence of what the school seeks to achieve and is aligned with Connecticut’s mission for high schools.

*The expectations for student learning are based on and drawn from the school’s mission statement. These expectations are the fundamental goals by which the school continually assesses the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process.*⁵

Connecticut high schools will be mission driven. In a mission-driven school all members of the school community will understand and embrace the mission while working toward the implementation of the common expectations and shared responsibility defined in the mission. It is especially important that the leadership and professional staff embrace and implement a mission that is focused around common, measurable expectations for what each student will “know and be able to do” for success in college, workplace environments, civic involvement and life outside the workplace.

NEASC states “the school shall define school-wide academic, civic, and social learning expectations that:

- are measurable and
- reflect the school’s mission.

In mission-driven schools students, parents and staff understand the mission and share active responsibility for its implementation and student learning. The school community’s focus is on each student graduating with:

- preparation that goes beyond the standards of the past;
- the ability to function in a global society;
- preparation in all subject areas for life, work and the world after high school; and
- the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in college and the workplace.

5. New England Association of Schools and Colleges Inc., *Commission on Public Secondary Schools Standards for Accreditation for High Schools, Middle Schools and K-12 Schools*, 2005.

Expectations

Connecticut High Schools will develop a clearly focused mission statement which will represent the school community's values and beliefs about student learning.

The mission statement will be:

- collaboratively developed
- concise
- memorable
- written in lay terms
- measurable

Through participation in the development of its mission, the school community will take ownership of that mission and its implementation. The school's faculty and administration will ensure that the mission drives the school's curriculum, instruction and assessment practices.

Ongoing analysis of the impact of the school's mission is critical to the success of Connecticut high schools. This analysis should include data related to student learning, as well as evidence that the mission is being used to make school improvement decisions.

To ensure the relevance and success of their missions, high schools must continually analyze their effectiveness through individual student and school wide performance; as well as how their school uses its mission to make decisions about policies, programs and procedures.

In schools that effectively use their mission to drive school improvement and increase student achievement there will be clear evidence of the mission's presence, such as:

- the mission is visible in every classroom and office;
- every member of the school community can paraphrase and explain the mission;
- school-wide standards and rubrics reflect the mission;
- departments are committed to the implementation of the mission;
- curriculum is collaboratively developed;
- instructional and assessment practices reflect the mission;
- data is continuously used at department and school levels as a basis for feedback and program improvement focused on student learning, as reflected through:
 - policies

- program
- procedures; and
- a plan for annual review and revision of the mission, as needed

A Snapshot of the High School of the Future

The district superintendent walks into the high school and witnesses a culture where the school improvement team, informally known as the “Mission-Keepers” is leading the faculty meeting. The Mission-Keepers are presenting student performance data on the school wide writing assessment, which includes a subgroup of low-performing students.

The team reminds the faculty that writing performance is a key component of the school’s mission for each student and is assessed using a single mission-driven, school wide rubric. The ensuing faculty discussion includes the following:

- various departments make a commitment to review the curriculum;
- teachers identify the need for further professional development in the teaching of writing;
- teachers agree to greater instructional collaboration across disciplines;
- the faculty identifies the need for focusing resources on writing improvement; and
- a timeline is established for on-going review of writing assessment data in relation to the school mission.

Guide to Planning and Implementation

Expectation 1, “Every high school in Connecticut will have a mission that clearly defines the essence of what the school seeks to achieve and is aligned with Connecticut’s mission for high schools” is the first in this document because of its importance. Decades of research cites the need to have a clear and common focus to ensure success. As today’s graduates enter the next phase of their lives, they are faced with a new reality, a global context for everything in their future.

Actualizing this expectation, in the context of a global society, will require schools to:

- 1. Have a mission statement that defines the core values of the school community within a global context.***

- 2. Have clearly defined core expectations that define what each student should know and be able to demonstrate by the time he/she graduates**
- 3. Periodically engage all of the school's stakeholders in the revision and development of the school's mission and core values to ensure its relevance and effectiveness**

In their work with schools, the New England Association of Schools and Colleges provides guidance and a process to revise already developed mission statements. However, the world is changing much faster than our current 10 year cycle of accreditation. Focused on clear values and data, school communities need to continually revise, agree and act upon their mission, core values and beliefs about learning and teaching. School communities should also revise, agree and act upon clearly identified key attributes and skills that apply across the curriculum. Continual discussions about and revisions of the mission, core values, key attributes and skills, by all stakeholders, will contribute to the success of our graduates and the skills they will need for success in life and work in a global 21st century society.

Actualizing this expectation will also require schools to:

- 4. Implement specific strategies to ensure the mission and core values are understood and supported by all stakeholders**

Educators can guide students to see the connections between learning, the school's mission and life after high school by making connections to the mission and core values in daily lessons, class discussions and projects. Making these connections will also encourage all educators to view themselves as leaders and educators of students first, and content specialists second.

These instructional and professional connections, along with displaying the mission and core values in all learning areas, will reflect the importance of the school's clear and common focus. As the school community becomes comfortable making classroom connections to the mission and core values, **actualizing this expectation will also require schools to:**

- 5. Use the school's mission and core values in all decision-making arenas (school board, budget, hearings, parent organizations, etc.) to drive decisions and practices about the school's curriculum, instruction, assessment, budget, staffing, etc.**

It is one thing to engage stakeholders in the revision and updating of a school's mission and core values; it is quite another to use their work to ensure all decisions are made through the lens of the school's mission and core values. Educators in all content areas can demonstrate use of the mission and core

values by embedding the learning expectations of the mission and core values into curriculum, instruction and assessment practices. Use of classroom and standardized assessment data by the individual educator, department staff and all school faculty members will promote continuous improvement, as well as determine school improvement priorities. As schools learn how to use their missions to make decisions, a focus on the student is critical to ensure **actualization of the expectation. To this end schools will be required to:**

6. *Make mission-driven decisions to ensure each student learns the skills and knowledge necessary for success in college, the global workplace and life*

As our global society changes faster than our schools, educators in each discipline should articulate the knowledge and skills that support the expectations for learning. Articulation of these concepts and skills should be relevant to post secondary learning, the global workplace, and life. All stakeholders must agree to communicate a consistent message of high expectations for each student, allowing not a single student to fall between the cracks. This will require educators to make courageous decisions regarding the elimination of courses or classes that have been historically associated with low expectations for student learning. The elimination of tracking and the practice of limiting ability grouping in order to challenge every student is another courageous discussion and decision that will be needed to ensure each graduate's success in a rapidly changing global economy.

Tracking is defined as the permanent assignment of a student to an ability level. Tracking refers to a practice in which high schools tested students, typically with both achievement and IQ tests, and used these scores to place their students into separate curriculum tracks, or "streams," as they are called in Europe.

The tracks covered distinctly different curriculum, were binding across all academic subjects, and led to different destinations upon graduation. Three tracks were common: (1) a high track, with college-preparatory or honors courses that readied students for admission to top colleges and universities; (2) a general track that served as a catch-all for the huge group of students in the middle, those neither gifted nor deficient in their studies or those simply unsure of what they would do after high school, and (3) a low track, consisting of vocational courses and a smattering of low-level academic offerings, such as consumer math, serving mainly low functioning and indifferent students. After graduation, general track students matriculated to second-tier colleges, community colleges,

*or the workforce. Low track students frequently dropped out, found work, or suffered periods of unemployment.*⁶

A “mission-driven high school” is a school where all stakeholders have taken seriously the responsibility to actualize this expectation. School missions should be centered on core values - deep, fundamental truths and common denominators about what the high school’s focus should be. The principle, “begin with the end in mind” is a principle of personal responsibility and leadership. This principle is based on two foundations: anything worthwhile is first created mentally (the development of a school’s mission and core values); and anything created mentally and centered on core values requires physical creation (the work to ensure the mission and vision are actualized). To become mission-driven, high schools must begin with the end in mind.

Policy Recommendations

- I. The Connecticut State Department of Education and Connecticut Department of Higher Education will work with schools and colleges to align, publish and disseminate to all school districts a single set of expectations for skills and Core knowledge necessary to be ready for college.
- II. The Connecticut State Department of Education will establish policies that require public high schools to participate in periodic, regional, peer reviews of their Mission and Expectations.
- III. The Connecticut State Department of Education will establish policy that requires each public high school to file a copy of its Mission statement and New England Association of Schools and Colleges accreditation report with the Connecticut State Department of Education for review.
- IV. The Connecticut State Department of Education will establish policy that requires districts to develop (for all certified staff) evaluation plans that are linked to the values and expectations in the school’s mission.
- V. ~ The Connecticut State Department of Education will establish policy and provide funding for time for ongoing and embedded school-wide staff collaboration to ensure ongoing refinement and implementation of each school’s Mission and Expectations. Such refinement and implementation must include curriculum, instruction and assessment practices.

6. Tom Loveless, Fordham Foundation, *The Tracking and Ability Grouping Debate*, 1998.

EXPECTATION 2: Rigorous Curriculum

Every high school in Connecticut will develop curriculum that are standards-based, rigorous, and challenging. The emphasis will be on learning that is authentic, relevant and includes exploration of post-secondary opportunities.

As many as two in five high school graduates say that there are gaps between the education they received in high school and the overall skills, abilities, and work habits that are expected today in college and in the workforce.⁷

The current minimum standard for earning a high school diploma in the State of Connecticut is 19 Carnegie credits and a “D” average. Four in five college students (82 percent) and non-students (80 percent) say that they would have worked harder if their high schools had demanded more of students, set higher academic standards, and raised expectations of how much course work and studying would be necessary to earn a diploma. In addition, 97 percent of non-college students say that providing opportunities for real-world learning and making coursework more relevant would improve closing the gap between the education they received and the overall skills, abilities and work habits that are expected today in college and in the workforce.⁸

Closing the gap between the skills of high school graduates and the skills needed in college and the workforce is essential. The high school experience should prepare students for the freedoms, challenges, intellectual demands, opportunities and possibilities that await them. The skills needed are challenging, but students report that they can and would work harder if the expectations were higher and learning was more authentic and relevant.

Authentic and relevant learning provides connections between the world and the academics typically studied in American high schools. Students involved in authentic learning are engaged in tasks that have significance to their lives and to the lives of others. When students work on authentic problems, they apply the knowledge and skills they are gaining in school to complete meaningful tasks that have an impact on their society.

Providing the level of challenge desired by students and necessary for their future success requires curriculum that focuses on rigorous content and concepts connected to relevant and authentic experiences. Rigorous curriculum moves

7. Peter D. Hart Research Associates, *Rising to the Challenge: Are High School Graduates Prepared for College and Work?*, February, 2005.

8. *ibid.*

beyond the standards of the past, expand what is familiar to students, and give students the ability to function in a global society (Appendix C - Rigorous Learning and Teaching). Connecticut students need to be better prepared with 21st century skills and ready for life, work and the world after high school.

As a result of high schools developing and implementing more rigorous and authentic learning opportunities students will⁹

- have higher levels of understanding in the Core subject areas as defined by No Child Left Behind:
 - English, reading/language arts, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics, government, economics, arts, history and geography
- have higher levels of understanding and application in **21st century content:**
 - global awareness
 - financial, economic, business, and entrepreneurial literacy
 - civic literacy
 - health and wellness awareness
- have higher levels of understanding and **application of learning and thinking skills:**
 - critical-thinking and problem-solving skills
 - communication skills
 - creativity and innovation skills
 - collaboration skills
 - contextual learning skills
 - information and media literacy skills
- have higher levels of understanding and application of information, communication and technology (ITC Literacy)
- have higher levels of understanding and application of life skills:
 - leadership
 - ethics
 - accountability
 - adaptability
 - personal productivity
 - personal responsibility
 - people skills
 - self-direction
 - social responsibility
- have a broader sense of career opportunities.

In addition, Connecticut's high school students would:

9. Partnership for 21st Century Skills, *Results that Matter: 21st Century Skills and High School Reform*, March, 2006.

- enter college with a reduced need to take remedial courses
- have greater access to post-secondary opportunities
- have a smoother transition between secondary and post secondary experiences.

Expectations

Connecticut high schools will develop curriculum that is standards-based, rigorous and challenging. Teachers are expected to differentiate instruction for all learners in each class, taking into account their learning styles, prior knowledge and/or interests. Instructional strategies and performance assessments that align with challenging content will be an integral part of the curriculum to provide guidance for engaging students with the subject matter.

The curriculum must have an emphasis on learning that is authentic and relevant and should incorporate experiences related to post secondary options. All content area curricula should reflect the connections between numeracy, literacy, problem solving and technology and the content area. Like everything else in Connecticut's high schools, the curriculum must be mission-driven.

The curriculum must reflect a comprehensive system of assessment that includes a range of measures to gauge student learning as they work toward their individualized goals. Assessments are tied to the Connecticut Frameworks and to Connecticut's graduation requirements. Proficiency should be determined through performance tasks that require students to demonstrate their understanding of the content and how it applies to the real world. Additionally, students should be able to collect evidence of their own development over time with selections of authentic work, culminating in a meaningful presentation of their learning.

It is also expected that schools developing and implementing a rigorous and authentic curriculum will:

- allow for interdisciplinary programs (e.g., humanities departments, learning teams/communities, senior projects);
- incorporate technology into all content areas;
- require students to work with parents, teachers, guidance counselors, or other adult advocates to develop self-directed, personalized, learning goals;
- provide courses or learning opportunities for students to explore various experiences or focus on career paths along with required learning;
- expect teachers to work collaboratively and will provide appropriate resources to allow them to do so;

- require that students share more responsibility for their learning;
- prepare more students for full matriculation into post-secondary education; and
- work cooperatively with middle level educators to ensure students entering high school have the necessary skills, knowledge and preparation to meet the high school expectations.

Connecticut high schools embracing these ideals will better service the needs of our society. Students engaging in rigorous and authentic learning will be more confident in their abilities, able to relate to the world around them, and better prepared for post secondary opportunities.

A Snapshot of the High School of the Future

Students enrolled in civics are held to rigorous standards and experience our government in action. In order to complete the course, students are guided by a variety of resources, as well as their own research and experience. Students have to attend several local government meetings and are responsible to present the information to their classmates. The teacher monitors the students' planned activities and builds upon the presentations with follow-up questions for investigation. Students in the class are encouraged to take a stand on a particular issue, research the issue, determine a supportable conclusion and take the stand in a public forum or with a letter to the involved parties. To learn about the three levels of government each student is asked to find a guest speaker involved in civics matters from the local, state or federal level. All communications, scheduling and follow-through are handled by the student. Students complete a reflective piece in conjunction with their language arts teacher describing their learning, their personal positions and their plans for participation in government in the future.

Guide to Planning and Implementation

Expectation 2, "Every high school in Connecticut will develop curriculum that is standards-based, rigorous, and challenging. The emphasis will be on learning that is authentic, relevant and includes exploration of post secondary opportunities" will require schools to initiate significant conversations about what is taught in our high schools and make appropriate changes to that content.

Actualizing this expectation, in the context of a global society, will require schools to:

- 1. Increase graduation requirements to be more reflective of the skills needed to ensure success in a global society. These are represented as:***

Connecticut high school graduation requirement - 2006		Connecticut high school framework graduation requirement	
No less than 20 credits		No less than 20 credits	
English	4 years	English	4 years
mathematics	3 years	mathematics	4 years
social studies,	3 years	social studies,	3 years
science	2 years	science	4 years
arts or vocational education	1 years	arts or vocational education	1 year
physical education	1 years	physical education	1 year
		World Language	<i>Proficiency in a second language</i>

- 2. Identify core expectations that define what each student should know and be able to demonstrate by the time he/she graduates including the 21st century content and application skills described earlier in this expectation**
- 3. Develop curriculum documents and sample assessments for each course and/or grade level that clearly define rigorous, developmentally appropriate and comprehensive learning outcomes, and are clearly linked to the changing needs of the workplace, technology and public policy, *The Connecticut Curriculum Frameworks and The Connecticut Common Core of Learning***

A clear definition of what high school graduates should know and be able to demonstrate is critical to ensure the success of each student. This can only be accomplished when all faculty members are involved in continuous curriculum revision and renewal cycles. Schools should establish a number of committees to involve all staff members in the school as well as parents, business leaders, university or college partners and students. Committees should be established to:

- define the core expectations for each course;
- ensure an ongoing curriculum review, revision and approval process is developed and implemented;
- define methods and processes to monitor individual student progress;
- establish common meeting times for staff to work in professional learning communities; and
- develop common protocols and a schedule of regular meetings that are incorporated into the work day for professional learning

communities of staff to focus on data, student work and improving instruction.

Using *The Connecticut Curriculum Frameworks* and *The Connecticut Common Core of Learning* as a guide, all faculty members should be engaged in continuous improvement efforts and have a clear understanding of the expected outcomes for each student's development and progress toward graduation. **To actualize this expectation, schools will also be required to:**

- 4. *Provide instruction that engages students in active and meaningful learning, promotes persistence and critical thinking, and focuses on literacy, science, technology, engineering, mathematics (STEM), and 21st century skills***
- 5. *Provide access to varied pathways and differentiated instruction to foster each student's accomplishment of the core learning outcomes and provide concrete opportunities for extensions beyond the core***
- 6. *Develop curricular content in all classes that contains relevant and authentic problems***

Today's K-12 students are members of the "Millennial Generation". Born after 1982, these Millennial students will be shaping the workplace and world economy through the first part of the 21st century. Millennials have a more distant view of the world and often ask, "What's the purpose?" In recent interviews Millennials affirmed that their preferred methods of networking are instant messaging, blogs and podcasts. One of the most important characteristics of the Millennials is that when they do something, go somewhere, or learn something new, they always want to know what they will be able to take away from the experience.

Engaging the Millennial Generation in the classroom is critical to ensure learning occurs. Educators need to create multiple structures or pathways within the school that are based on learning styles, interests and/or career aspirations for students to pursue the core learning outcomes. These structures or pathways should allow students to transition between them seamlessly. Creation of school wide schedules conducive to collaboration, interdisciplinary work, regular interactions with professionals who use the content knowledge in business and industry, small learning communities, and independent exploration are examples of structures or pathways that engage students in their learning.

The Millennials are not passive, although they tend to become passive when they see no meaning or purpose in the learning. Schools should guide students in the development of an individual learning plan. This can begin with initial collaboration with middle school staff and students about a freshman year transition program. A transition plan should be designed to assist students who will be entering high school in determining their focus among all the available options that will be presented as a part of their learning.

Developing meaningful learning plans will be a catalyst for student engagement. Individual learning plans may lead students to demonstrate their competencies and complete their learning plans before the traditional four years. To meet this need schools should initiate plans that will allow students to take college courses while in high school to meet and/or exceed graduation requirements; or allow students to choose to graduate once they achieve and demonstrate the knowledge and skills defined in the school's core expectations that are aligned with *The Connecticut Common Core of Learning* and *The Connecticut Curriculum Frameworks*. Plans for early graduation must also include a student's transition plan for continued learning and/or the workplace. This transition plan should include goals for continued learning, personal activities and financial security.

Professional staff will need support in their efforts to ensure the success of their students. This support can be found in schools that provide:

- professional development for:
 - differentiating instruction
 - effective instructional practices (best practice)
 - developing relevant and authentic learning activities that engage students in decision-making
 - developing lessons and activities focused on critical thinking
- opportunities for teachers to work together to identify interdisciplinary learning opportunities
- a variety of resources to serve as guides for instruction
- time for collaboration in professional learning communities
- lesson study and/or classroom rounds to observe instructional strategies with a focus on improvement

The Millennial Generation is our future in an increasingly competitive, global economy. Schools' communities will need to continually engage in on-going improvement efforts. As schools continue their efforts to **actualize this expectation they will also be required to:**

7. Use ongoing, varied assessments to gather formative and summative information about student learning to inform instruction, adjust curriculum and guide students' learning plans

Professional staff, through their involvement in professional learning communities, will have the time to reflect on student work, classroom assessment data and student demonstrations. This data will have tremendous meaning once staff members have developed clearly articulated descriptions of what quality student work looks like and once the measures used to determine

progress toward standardized benchmarks have been established. Periodic measures of student progress followed by reflective discussions will guide professional staff decisions about student gains and future instructional decisions necessary to assist each student in achieving the benchmarks.

School communities also have a responsibility to have regular conversations about student learning and the progress of individual students, as well as the entire student body, toward achieving the school's core expectations for student learning. Schools have multiple assessment tools available to them (The New England Association of Schools and Colleges, *Breaking Ranks II*, and the Connecticut Vanguard Schools Program) to guide their school improvement efforts. **While continuous improvement tools and assessments will assist schools in actualizing this expectation, schools will also be required to:**

8. *Guide students in the development and continual review of their personalized learning plans, their personal development, and their work toward achieving the core learning outcomes*

Students have an important role in creating their future and monitoring their own progress. Students should be expected to demonstrate their progress toward the defined core learning expectations at regular meetings with an adult advocate or mentor. The student and advocate/mentor will be trained in the core learning expectations and the various pathways the student might follow to achieve his or her academic and personal goals. Students should be encouraged to demonstrate learning through a variety of assessment tools that are provided by the school. These include course assessments, cumulative portfolio, culminating performance, student demonstrations, etc.

The student voice is important and often overlooked in the future improvement of high schools. Schools need to offer occasions for students to have a voice in the school by providing opportunities for decision-making and goal-setting related to the school's mission and core learning outcomes as well as their own personal development. These opportunities should be embedded in the school day and year. A comprehensive, developmental guidance program providing concepts and the skills of decision-making and goal-setting will contribute to the success of staff and students working together.

As previously mentioned, the preferred method of networking or communicating for our students is through instant messaging, blogs, and podcasts. It has been said that everything we know is doubling every 4.5 years as a result of breakthroughs and new technologies. As students communicate with the world through their preferred technologies, schools must also change. In order to **actualize this expectation, schools will also be required to:**

9. Align current technologies with 21st Century skills and make them regularly available and embedded into the learning/teaching process throughout the educational program

If computers and computer networks play an increasingly important role in continued learning and career advancement, then education should integrate technology in a meaningful way to better prepare students. Without such offerings, the existing digital divide disfavors children of lower socioeconomic status, particularly in light of research showing that schools serving these students usually utilize technology for remediation and skills drilling due to poor performance on standardized tests. This type of technology use does not prepare students to be innovative problem solvers that will be integral to future social mobility.¹⁰

Providing current technologies in every school, especially every high school in Connecticut, is paramount to the measured successes in our state high school reform efforts. Schools and community partnerships can initiate their technology programs and efforts with significant training and support to staff on the use of current technology and its role in respective content areas. Teachers' and students' knowledge of current technologies is on a continuum. Identifying "teacher leaders" who effectively use technology as models, support and trainers for others in the building will create a technological professional learning community.

Using portable technologies as a tool, schools need to create wireless environments that are fully accessible to all. As wireless networks are established and made accessible, virtual learning environments (i.e. online courses and videoconferencing) can become a reality. In addition, the network can support an active intranet for faculty and student access to curriculum content, resources, world-wide communications and utility services.

As described in Irving's Digital Divide reports of the '90's, funding is always an issue. The state, individual districts and schools must make technology a priority and consider all options, including sharing resources with other schools, buildings, districts and towns in order to fulfill their mission.

Many people say knowledge is changing so fast that what students learn today will soon be outdated. While current events and technology are constantly changing, there is, nevertheless, a body of lasting knowledge that should be the "core" of a child's education. In Connecticut, that "core" is known as the Common Core of Learning. When the Common Core of Learning is combined

10. Larry Irving, a former United States Assistant Secretary of Commerce and technology adviser to the Clinton Administration, in a series of reports in the mid 1990's.

with the Connecticut Frameworks, educators have a clear road map for identifying local expectations. Local and state alignment is the essence of this standard.

Policy Recommendations

- I. The Connecticut State Department of Education and Connecticut Department of Higher Education will convene a PK-16 Education Committee to review the Connecticut Common Core of Learning and Connecticut Frameworks. To provide alignment with college expectations, this committee will define the competencies that students need to master for graduation.
- II. The Connecticut State Department of Education will develop policies regarding graduation requirements that reflect comprehensive skills and knowledge as identified by the PK-16 Committee.
- III. The Connecticut State Department of Education and Connecticut Department of Higher Education will enforce the requirement that teacher preparation programs include the knowledge and skills needed for the application of: the Connecticut Common Core of Learning, New England Association of Schools and Colleges' standards, the Connecticut Frameworks and Connecticut's state assessment program..
- IV. The Connecticut State Department of Education will establish an ongoing, statewide curriculum review cycle.
- V. ~ The Connecticut State Department of Education will coordinate statewide buying power and advocate for funding for appropriate technology for each student and educator.

EXPECTATION 3: Leadership

Every high school in Connecticut will have strong educational leaders who have developed the capacity of teachers, parents, and students to enable all stakeholders to achieve the school's mission and expectations for student learning.

The way in which a school organizes learning for students, fosters leadership and engages its members has a profound effect on teaching and learning. The professional culture of the school must be characterized by thoughtful, reflective and constructive discourse about decision-making and practices which support student learning and well-being.¹¹

True educational leadership in Connecticut's high schools requires every adult in the school community to assume responsibility and leadership that is focused on achieving the school's mission and expectations for all students. School leadership must foster collaboration among all stakeholders of the school community: setting the direction, sharing the vision and managing the resources needed to insure success for each student. School leadership must be focused on the improvement of student learning and the belief that each student can succeed. Such success refers not only to traditional academic achievement but also to developing the student's physical, moral, social, emotional and aesthetic well-being.

"The principal's focus must be on inspiring and mobilizing staff, students, and parents to work toward the fulfillment of the school's mission and, within it, their own learning and life goals."¹² The principal must ensure that improved student learning is the focus of the school community. As the instructional leader, the principal must work with department heads and other teacher leaders in providing the information, data, guidance, resources and support needed to foster continuous improvement. The principal must ensure that the formative and summative assessments of student work and performance are the basis for all decisions that affect the teaching and learning process. The principal must provide opportunities for teachers to collaborate both within and across departments for the purpose of improving curriculum, instruction and student achievement.

11. New England Association of Schools and Colleges Inc., *Commission on Public Secondary Schools Standards for Accreditation for High Schools, Middle Schools and K-12 Schools*, 2005.

12. Maine State Department of Education, *Promising Futures: A Call to Improve Learning for Maine's Secondary Students*, 2005.

Expectation

Connecticut high school leaders must provide significant leadership in new ways that empower both teachers and students to pursue improved learning for all members of the school community; today

Leaders must maintain a clear vision, facilitating the design of a curriculum that is aligned with this vision, as well as appropriate organization and use of technology and facilities. They are instructional leaders and teacher coaches, providing job-related learning experiences and time for teachers to work together. They are marketing executives, communicating the school's vision and the benefits of attending the school. They are collaborators, developing learning partnerships with businesses, community groups, and institutions of higher education. They are competent administrators, distributing leadership and management tasks across the staff.¹³

Successful school leaders create professional learning communities that focus on improved student learning by fostering trust and collaboration. The climate of the school reflects students who are involved in decision-making, are treated with respect, and have significant ownership of their own learning. Teachers are fully involved in leading the school with active participation on school and district committees as well as collaborating within and across departments for the purpose of improving student learning. Parents/guardians and the community are supportive of the school's mission and are knowledgeable advocates in providing the necessary resources.

As Connecticut high schools develop leadership structures that focus their members on fulfilling the school's mission, they will experience a positive and improving school culture characterized by thoughtful, reflective discourse and decision-making that supports improved student learning. High school leaders must fulfill all 14 indicators listed under the New England Association of Schools and Colleges' Leadership and Organization accreditation standard. Underscoring those indicators is the need for high school principals to:

- promote the success of each student by acting with integrity, fairness and in an ethical manner;
- articulate what high school graduates need to know and be able to do;

13. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, *The Case for Small Schools*, Educational Leadership, February 2002.

- focus on continuous improvement of student learning;
- support students, including low achieving and at risk students, to ensure that all Connecticut high school students graduate;
- encourage and develop professional learning communities;
- be instructional leaders that foster a climate of trust and collaboration;
- structure the school so that each student has opportunities to meet the school's expectations for learning;
- be knowledgeable of current research and best practices for improving student learning;
- include the school's stakeholders in developing the school's vision and in the decision-making processes required to pursue that vision;
- have the authority and resources needed to lead the school in achieving its mission and expectations for student learning;
- insure teachers have the time and skills needed to be reflective, to collaborate on student work, to develop common assessments, and to analyze student performance data to improve instruction and curriculum; and
- insure student grouping practices foster heterogeneity and reflect the diversity of the student body.

A Snapshot of the High School of the Future

The summary of the school's Academic Standards Committee's monthly meeting that covered a number of important topics was sent out to the faculty. The committee of department leaders, teachers, students, parents and the principal outlined an inclusive process that would result in revising the school wide rubrics so they could be more easily understood by students, as well as more effectively used by teachers across disciplines. The department leaders and a teacher from each department would be trained in the process of revising rubrics and they, in turn, would work with groups of teachers in making the needed revisions during the two professional development days in the spring semester.

The committee also approved the addition of two new course offerings for next year, as well as the proposal to align the school's academic expectations for writing with three social studies courses. A proposal for the focus of the monthly professional development program, drafted by the department leaders and the principal, was confirmed by the committee. The time would be used by departments to assess student performance on common, midyear assessments and by department representatives to improve understanding of the writing rubric with each representative responsible for informing department members. Also, each department was allotted a collaboration period in which the teachers of tenth grade students would work to prepare materials and lessons in preparation for the upcoming Connecticut Academic Proficiency Test.

Guide to Planning and Implementation

Expectation Three, “Every high school in Connecticut will have strong, educational leaders who have developed the capacity of teachers, parents, and students to enable all stakeholders to achieve the school’s mission and expectations for student learning” is based on the fact that for decades, strong leadership has been a consistent quality found in the research on high achieving schools. In today’s schools, strong leadership refers to both strong administrative leadership¹⁴ and a strong distributed leadership model¹⁵ involving all stakeholders in the ongoing decision-making of the school. As our communities become more global it is especially important to ensure the diversity of the school community has an active role in the school’s future. **To actualize this expectation and ensure decisions are being made that reflect the school’s role in a developing global society, schools will be required to:**

- 1. Recruit and retain strong administrative leaders who articulate high expectations for the actualization of the mission for everyone involved in the school community; and provide leadership for the development and implementation of the necessary structures and processes that enable a school climate of collaboration and mutual trust***

Building administrators must be the “walk-the-talk” models of high expectations for each student, each staff member and each member of the school community. Through their behaviors they articulate the mission and vision daily in formal, informal, and personal conversations with students, staff and parents. The administrative team continually looks for ways to make the mission and vision visible in the school via the school’s website, classrooms, halls and in the community. In addition, recognition of students and adults who embody the mission in their work and school-life is ongoing and celebrated.

14. Strong administrative leadership refers to the certificated administrative team whose training and responsibilities are focused on being an instructional leader and manager of the daily operations of the school. As instructional leaders, the focus is on improving student learning by providing leadership to the school community on the literature, research and best practice that has a positive impact on improving student performance. As a manager, the focus is on maintaining the smooth daily operation of the school, ensuring all staff members have the necessary materials, and implementing sufficient policy and procedures to create a safe environment for all to work and learn.

15. Strong distributed leadership model refers to a school’s practice that encourages and enables all staff members to demonstrate leadership through their personal involvement in the decision-making of the school by participating on a variety of meaningful committees such as: a school wide leadership team, a school improvement team, a professional development committee, an action research committee, etc.

Strong administrators and administrative teams engage groups in identifying problems, developing solutions and implementing them to ensure that the mission and vision remain the focus of the school. They provide the structures and procedures necessary for professional development, time during the day for staff collaboration, and the means to fund the achievement of the school's mission.

Building administrators understand the importance of the mission's role in school improvement, can clearly articulate a plan of action for achieving the mission, and have a long-range plan for ongoing review and revision of the mission to ensure the school can stay aligned with a rapidly changing, global society. Most importantly, a strong school administrator and administrative team know the work of school improvement and have the leadership ability to make it become a reality. This can not be done alone. **Actualization of this expectation requires strong administrative leadership to:**

- 2. Increase the leadership capacity of teachers, parents and students by providing opportunities for leadership and involvement in the pursuit of the school's mission and vision while building a culture of trust and risk-taking that leads to decision-making that is collaborative, values-driven and data informed***

Establishing a school leadership team structure that includes teachers, parents and students to oversee the mission, vision and school improvement planning and implementation is a critical first step in developing a distributed leadership model in a school. The leadership team's focus will be on overseeing the entire educational process in the school. This collaborative function will enable the school community to have a voice in facilitating school improvement efforts.

As a part of its focus the leadership team should:

- consider ways for the school community to look at student work through a school wide perspective;
- promote and design opportunities for staff to visit different departments and classrooms in order to understand and appreciate different learning objectives and pedagogy priorities, and to create opportunities for staff to explore learning opportunities for students that cross subjects and disciplines;
- organize data in a meaningful way before providing it to colleagues for examination and model how data should be used when reflecting on school improvement; and
- lead professional development opportunities

Strong leadership is a shared function. The school leadership team has a critical role in ensuring leadership is shared. Today's high school is much too complex to be led by a single individual. A high achieving school will develop multiple opportunities for leadership by all members of the school community, including the students. Today's students are eager for a voice in their school and school life, yet most schools provide few opportunities for each student to become engaged and even fewer opportunities for each student to become well known.

Actualization of this expectation requires strong leadership to:

3. Ensure that each student is known well by at least one adult in the school community and provide equity and access for every student through a positive school climate and flexible grouping practices

Graduates around the country report they could have, should have and would have worked harder if the expectation was that all students were to achieve at higher levels. Graduates also report that school was mostly anonymous. Unless engaged in student government, athletics or school clubs, most students came to school, attended classes and went home, eventually graduating in three or four years. Schools can immediately create opportunities for students to become engaged and well-known by adults in the building. Mentor/mentee or adviser/advisee programs will ensure regular contact with each student by an adult within the school community. These programs, when designed to provide academic and social support to each student, eliminate the anonymity that is reported by graduates. These programs are especially important to ensure that not just a few but every student is engaged.

In addition, strong leadership in schools continually considers alternatives to ensure that each student has equal access to all challenging classes. Students can and will work harder and achieve more when higher expectations are communicated formally and informally. Schools can challenge each student with higher expectations by the elimination of honors and remedial sections in the ninth-grade and, as an alternative, provide earned honors options within heterogeneous ninth-grade courses. To ensure each student has equal access, schools will need to provide course-long support for lower achieving students in more challenging courses.

As already discussed in Expectation 1, the elimination of tracking and the practice of limiting ability grouping in order to challenge every student is another courageous discussion and decision that will be needed to ensure graduates of the future will not report they could have and should have worked harder in high school.

Strong leadership is multifaceted. Schools with strong leadership have administrative instructional leaders who engage the entire community, including students, in their efforts to increase student achievement. Their work is clear and focused on the needs of each student. Schools with strong leadership also have administrative leaders who have the skills, knowledge, and willingness to manage a complex system. **Actualization of this expectation will require strong administrative leadership to:**

- 4. *Manage the key components of change (vision, incentives, strategies, resources) to ensure continuous school improvement***
- 5. *Be courageous regarding evaluations and continued employment decisions***
- 6. *Be vigilant to ensure the safety and well-being of all members of the school's community***
- 7. *Build positive relationships with district administrators and board members to ensure the autonomy necessary to provide the leadership needed to manage the mission***

Strong administrative leaders know when to lead and when to manage. They recognize the importance of knowing all students and staff. They model the power of building personal relationships through strong and positive communications skills. They model reflective practices by asking questions about what is working, what must change and the future direction of the school. They also model reflective practices during supervision and evaluation by expecting staff to reflect on student work and achievement.

Leading and managing a high school is a difficult task. A strong administrative leader always focuses on the school's mission, vision and student achievement when having discussions about and making decisions regarding resources, equitable distribution of students to faculty, and new programs and opportunities. The balance between being an instructional leader and an instructional manager is critical to being a strong administrative leader. This balance is found when a strong administrative leader finds comfort in shared and distributed leadership, remains focused on the mission and vision, and truly believes that *"Each student entering high school will graduate as a contributing citizen in a democratic society and prepared for college and work in a global society."*

Policy Recommendations

- I. ~ The Connecticut State Department of Education will develop policy and advocate for financial support for administrative internships.
- II. ~ The Connecticut State Department of Education will establish guidelines for ratios of administrative staffing to building enrollments/staff assignments to ensure administrative leaders can find the balance

between instructional leadership and instructional management and will advocate for support for districts to implement those ratios.

- III. The Connecticut State Department of Education and Connecticut Department of Higher Education will enforce the requirement that administrative preparation programs include deeper understanding and skills needed to become an instructional leader, as well as, development of leadership focused on the Connecticut Common Core of Learning, The New England Association of Schools and Colleges standards, and the Connecticut Frameworks as a basis for developing Connecticut's principals.
- IV. ~ The Connecticut State Department of Education will advocate for funding to provide time for professional collaboration and leadership team functions during the school day.

DRAFT

EXPECTATION 4: Learning Communities

Every Connecticut high school will develop small, safe, personalized, and positive learning communities.

If high achievement for each student is the goal of reform, then personalization is the key. Although some students might be able to make it through four years of high school despite the lack of any personal connections, each student requires a supportive environment – some more than others. Creating that environment is essential to bringing learning to fruition. In keeping with the sentiment implicit in the word, personalization can mean different things to different people. However, most definitions converge on a few common principles associated with providing students with opportunities to develop a sense of belonging to the school, a sense of ownership over the direction of one's learning, and the ability to recognize one's choices and to make choices based on one's own experience and understanding of the choices.¹⁶

Once a failing, urban high school with low expectations for student learning, Bassick High School in Bridgeport is transforming itself into a school where all students are expected to achieve at high levels. Although 95 percent of its students are on free and reduced-priced meals, and the school has experienced a 36 percent increase in enrollment with a 2 percent decrease in staffing, as a school community it has implemented specific strategies that have profoundly improved its school program. Among the school improvement strategies the school has implemented are:

- a school wide Advisory Program;
- school wide reading and writing programs;
- use of performance-based learning and assessments;
- teaming in grades 9 and 10 (Achievement Academies); and
- Career Academies in grades 11 and 12.

As a result of the school's efforts, academic achievement has increased, attendance has improved, the drop out rate has decreased, fewer disciplinary actions are required, and the school's image has improved.

While the school continues to struggle with increased responsibilities and no increases in resources, it perseveres because of a belief that "their students

16. National Association of Secondary School Principals, *Breaking Ranks II: Strategies for Leading High School Reform*, 2004.

deserve it and because it's the right thing to do." Bassick High School's goal is to become the "*Finest Urban High School in Connecticut.*"¹⁷

Research findings about smaller learning communities and personalized learning environments have led schools and school districts to rethink school size and the value of a "comprehensive high school." *Breaking Ranks II* identifies "making learning personal" as one of three core areas for which high schools must begin planning and implementation. Personalized learning environments and smaller learning communities will foster positive and supportive relationships between students and adults. These personal connections are highly motivating for high school students and are necessary for a successful learning environment. Personalized learning environments are the foundation on which change will take place.

Expectations

As defined by The New England Association of Schools and Colleges, Connecticut high schools will establish small, safe, personalize and positive learning communities that will support each student in achieving the school's expectations for student learning. Each learning community will:

- ensure that every student will develop a personal learning plan with the support of a staff adviser to advocate, monitor and support the student's progress through school;
- increase opportunities for students to have a voice and involve students in decision-making;
- conduct significant discussions about what they can give up and/or do differently (i.e. reducing course requirements to increase rigor);
- create a flexible schedule;
- establishing teacher teaming and looping structures;
- work toward student-teacher ratios with fewer than 20 per class and fewer than 90 per semester;
- schedule common planning time for teachers focused on students, especially those with the highest needs; and
- provide credit alternatives to the Carnegie unit as a way to demonstrate mastery of course competencies and to meet graduation requirements.

As small, personalized, learning environments are developed students will have better opportunities to be recognized for their contributions, feel free to risk, ask questions, disagree with classmates and teachers, make mistakes and/or not know answers. Small learning communities will provide teachers the time to

17. Bassick High School, *Collaborative Leadership: Creating a Culture for Change*, 2005.

accommodate students' various learning styles. Interpersonal relationships (teacher to teacher, teacher to student, student to teacher, student to student) will be characterized by respect. In Connecticut high schools, all staff will recognize that students' backgrounds, experiences and needs vary, resulting in the allocation of resources to meet each student's needs.

It is further expected that each Connecticut high school will conduct an assessment of its climate for learning and, based on the results, develop a plan to increase the school's level of mutual respect and sense of community. This climate improvement plan will be reflected in the school's Code of Conduct and will be collaboratively developed, periodically reviewed and consistently followed.

Connecticut high schools will:

- periodically conduct climate assessments to identify needs and develop strategies to improve the climate for learning; and
- annually conduct a safety audit including a review of the crisis management plan.

As schools provide a safe, positive learning environment, each student will feel safe; individual differences will be valued by all; interactions among all community members will be characterized by respect; and adults will be trained to recognize the social, emotional, and physical needs of students.

Research is clear that when schools have collaboratively planned, developed and implemented small, personalized and positive learning environments, and have taken specific actions to ensure the safety of all members of the school community, significant improvement in learning results. The research also indicates that schools with effective small learning communities experience:

- improved attendance and fewer disciplinary problems;
- improved attitudes toward school by students and staff;
- less vandalism and fewer incidences of violence;
- curriculum that is more relevant and engaging;
- respectful and supportive relationships among students, school staff and parents;
- frequent opportunities for student participation, collaboration, service and self-direction; and
- greater acceptance of differences and better conflict resolution skills.

A Snapshot of the High School of the Future

In the staff room a group of teachers is discussing the value of the high school's small, personalized learning communities. The discussion is focused on

ensuring that not a single student's high school experience and the outcome of that experience is left to pure chance, but rather, working with colleagues to ensure that all staff assume the obligation to understand the individual needs of their students and to meet those needs intellectually, socially and personally.

Their conversation also addresses how staff might help students in finding voice. While some students have little problem finding voice, others struggle to find a productive voice well into adulthood. Staff members discuss their efforts to provide a variety of structured experiences in which students are actively engaged that they think have been successful. They believe that they can and do address their students' needs to:

- express personal perspectives
- create individual and group identities
- examine options and choose his/her own path
- take risks and assess the effects
- use his/her imagination
- demonstrate mastery

However, in this high school chance is not a game to be played with students' lives. How often do only a few students express themselves—even though, in theory, all are “allowed”? Does that mean others don't want to? Are afraid to? Some would say that part of growing up is finding the ability to express one's self and if someone can't, then that's life. But what happens if one never learns that skill? Is that life? This staff does not agree and continues to discuss several arenas in which each student can express himself or herself: in one-on-one and group settings, through their advisory program, their activities program, student exhibitions and presentations, and within each classroom. This school is focused and addressing the needs of its students.

Guide to Planning and Implementation

Expectation 4, “Every Connecticut high school will develop small, safe, personalized, and positive learning communities” is based on the fact that in large, comprehensive high schools students can choose to be disengaged from the school community. Research has clearly identified student engagement as a direct impact on student achievement: the more engaged, the higher achievement.¹⁸ High achieving schools have worked to ensure that each student is well-known and actively engaged in his or her high school experience. To ensure that each student is engaged by **actualizing this expectation, schools will be required to:**

18. Paul Joseph Chebator, *Involvement and Student Outcomes: The Student Development Effects of Co-curricular Programs*, 1995.

1. Create a comprehensive advocacy program that involves each student and all staff members who meet with each other on a regular basis

For most students to become engaged in their school, they must first feel safe and know that they have at least one adult advocate in the school. While The New England Association of Schools and Colleges requires schools to implement a comprehensive guidance service program, guidance can not be the sole source of advocacy for students. Schools can develop adviser/advisee or mentor/mentee programs to ensure that every student has an adult advocate in addition to his or her guidance counselor.

With each student having an adult advocate/mentor, personalized learning plans can be developed by each student with the support of his or her advocate/mentor and annually reviewed or updated. Personalized student learning plans are as much about academic goals and planning beyond high school as they are about social goals. In addition, an advocate/mentor program can be used to provide a student voice on issues, potential problems and potential solutions to enhance their life in school. Students who have direct involvement in decision-making and the information flow within the school become more engaged.¹⁹

Working with the middle schools that feed the high school to develop a pre-high school advocate/mentor relationship would be desirable. This relationship would provide the opportunity for a brief introduction of the student's future advocate/mentor and the development of an initial, personalized, transition plan that will guide the student's move from middle school to high school. This transition plan could include interests, learning styles and strategies for being successful in high school. Transitioning from middle school to high school is a difficult task for most students. The first two years in high school are critical to ensuring their success. **Actualizing this expectation, schools will be required to:**

2. Design a master schedule that will provide class size/teacher target ratios of 20 students per class and/or 90 students per semester in ninth- AND 10th - grade core academic areas

Emerging literature suggests small high schools/class sizes have the following benefits:

- teachers tend to innovate and encourage students to participate, resulting in greater commitment for both groups;

19. Ibid

- more positive attitudes and greater satisfaction are reflected in higher grades and test scores, improved attendance rates and lowered dropout rates;
- communication is easier;
- students and teachers get to know each other well;
- less bureaucracy makes it easier to individualize;
- teachers can respond quickly to rudeness or frustration ;
- parents are more likely to form alliances with teachers who know their child and care about his or her progress;
- data reflecting how well a student, a teacher or the school is doing is shared; and
- each student, not just the academic and athletic stars, is part of a community that contains adults.²⁰

School leadership teams must find ways to develop schedules in which smaller student/teacher ratios are the norm and not the exception. As schools begin looking for solutions, asking questions about the current schedule could provide some direction:

- How many classes are currently being offered with fewer than 18 students enrolled?
- How many courses are currently being offered with fewer than 10 students enrolled?
- How many duties that could be filled with less expensive employees are being filled by certificated staff?
- How many employees have multiple planning periods without additional responsibilities?
- How do grouping patterns affect class size?
- How can technology improve class size?
- Are current graduation requirements reflective of what students need to know and be able to demonstrate in order to be successful learners and contributing citizens?

Many similar questions can be asked about how staffing patterns, course offerings and ways in which credit can be earned will affect class size. At minimum, to **actualize this expectation, schools will be required to:**

3. Provide each student access to standards-based alternatives for demonstrating knowledge, skills, and understanding as a way to earn credit and/or concurrent credits (Carnegie units)

20. Karen Irmsher, *School Size*, ERIC Digest, 113, 1997.

The unit was developed in 1906 as a measure of the amount of time a student has studied a subject. For example, a total of 120 hours in one subject--meeting 4 or 5 times a week for 40 to 60 minutes, for 36 to 40 weeks each year--earns the student one unit of high school credit. Fourteen units were deemed to constitute the minimum amount of preparation that may be interpreted as 'four years of academic or high school preparation'.²¹

The earning of credit tied to seat time has been a controversial discussion for decades as most agree the credit does not equate to the level of knowledge, skills or understandings achieved by different students.

Schools focused on each student's success will need to supplement the Carnegie unit and the associated seat time requirement with demonstrations of learning, based on a set of defined standards or identified essential competencies. Demonstration of competency in any course may be offered at multiple entry and exit points during the school year.

As schools develop a variety of assessments that may be used as options to demonstrate knowledge, skills, and understandings, the Connecticut Common Core of Learning and the Connecticut Curriculum Frameworks should be used as a guide. Students must also assume responsibility when choosing to participate in an alternative assessment. All alternative assessments should be directly connected to the competencies that are not only required for graduation but are also connected to the student's long-range learning plan.

Schools providing alternatives to seat time for earning Carnegie units should also consider credit being earned by demonstration of competencies through the completion of online courses, internships, independent studies, college courses, etc.

Schools and their staff cannot make such a dramatic shift overnight. It can be expected, however, that all schools begin planning for student access to alternative methods of earning credits. To provide staff the time needed to **actualize this expectation, schools will be required to:**

4. Provide time, in the school calendar year, for faculty to collaborate

All the items mentioned in this standard will require time for school leadership and staff members to meet on a regular basis to ensure education is personalized for each student. As the staff begins to use collaboration time to look at student work, define competencies required for credit and/or graduation requirements, and explore interdisciplinary team planning of common units,

21. Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, *The Carnegie Unit: What is it?*, 2005.

personalization of the school will begin. School leaders and leadership teams must make it a priority to develop schedules that provide opportunities for collaboration among teachers and/or teams. Scheduling of this kind is occurring in high schools across Connecticut today. Models are available that include traditional department schedules as well as schedules for teaming and looping structures.

While schools have a responsibility to ensure each student is known well and is engaged, developing small classes and developing advocate/mentor programs are two legs of the three legged stool. The third leg of the stool that will ensure **actualization of this expectation will require schools to:**

5. Create a positive and safe learning environment

Schools with strong distributed leadership have many committees; one very important committee is the school improvement committee consisting of faculty, staff, parents, students and community members who meet regularly. A key component of any school improvement plan should be school climate. If a school does not have an improvement plan that includes the school's climate a school climate assessment should be conducted. There are many climate assessments available to schools. In selecting a climate assessment tool, schools should make sure they include the following areas for assessment.²²

- Appearance and Physical Plant
- Faculty Relations
- Student Interactions
- Leadership/Decision-making
- Discipline Environment
- Learning Environment
- Attitude and Culture
- School-Community Relations

In light of current financial support to schools, creating small, safe, personalized, and positive learning communities will not be an easy task. However, there is a great deal that can be accomplished with current resources. To this end, schools will be expected to review age-old traditions and rituals and exchange them for strategies that will begin to create the small, safe, personalized, and positive learning communities that are most desirable.

22. The Western Alliance for the Study of School Climate, *Why make the effort to improve your school's climate?*, 2004.

Policy Recommendations

- I. The Connecticut State Department of Education will redefine the graduation requirement legislation to allow students to have equal access to competency-based assessments and alternative learning opportunities to earn Carnegie units for high school courses.
- II. ~ The Connecticut State Department of Education will establish policy and advocate for funding to support local efforts to achieve class size/teacher target ratios of 20 students per class and/or 90 students per semester in ninth- and 10th- grade core academic areas.
- III. ~ The Connecticut State Department of Education will establish policy and advocate for funding for collaboration among teachers within the school year and work day.

DRAFT

EXPECTATION 5: Professional Development

Every high school in Connecticut will have an embedded professional development program with the single purpose of improving teaching and learning.

While staff and faculty may support school improvement, they may not always know how to implement what is being proposed. For this reason professional development is critical to the school improvement process.²³

The daily working life of most teachers is one of unrelieved time, pressure and isolation; they work, largely alone, in a classroom of 25-30 students for hours every day. Unlike teachers in many systems overseas who can take advantage of continuous, daily opportunities for professional development, American teachers have little time to work together on planning, preparation, collaboration or professional growth.

The whole question of teachers and time needs to be rethought in a serious and systematic way. They (teachers, administrators and professional staff) need time to read professional journals, interact with their colleagues and watch outstanding teachers demonstrate new strategies.²⁴

It is critical that each Connecticut high school develops a professional development program that is ongoing, assessment-driven (formal or informal), systematic, focused and inherent in structure with the single purpose of improving teaching and learning.

To be effective, professional development must provide teachers with a way to directly apply what they learn to their teaching. Research shows that professional development leads to better instruction and improved student learning when it connects to the curriculum materials that teachers use, the district and state academic standards that guide their work, and the assessment and accountability measures that evaluate their success.²⁵

23. Southern Regional Education Board, *Closing the Achievement Gap: A High Schools that Work Design for Challenged Schools*, 2002.

24. The Education Commission of the States Education Reform, *Prisoners of Time*, April 1994

25. American Educational Research Association, AERA, *Teaching Teachers: Professional Development To Improve Student Achievement*, July 26, 2005.

Expectations

Connecticut high schools will be expected to establish professional development programs that are embedded in the daily culture of the school, providing time for professional staff to work together, plan together and learn together.

School districts must have a professional development program that meets the community's needs. School districts and teacher groups should work together to develop the program as well as to provide the needed contract language to support the professional development program. Teachers participating in such programs must be given opportunities to disseminate information to their colleagues.

A professional development program will:

- be mission driven, focused on teaching and learning, and differentiated;
- based on data about student achievement which that shape decisions regarding professional development;
- meet the needs of all members of the learning community (teachers, administrators, paraprofessionals, counselors, etc);
- provide multi-level opportunities (cross grades/various stakeholders);
- promote interdisciplinary collaboration;
- address the needs of initial educators as well as veteran educators;
- be cooperatively developed by all stakeholders: teachers, administrators, et. al;
- be included in the school budget as an annual expenditure; and
- result in increased student achievement.

As a result of schools becoming professional learning communities, the personal investment of all staff will be apparent. Evidence of improved teaching and learning, improved teaming and school culture, and empowered and motivated teachers will be measurable. Observers will also notice increased interdisciplinary collaboration among teachers, a continuing conversation about teaching and learning, and a sense of sustainability that encourages continued professional growth and personal learning.

A Snapshot of the High School of the Future

The team has one block (63 minutes) every six days to collaborate on student learning and assessment. Facilitation and presentation responsibilities rotate among the eight member team. Typically, a formal protocol is used to address a concern/dilemma specific to ninth-grade lessons and assessments that are being developed during this time. Team members value and protect the professional

time where conversations are centered on focused issues related to teaching and learning. Other stakeholders participate in these collaborations when appropriate.

Guide to Planning and Implementation

Expectation 5, “Every high school in Connecticut will have an embedded professional development program with the single purpose of improving teaching and learning” is based on the fact that ongoing opportunities for embedded, district, state and national training for all educators is essential to ensure today’s professional staff remain ahead of the rapidly growing research on best practice, the brain and the use of technology. Creating high schools that respond to the fast-paced changes in our global society will require schools and districts to **actualize this expectation by:**

- 1. Planning and conducting professional development that supports the school’s and district’s mission and is focused on teaching, learning and increased student achievement***
- 2. Shaping decisions for planning professional development by using multiple kinds of data about student development and achievement***

A mission-driven school community consistently uses its mission to make decisions regarding every element of the school program and culture. This is especially important when making decisions regarding professional development. Connecting the school’s mission and professional development plan to the district’s professional growth and evaluation plans will assist schools in maintaining their focus. To ensure each student graduates with the skills required in the 21st century, professional development must focus on learning and teaching.

Linking professional development programs to the school’s mission will require schools to focus on qualitative and quantitative data about student achievement and development. This data can provide guidance to decisions regarding the type(s) of professional development, e.g. pedagogy, classroom management, student development, content, etc., that would best support student growth and achievement. Administrators and teachers should be trained together in the use of student data to shape professional development decisions.

As rapidly as the world is changing, so are many of our specific content and discipline areas. Schools should ensure that all educators have the knowledge and skills necessary to integrate literacy skills into all classroom and department expectations. Significant and ongoing opportunities must also be provided to expand teachers’ current content knowledge based on their professional needs and the needs of the students. **To ensure this expectation and new learning**

from professional development programs are actualized, schools will be required to:

- 3. Differentiate professional development opportunities (school, district, state, and national) to:**
 - *meet the needs of all members of the learning community*
 - *allow for cross grade/department collaboration*
 - *address the needs of educators in various career stages*
- 4. Ensure that a portion of each teacher's professional development will be relevant to the academic discipline and content area in which he or she is certified**
- 5. Plan for a balance of district, school, department, and self-selected content area professional development opportunities that are relevant to student learning and the needs of the teacher**

As part of a school wide professional development plan, subject area teachers should have a significant voice in the identification of the kind of training that is needed to improve teaching and learnings, such as:

- integrating literacy skills and expectations for all teachers;
- content update in bioengineering genetics for teachers of science;
- identifying the best current literature for adolescents ; and
- the use of technology to enhance instruction.

All staff must become teachers of reading and writing as well as content area specialists. To this end, schools should establish methods for ongoing communication and collaboration among teachers of various subject areas, i.e., groups of teachers working collaboratively on professional growth projects for their evaluation. School curriculum and instruction should, therefore, become more interdisciplinary as well as integrating literacy and the use of technology.

To ensure this expectation is actualized, schools will be required to:

- 6. Include in the annual school budget a line item for school-based professional development**
- 7. Conduct an annual analysis of each year's professional development plan to determine the impact the plan has had on teaching and learning practices in classrooms and to ensure that designated funds were expended to support the professional staff's needs as designed**

As school leadership teams and professional development committees work to align school professional activities with the school's mission, ongoing evaluation is critical. Leadership teams should work with committees to develop meaningful evaluations of every plan. Each evaluation will provide the school's leadership

team and professional development committee with the necessary information to revise and redesign the next year's plan.

Maintaining a balance and evaluating each component of district, school, department and individual professional development activities will provide significant information for schools to make future decisions about professional development. Using this evaluation information of the year's professional development will also provide schools with the needed information to make improved decisions that do not have an impact on student achievement.

Policy Recommendations

- I. The Connecticut State Department of Education will establish policy and advocate for the means and time for educators to participate in continual professional development based upon the Connecticut State Department of Education's Common Core of Learning and the Curriculum Frameworks.
- II. The Connecticut State Department of Education shall build an infrastructure for state-wide dissemination of model professional development programs and plans.
- III. ~ The Connecticut State Department of Education, in collaboration with the Department of Higher Education and local education associations, shall use appropriate funds from federal, state and business sources to stimulate schools in implementing professional development.
- IV. ~ The Connecticut State Department of Education will advocate for entitlement funds to support the time needed for schools to implement the necessary balanced professional development activities needed to ensure that the changes required in this document will occur.

EXPECTATION 6: Data-Informed Decision Making

Every Connecticut high school will purposefully and regularly use data²⁶ to form and transform its teaching, learning, development, leadership and management; and to provide a rationale for educational decisions that students, educators, parents and taxpayers can comprehend.

Schools successful in using data to support decision-making and improvement use the district resources available to them, create a school structure where data use is embedded in the daily schedule, and use staff expertise to continually develop data analysis skills. Other school factors include: strong principal support and leadership; ongoing use and analysis of timely, student-level data; expert assistance in data use and instructional strategies; interventions to improve teaching and learning; school improvement plans and teams; and professional development opportunities for teachers.²⁷

Data collecting and reporting are critical components of *NCLB*. Nationally, school districts must collect and report more data in more detail than ever before. When done purposefully and regularly, data collection, analysis and discussion is a process that goes beyond accountability mandates and begins to drive teaching, learning, leadership and management decisions within a district and schools. Analysis of data can inform decisions about everything from class schedules, reading levels and behavior management to instructional strategies, professional development and resource allocations.

For easy access, educational data should be warehoused at the state level, PK-16. This information should also include information about student demographics, educator preparation, personnel evaluation, budget resources, curriculum maps, instructional strategies and materials, formative and summative assessments, professional development opportunities, programs, test results,

Teacher and staff discussions, focused on educational data, must stem from real circumstances educators face everyday. These discussions involving students, teachers, staff, administrators and parents, should be a part of a school's daily culture.

26. Data is defined as information from academic assessments: formative, summative, and alternative; social information: attendance, disciplinary, co-curricular participation etc.; emotional information: issues in student's life, family background, etc.

27. Education Commission of the States, *Data Driven Decision-making*, No Child Left Behind Issue Brief, 2002

As data-informed decision-making becomes an integral part of overall school district performance, the role of the teacher changes. The doors to the classroom open and the teachers team to share strategies, goals and plans with each other. As part of the school culture, all stakeholders work together as a professional learning community to improve student achievement through data-informed decision-making.

The use of student data by teachers will become one of the most important aspects of best practice in our high schools. In addition, program evaluation and benchmarking will allow teachers to determine levels of performance and measure progress toward common goals over time. Every teacher team will participate in the process of identifying the current level of student achievement and establishing a goal to improve student performance.

Furthermore, research indicates that teachers who purposefully and regularly use formative and summative assessment data to form and transform their instruction are more effective than teachers who do not. The best teachers have always held themselves accountable. When a teacher knows early who is learning and who is not, there is a greater likelihood instruction will be tailored to meet a student's individual needs and shape a student's individualized learning plan.

To accurately recognize and meet the needs of all of Connecticut's students, formative and summative assessments must take varied forms. The notion of each student's knowledge and skills being accurately measured only in seat time and standardized tests must stop if Connecticut's high schools are to be the best in the nation.

Expectations

Connecticut high schools must develop a comprehensive plan for the purposeful and regular collection, analysis, discussion and disclosure of assessment data to form and transform teaching, learning, development, leadership and management. The plan must include a means by which boards of education, and district and building administrators will:

- promote a culture of embedded, regular and purposeful data-informed decision-making to support a systems approach to school improvement resulting in increased student achievement;
- provide necessary resources (e.g. time, money) to support the regular and purposeful meeting of teacher-directed data teams at each school;
- provide the necessary professional development around data-informed decision-making in which teachers, staff and administrators will participate;

- provide real-time access to a Connecticut PK-16 data warehouse and other in-district data collection systems;
- communicate with higher education institutions as well as businesses and industries about data in relation to Grade 12-16 student performance; and
- share information about data-informed decision-making to provide a rationale for educational decisions that students, educators, parents, and taxpayers can comprehend.

In addition teachers, staff and administrators in all schools will:

- meet regularly and purposefully as part of data teams (e.g. grade-level teams to focus on specific student needs; vertical teams, including Grades 8-9, to focus on student achievement in content areas as well as specific and effective instructional strategies)
- meet across disciplines with data regularly collected, analyzed, discussed and used to identify school wide issues and establish school wide goals to inform best educational practices for each student; discussions should include:
 - common formative and summative assessments
 - literacy, numeracy, technology and social and civic data
 - benchmark indicators to measure student achievement in the classroom across all curricular areas
 - additional indicators that articulate all student skills outside of the classroom
 - strategies to reduce student-teacher ratios
 - strategies to develop individual student learning plans
 - strategies to ensure each student graduates
- meet to establish graduation requirements that meet the needs of each student with data regularly collected, analyzed, discussed and used to inform individualized education plans

A Snapshot of the High School of the Future

The data team has just received the results from its quarterly benchmark assessments. The team is actively reviewing the data and is excited with the results. The team's suggestions to colleagues regarding instructional strategies, curriculum adaptations and extended learning opportunities have had a remarkable impact on student performance this quarter. As the team members dig deeper into the data they have discovered that two sub-groups have not responded as well to the various changes made. The team decides to meet with their department colleagues to look closer at individual student work to determine the next steps to be taken as a school.

Guide to Planning and Implementation

Expectation 6, “Every Connecticut high school will purposefully and regularly use data to form and transform its teaching, learning, development, leadership, and management; and to provide a rationale for educational decisions that students, educators, parents, and taxpayers can comprehend.” Is based on the fact that the comprehensive changes that schools are required to make in order to ensure each student graduates from high school prepared to thrive in the 21st century will require the use of data to inform decisions about what each student needs to achieve academically, emotionally and socially. These data-informed decisions must be made for each student whether they plan to go to college, career preparation or directly to the workplace. **To ensure this expectation is actualized, schools will be required to:**

- 1. Select from the Connecticut State Department of Education’s assessment items bank and/or develop local, common assessments aligned with the Connecticut Common Core of Learning, including:***
 - common, formative assessments and classroom assessments that serve as benchmarks to guide instruction***
 - summative assessments that serve as guides to curriculum alignment, instructional decisions, and additional assessment development***
 - alternatives to traditional assessments of learning that allow students to demonstrate knowledge, skills and understanding in all content areas***

Ensuring each student will graduate with 21st century skills will require schools to allow each student access to a rigorous curriculum. In addition each student must be assessed on a regular basis to determine growth and progress toward achieving the knowledge and skills as defined in the Connecticut Common Core of Learning. School leadership and department teams will need to agree on which assessments are to be used, when they should be given and most importantly, how to use the data from the assessments to make future instructional decisions. **To ensure this expectation is actualized, schools will be required to:**

- 2. Develop schedules that provide teachers common planning time to meet, discuss, and analyze:***
 - student work by content and across disciplines and grade levels***
 - social and emotional data such as attendance, extra-curricular participation, discipline etc.***

3. Have trained, technical personnel who can provide on-going support and professional development to all staff in the application and analysis of data to improve student learning

Professional staff members make thousands of decisions regarding instruction and curriculum daily. In regular department meetings and common planning times professional staff members need to include conversations about student data as a routine part of the professional dialogue that occurs. Data-informed instructional decisions by the professional staff will provide each student a greater opportunity for success.

Professional staff can not be expected to begin using data to inform instruction without ongoing support and professional development. Specialized, trained, technical staff and building administrators can support professional staff discussions that are focused on student data by participating in department and common planning time meetings on a regular basis and modeling the appropriate use of data for decisions about program improvement and policy changes. Leadership teams should work to establish protocols for the use of common planning time and department meetings to ensure that significant time for discussions about student work and data is included in each meeting.

If professional staff members are going to use data as a means to inform instruction then access to the data must be efficient and reliable. **To ensure this expectation is actualized, schools will be required to:**

4. Provide professional staff access to a statewide data management system (PK – 16) that can be analyzed at state, district, school, class and student levels

Professional staff, when provided time and ongoing embedded professional development, will effectively use data to inform decisions about instruction and curriculum. Easy access to the data, and support from colleagues, administrators and technical staff will ensure the data is used properly. To ensure data is current, school leadership and/or data teams must determine the kinds of formative, alternative and classroom assessment data that should be included in the data warehouse, along with summative assessment data, for local instructional decisions. School leadership and data teams need to review existing tools and software that provide entry of multiple data elements and ensure the data organization is simple in order for data retrieval to be easy and efficient.

Policy recommendations

- I. The Connecticut State Department of Education and Department of Higher Education, through the PK-16 Council, will establish competencies of what students should know and be able to do upon graduation from high school.
- II. The Connecticut State Department of Education and Department of Higher Education, through the PK-16 Council, will make available models of formative assessments of these competencies that will lead to graduation.
- III. The Connecticut State Department of Education will collect and make available examples of student work that demonstrate the established competencies.
- IV. The Connecticut State Department of Education will establish policy that requires school districts to align local graduation requirements with the PK-16 Council's established graduation competencies.
- V. The Connecticut State Department of Education will continue the development of an item resource bank of formative and summative assessments items that are aligned with the expectations of the Common Core of Learning.
- VI. The Connecticut State Department of Education and Department of Higher Education, schools and districts will continue to investigate and publicize the links between CAPT scores and success in college.
- VII. The Department of Higher Education will encourage public institutions to use CAPT scores as one criterion for admission.
- VIII. The Department of Higher Education will require administrative and teacher preparation programs to include deeper understanding, skills and knowledge needed to focus on using student work and achievement data to inform instruction.
- IX. ~ The Connecticut State Department of Education and Department of Higher Education will advocate for funding to create and sustain a PK-16 data warehouse to provide an understanding of high school graduates' performance in college.

EXPECTATION 7: Extended Learning Opportunities

Every high school in Connecticut will develop learning opportunities that extend into the community for each student.

Educational institutions do not exist in isolation from the economic, social, and cultural situations that sponsor and surround them.

In contextual teaching, it is the major task of the teacher to broaden students' perceptions so that meaning becomes visible and the purpose of learning immediately understandable.

After 50 years in education, I am convinced that few other teaching strategies will so effectively help increase student achievement as helping students make the connections between classroom subject matter and the real-life challenges they will face throughout their lives. Connecting the 'why' of concrete reality to the teaching process provides an essential motivational force for learning. If students are to be motivated to learn, they must see and feel the touchstones of reality and meaning in their education experiences.

Researchers who study learning and thinking outside of school have found that in daily life people think about, find and solve problems:

- *within a broader societal goal structure;*
- *in a way that is integrated with actions;*
- *by using numerous cognitive supports (mnemonics, concrete manipulatives, visual aids, etc.);*
- *in collaboration with others or in distributed patterns;*
- *in different orders of complexity; and*
- *as part of a complete task.²⁸*

At the turn of the century the primary focus of schools was to educate a small percentage of workers to think, collaborate, problem solve and lead. Learning was limited to what individuals gained at school, in church and at home. Today, technology and a rapidly shrinking world have changed where, when and how learning takes place.

As Connecticut schools continue their reform efforts, the learning community must move beyond the school walls and provide real-life applications of essential learning and an understanding of the global economy.

29. Parnell, D., *Contextual Teaching Works! Increasing Students' Achievement*, CCI Publishing, 1995.

Expectations

Connecticut high schools must provide each student opportunities for learning beyond the high school setting, day and calendar. These opportunities will focus on providing students real world experiences to enhance their learning in the classroom and explore careers.

Connecticut high schools should design opportunities specifically focused on relevant learning and connected to post secondary and career opportunities. Each opportunity should include activities that further develop students' appreciation for their civic and ethical responsibility, as well as their understanding of the value of the experience as it connects to the real world.

As students learn in the context of their community, the student and the community will have a better understanding of their responsibility in the formal educational process. Students will gain an appreciation for diversity, as well as understanding the organizational structure and behaviors evident in the modern workplace.

High schools will provide experiences such as:

- Internships
- Job shadows
- Alternative credits
- Field trips
- Speakers
- Service learning experiences
- Mentoring
- Community service experiences
- Virtual educational opportunities
- Formal school, business, higher-ed partnership/advisory teams
- Courses for college credit

As learning moves outside the school walls, Connecticut students will experience additional opportunities for networking, exposure to different forms and uses of technology, and a better awareness of the community and their role as active participants.

Schools should require a personal, digital portfolio and a comprehensive post secondary transition plan for every student. This portfolio and plan will be the future road map for the student's post secondary experiences.

As a result of these new opportunities it is expected that each student will develop strengths in the following areas:

- critical thinking
- problem solving
- application of academic concepts
- ethical behavior
- awareness of the global economy
- interpersonal and team building skills
- leadership and organization skills
- time management skills
- employability skills

High schools cannot be solely responsible for educating our adolescents. Extending learning into the community will provide mutual benefits to the school, the students, and the community. Communities, as contributors to the educational process, will become more aware of school operations, overall student performance and areas of need.

Learning that takes place beyond the high school walls will be valuable for students, teachers and the entire community as each stakeholder becomes more actively involved in the high school experience.

A Snapshot of the High School of the Future

A junior at one of Connecticut's high schools steps off the bus in front of the hospital located in her community to participate in a very unique experience. The student later described this opportunity as life-changing and career-affirming. In the hospital she witnesses the delivery of two babies in the Family Birth Center. After observing the deliveries, she assists the nurses in caring for the newborns and their mothers. The student has been well-prepared academically and occupationally, not only with her coursework, but with the mandatory training in HIPPA and universal precautions, as well as topics from medical ethics to diversity in the workplace. In the hospital, the student learns about the technology and testing used prenatal and postnatal for both the mothers and babies. The nurses serve as her mentors and resources as she pursues her goal of becoming a labor and delivery nurse. The student maintains a weekly journal of her experiences while being exposed to a full range of health related careers. She is now better prepared to make decisions about post-secondary education and a future in the challenging field of health care.

The real world experience described above is part of Education Connection's Regional Internship Program, which serves as an exemplar of student learning

outside the classroom walls. The experience is a culmination of rigorous academic and health care coursework that breathes life and relevance to a student's educational and career path.

Guide to Planning and Implementation

Expectation 7, "Every high school in Connecticut will develop learning opportunities that extend into the community for each student" is based on the fact that there is a continuous need to ensure that learning is relevant and rigorous. Relevance to learning can take many forms. One such form is to have learning take place off the school campus: in a workplace, at a community college, a university or other centers for learning. **To achieve the actualization of this expectation, schools will be required to:**

- 1. Provide each student access to opportunities to demonstrate learning and earn credit through both traditional and alternative means, as well as earning concurrent credits when possible***
- 2. Expect students to have relevant and authentic learning experiences to explore careers, participate in work-based, community-based, or other experiential learning opportunities to enhance their understanding of the relevance and applications of classroom learning***
- 3. Have each student develop a formal, comprehensive post-secondary/career transition plan based on his/her high school explorations and experiences***

Connecticut high schools have an opportunity to actively engage their students, especially 11th - and 12th-graders, in meaningful and relevant learning experiences by creating programs, opportunities and offerings for students to demonstrate their learning and/or experience in alternate ways. High schools around the state currently offer their students learning opportunities through virtual environments, formal, articulated internships, cooperative work experiences, job shadowing, field trips, community service, mentoring and supervised work experiences. In each of these alternatives to classroom learning, credits can be earned through demonstrations of learning, credits by exam, and/or portfolios with representations of the learning that has taken place during the experience.

With the creative thinking of our high schools' staffs, the possibilities to engage our students in relevant and rigorous alternative learning experiences are endless. Leadership teams, content area department staff or interdisciplinary staff committees working to develop alternative learning opportunities will need to establish the procedures for accessing alternative learning experiences, earning credit or concurrent credits, and assessing these experiences.

Each student's success in high school is associated with the quality of the experiences he or she had in and out of class. School leadership teams and committees can create a series of planned, annual experiences and activities such as: ninth-grade career exploratory research, 10th-grade research and selection of a career cluster to explore, 11th-grade work/community based experiences and 12th-grade capstone experiences to enhance each student's learning.

As 11th- and 12th- graders begin to think about transition to the next phase of their lives, their comprehensive post secondary/career transition plan will, at minimum, start their thinking about and planning for a direction for their future. Working with their advisers or mentors, connections with learning experiences both inside the school and in the community may be initiated. Community support and involvement will be critical to **actualize this expectation. Schools will be required to:**

- 4. Establish an advisory board to provide input on ways to integrate meaningful experiences into the educational program to ensure that it is connected and responsive to the broader community**
- 5. Establish outreach plans for strong relationships with local business, industry, and professional groups to provide speakers, classroom mentors, virtual environments for career explorations, workplace visits, job shadowing, community service, and support for extra-curricular activities such as robotics teams**
- 6. Develop outreach plans to establish linkages, agendas, and priorities, involving business organizations, professional societies, and parents**

High achieving high schools have reached into the broader community, local region, and the state to solicit community and business partners in support of extending learning into the community. The business community typically will not approach schools for partnerships. Businesses will, however, consider partnerships when approached with a comprehensive plan to support student learning.

There are numerous examples of how businesses are supporting high schools. Some of these examples are: with mentors, tutors, authentic issues for problem solving, student internships and staff externships. Schools that develop a comprehensive plan, with input from the community and businesses, will offer additional opportunities for students to experience relevant learning outside of the classroom.

It has been mentioned on several occasions in this document that the world around us is changing faster than our schools. So, too, is the workplace!

Professional staff should be encouraged to participate in formal community and business based externships to experience, first hand, how the world and the workplace is changing.

Policy Recommendations:

- I. The Connecticut State Department of Education will establish policy to allow credit toward graduation to be earned through alternate means.
- II. The Connecticut State Department of Education will establish policy to allow concurrent credit toward graduation to be earned
- III. The Connecticut State Department of Education will establish policy to require access to meaningful out-of-school learning experiences for each student and teacher.
- IV. The Connecticut State Department of Education will establish policy requiring a personal educational plan for each student that includes: career development, in and out of school coursework and/or activities, and a plan for transition to post secondary education and/or the workplace.
- V. ~ The Connecticut State Department of Education and local districts will annually provide resources to monitor the review, development and implementation of curriculum that is driven by the changing needs of the workplace, technology and public policy.
- VI. ~ The Connecticut State Department of Education and the Connecticut Business and Industry Association will partner to build infrastructures and to advocate for the State of Connecticut General Assembly to provide incentives for businesses and nonprofit organizations that are willing to work with high schools to actualize this standard.
- VII. The Connecticut State Department of Education will commission a study to explore alternatives to and an extension of the traditional length of the school day and the school year.

The Senior Year Revisited

In the Agricultural Age, post secondary education was a pipe dream for most Americans. In the Industrial Age it was the birthright of only a few. By the Space Age, it became common for many. Today, it is just common sense for all.

- National Commission on the High School Senior Year

For many seniors, the senior year is a time to reflect on the previous 11 years of learning, fun-filled events that have taken place, completing the remaining graduation requirements and preparing for post-secondary life. It is known that during the first three years in high school, many students have scheduled their classes to ensure that the senior year will be less than rigorous.

In an article, *The Senior Slump: Making the Most of High School Preparation*, Michael W. Kirst writes

Many students who express interest in post-secondary learning mistakenly assume that meeting their high school graduation requirements means they are prepared for post secondary learning. All types of students, including the highest performing, talk about the second semester of the senior year as being a time they have 'earned' to relax and have fun.

Even though about 70 percent of seniors will go from high school to post secondary education in 2000, the weak academic focus in the senior year is one reason why the percentage that completes a baccalaureate degree is not much greater than it was in 1950.

The Connecticut High School Advisory Committee believes all schools must seriously consider revising the senior year to ensure all graduates have an intellectually, as well as socially, engaged senior year and to ensure adequate preparation for post secondary learning and life. It is recommended that school communities consider the following when discussing the senior year:

- Provide and/or expand dual-enrollment post-secondary programs that invite each student, not just the highest achieving students, to participate. This will enable students to meet the requirements for higher-level academic and technical studies.
- Provide open enrollment for Advanced Placement and honors courses. Seeking out low-income and disadvantaged students for enrollment in these courses will result in more students meeting higher standards.
- Review high school policies granting course credit for work experience that has no strong academic components.

- Provide academically-based internships and/or apprenticeships by coordinating with the business community to develop high-quality, paid or unpaid, experiences that focus beyond entry-level jobs. Additional ways to incorporate the real world into the high school include creating school-based enterprises; offering students opportunities to take responsibility for running aspects of the school; and incorporating adult mentors from the business and social service communities.
- Ensure every graduating senior has developed a post-secondary five-year plan.
- Develop senior year curriculum that focus on post secondary preparation for each student, not just AP and honors, and then ensure each student is enrolled in rigorous courses focused on post secondary preparation.
- Provide structures and opportunities for students to volunteer in their community. The senior year is an appropriate time to reinforce and/or initiate the belief that a lifelong commitment to giving back to the community is a good thing.
- Provide options for service and work-based learning opportunities that offer credit. Students have much to gain from high-quality career programs that combine a demanding academic curriculum with challenging technical content. Apprenticeships and internships related to course content show students how their studies relate to the world of work.
- Develop a requirement that each student complete a comprehensive senior project demonstrating their capabilities for research, creative thinking, rigorous analysis and clear written and oral communication. Seniors should showcase an accumulated portfolio of their work throughout high school.
- Provide students access to "virtual" high schools that use distance learning techniques to provide high-quality instruction and programming in academic and career/technical courses.
- Provide travel-based study options for seniors by giving them the opportunity to earn credit for spending time in another city, region or country while being engaged in structured experiences that allow them to develop academic and social skills and new perspectives on their lives.

Practices to Consider Ending

As high schools begin or continue their journey of redesign, traditional and often well-intended practices often interfere with new research on learning. These rituals and traditions will need serious reconsideration and decisions will have to be made to prevent further interference with learning. Communities are asked to reconsider each of these practices to determine if they contribute to increased student success for each student. If they do not, each practice should be phased out, and replaced with meaningful practices that support the seven research-based expectations defined in this document.

Practices to consider phasing out and replacing that have an impact on *Teaching and Learning*

- Curriculum that is based on doing every chapter in the book
- Interruptions that disturb learning
- Meetings that do not focus on teaching strategies that meet the mission of the school and improve student achievement
- Learning in 45-55 minute time blocks 180 days a year
- “One size fits all” curriculum
- Learning defined by content that is practiced and assessed with worksheets and not connected to the real world
- Denying some students access to challenging learning opportunities and advising others into courses with low expectations
- Tracking/levels
- Professional development that is not targeted, ongoing and systematic
- Grading based on limited evidence of student learning
- Teacher managing and controlling learning

Practices to consider phasing out and replacing that have an impact on *School Structures*

- Administrators’ focus on day-to-day management
- Administrators not having the autonomy to be effective leaders
- Large impersonal high schools with large teacher/supervisor ratio
- Supervision of teachers through old supervision structures
- Students in rows and closed door classrooms
- 125+ students per teacher
- Students far behind in academic skills entering high school
- Decision-making not based on research or best practice
- Practices that impede a focus on students, such as the bus schedule

- Inadequate resources to support the academic mission
- Present school funding formula and emphasis on property taxes

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