

CONNECTICUT STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
Hartford, Connecticut

April 7, 2008

Dear Colleagues,

I am writing to offer you a brief update on the work of the Ad Hoc Committee for Secondary School Redesign. As many of you know, members of the Committee and I have been holding forums across the state to present the reform proposal approved by the State Board of Education in December 2007.

We have presented this proposal to well over twenty different groups, taken input, and received considerable written feedback from various individuals and organizations throughout the state. Our “listening tour” has resulted in dozens of excellent suggestions for improving the proposal, and we are now in the process of incorporating them into a final proposal which we hope to present to the State Board of Education in November 2008.

Four initiatives now move us to this November date:

First, the Ad Hoc Committee and I are now taking steps to secure a vendor to complete a cost analysis of the proposal in two phases – the first to be completed by mid-July; the second by September. Governor Rell has identified \$100,000 in her FY’09 budget to allow for the financing of this essential work, and we expect to have a vendor identified by May.

Second, having heard from many people that too few practitioners are involved in the Ad Hoc Committee’s work, we have added four new members to the Committee – another teacher, a student, a parent, and a community organizer.

Third, we have formed three separate workgroups consisting largely of individuals currently working in school systems. These workgroups will address the significant aspects of the proposal that demand more clarity: The first work group, co-chaired by Dr. Earle Bidwell, Assistant Executive Director of the Connecticut Association of Schools (CAS), and Barbara Westwater, Chief of the Bureau of Curriculum & Instruction at the SDE will prepare responses to several questions posed regarding the role of middle schools in making the changes work at the high school level. The second work group, co-chaired by Dr. Paul Hoey, Assistant Executive Director of the Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference (CIAC), and Dr. Dennis Carrithers, Assistant Executive

Director of CAS, will examine ways to refine the proposal, suggest alternatives to balance its many requirements, and to explore how best to implement them over the next 5-7 years. The third group, co-chaired by Rob Keating of the Office for Workforce Competitiveness, and Dr. Mitchell Sakofs from Central Connecticut State University, will explore how higher education institutions and community colleges can integrate their course offerings with those proposed, as well as prepare the next generation of new teachers needed for reform. I have enclosed the charges and compositions of each working group for your information. Each group has been asked to submit their reports to the Ad Hoc Committee by June 2008.

Finally, we have begun a series of planning sessions with the Connecticut Association of Schools (CAS) to organize a statewide Summit on Secondary School Reform in mid-October 2008. Although the details are still being sorted out, the conference will highlight the adjustments and new proposals now being developed within the work groups, informed by the cost study. We expect the Ad Hoc Committee will pull all of the information together into a comprehensive final plan over the summer. Responses and ideas that surface in October will ultimately find their way into the legislation and final set of recommendations made to the Board in December 2008.

By offering you this update on the Ad Hoc Committee's work, we hope you know just how much we have appreciated your feedback – and the feedback of those in your schools and communities – that has moved us to this point. To be sure, there are many issues to resolve (not the least of which is how much it will all cost), but we do have time to explore them in greater depth. Please know that we will post regular updates between now and September to keep you abreast of what's happening, what the questions are, and how you can learn more. If you have any questions, kindly consult our website under the "Commissioner's Update" and/or write to me or Jay Voss directly.

We look forward to continuing our work with you in the months ahead.

Sincerely yours,

Mark K. McQuillan

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Commissioner of Education

Enclosure

Secondary School Redesign Working Groups and Charges

Middle School Working Group

Co-Chairpersons: Earle Bidwell and Barbara Westwater

Members:

- 3.0 Middle School Administrators from an urban, suburban, and rural district
- 2.0 Middle School Teachers
- 1.0 Board of Education Member
- 1.0 High School Principal
- 2.0 SDE Consultants

Charge and Questions to Answer

The charge of the Middle School Working Group will be to define how students in grades 6-8 will be brought into the working requirements of the Ad Hoc Committee's Secondary School Proposal. The Middle School Group shall delineate:

- how Student Success Plans will be started, implemented and then restarted with high school guidance, faculty, and staff;
- the professional development needs of current and future middle school teachers, relative to teaching increasingly diverse student populations often reading below grade level or not fluent in spoken or written English;
- how CT's existing CMT or CAPT examinations might be used to identify academically talented and struggling learners;
- how a Grade 6 "early warning" system will be developed and implemented in all Connecticut's schools to identify students likely to drop out and in need of additional academic or counseling support;
- what early intervention structures and/or programs must be put into place to assist 6th graders either academically, emotionally, or socially;
- what new course requirements, if any, shall be required of all students in grades 6-8, including the possibility of an 8th grade end-of-year portfolio requirement;
- the number of high school credits that may be earned in middle school and the various courses that are acceptable for meeting the 24 credit standard; and
- how middle school curricula can be meaningfully integrated into or joined to model curricula planned for grades 9-12.

Revisions and Implementation Working Group

Co-Chairpersons: Paul Hoey and Dennis Carrithers

Members:

- 1.0 Superintendent of Schools from CAPPS Study Group
- 3.0 High school principals from an urban, suburban, and rural school district
- 1.0 Assistant Superintendent or Department Chair
- 1.0 Member of the Business Community
- 1.0 Board of Education Member
- 2.0 High School Teachers
- 2.0 SDE Consultants

Charge and Questions to Answer

The charge of the Revisions and Implementation Working Group will be analyze the “building blocks” and “matrix of choices and requirements” of the secondary reform proposal and suggest modifications that will improve upon the core ideas, values and assumptions of the proposal approved by the State Board on December 6, 2007. The Groups revisions should be consistent with Ad Hoc Committee’s charge and aimed at helping all secondary students achieve competencies in the essential courses and skills delineated in the plan.

Revisions of the plan should strive for fidelity to the plan’s three themes—Engagement, Rigor, and 21st Century Learning—without fundamentally altering the central direction of the original plan. For example:

- what are the strategies for accelerating students through high school;
- what new strategies might be designed to support students in meeting the expectations and how can technology (the new Virtual H.S. for instance) support these efforts;
- how might one balance the call for competency-based curricula and assessments with Carnegie units;
- how might the CAPT be deployed differently to meet the charge; and
- what incentives can be built into the proposal to make it attractive to urban, rural and suburban schools.

Higher Education Working Group

Co-Chairpersons: Mitchell Sakofs and Rob Keating

Members:

- 1.0 Assistant Superintendent of Schools from CAPPs Study Group
- 3.0 Deans or Department Chairs from Higher Education
- 1.0 High School Principal or Department Chair
- 1.0 Board of Education Member
- 2.0 Guidance School Counselors
- 2.0 SDE Consultants

Charge and Questions to Answer

The charge of the Higher Education Working Group will be to define how Connecticut's institutions of higher education and community colleges can integrate their missions, courses, and services to link seamlessly with our state's public high schools. Consistent with the Ad Hoc Committee's Charge and Reform Proposal, the Group shall define/describe:

- how community colleges and/or state universities can provide meaningful dual enrollment courses-- remedial, supplemental, and/or accelerated courses such as AP--for juniors and seniors in their surrounding communities;
- how, consistent with CSU's "Bridge Program" in Danbury, other such programs might be developed and implemented;
- how 5th year and "9-14" programs can be set up to help students complete their high school diplomas, should they need an added year of high school;
- how technology systems, lab space, and other institutional resources can be accessible to high school students through regional agreements set up through RESCs or other brokers of service;
- how businesses and institutions of higher education can collaborate on the early recruitment of talented students needed to fill the positions in future and growing businesses throughout the state;
- what must be done by higher education leaders and instructors to develop the work force of new teachers needed for the secondary reform proposal; and
- what shortage areas (e.g., mathematics, science, world languages) will be most acute by 2014, and in which regions throughout the state, based on projected retirement trends and future work force needs.