CAPSS

LEADERSHIP
FOR THE FUTURE OF LEARNING

NextEd: Next Steps

A Vision and a Plan for Transforming Connecticut's Education System

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY | 2016

Continuous Improvement Plan from the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents

What is CAPSS?

The Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS) is an organization that represents Superintendents and leaders of public schools districts in Connecticut. Its mission is to lead the continuous improvement of public education for all students by advocating public policy and developing and supporting executive school leaders. It is committed to making sure schools in Connecticut are all they can be for our children.

Project Partners

CAPSS gratefully acknowledges our Project Partners for their support of the Education Transformation Project:

DELL

Nellie Mae Education Foundation

The Peter and Carmen Lucia Buck Foundation

The Core Group

A working group of CAPSS members called The Core Group developed the recommendations contained in this report. CAPSS is grateful to the Superintendents, RESC Executive Directors, Assistant Superintendents and University Professors who met over a period of two years to develop the recommendations in this proposal. In addition, the Core Group was joined by representatives of two of our sister organizations, CABE (Connecticut Association of Boards of Education) and CAS (Connecticut Association of Schools).

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Transforming Connecticut's

Our children are precious. Every single one, regardless of ethnic background, economic situation or cognitive condition, deserves an equal access to high quality learning opportunities—through a vibrant, flexible, standards-based public education.

With the shift from a manufacturing economy to a global knowledge economy, we need a system of education that will prepare students for a changing world that requires an evolving set of skills and knowledge – and an orientation towards self-directed, lifelong learning. In the 21st century, information is readily available. Rather than focus on the memorization of content knowledge, today's education system must help learners develop the skills to access reliable information, the critical thinking and creativity to apply information in complex situations, and the collaboration and communication skills needed both for successful careers and active participation in their communities. In the knowledge economy, all students must be prepared for college, career, and citizenship with internationally competitive skills and knowledge.

In short, our public education must be transformed. Rather than focusing on cohorts of students, we now have the knowledge and tools to allow each individual to develop his or her unique potential. To do this in a systemic way, we cannot simply add new courses and programs to our schools. We have a vision for integrating the development of knowledge and skills through meaningful learning opportunities available in schools and in other settings. In this document, we propose a strategy to transform the education system to develop the human capital of each child in Connecticut. With effective leadership and the help of every citizen in Connecticut, CAPSS truly believes such transformation is possible. This report recommends exactly how we can help every student in our state be ready for life, work, and citizenship in the 21st century.

One of the purposes of this document is to empower educators to design learning environments that look and feel different from most of today's classrooms. Our other major purpose is to inform policy makers about the changes necessary to enable educators to transform the education system.

Education System

Connecticut, we've got a set of complex challenges.

Connecticut is a microcosm of the United States. In many ways, we are second to none. We have vibrant communities, high-performing schools, and economic opportunities. At the same time, we have some of the worst achievement gaps in the country.[1] Some of the poorest cities in the U.S. are here in Connecticut – just miles from some of the wealthiest suburbs.[2] Accordingly, Connecticut's public education system faces a series of complex problems we must surmount in order to serve all our children.

These challenges have multiple causes and cannot be solved by using standard techniques and conventional processes. These complex challenges include:

- Identifying and analyzing academic achievement gaps by race and poverty level
- Changing Connecticut demographics
- Low level of student engagement in education and motivation for learning
- Limited measures of assessment and accountability
- Inadequate preparation for today's higher education and workforce
- Little emphasis on modern skills to meet the needs of a global economy
- Disruptive innovations such as the development of more sophisticated technology
- Changes in information access that have created a situation where information is accessible through multiple devices and in multiple locations

Traditional solutions to these challenges are inadequate. The fact is, the only way to work on these challenges is to redesign the public school system. We must embrace creativity, challenge assumptions, and tap the ingenuity of those dedicated to success. Only then will we find the solutions that these challenges demand—and that our students deserve.

So what can be done?

The system must be transformed to meet future needs of students. With a new model that places the "learner" at the center of all strategy and action, CAPSS has developed a set of action-oriented recommendations that will address the complex problems we face today, transform learning, and ensure that Connecticut's children receive the best possible education.

We've organized this report around major themes in transformation. Although larger themes are separate, all are interconnected. Accordingly, we visit these ideas in multiple sections of the document. Our discussion of the proposed transformation begins on page 5 with "Start With Early Childhood" and continues through ten additional areas.

What Are Student-

Students engage with learning in different ways, so public schools need student-centered strategies to address the differences. Each student has unique talents and skills that shape learning – and we work to promote personalized learning that will give each student the critical thinking, problem solving and other skills needed to graduate from high school prepared to contribute to our communities and lead successful lives. Our public schools will use student-centered approaches to give students the skills they need to succeed after high school and participate in their communities.

Student-centered learning is personalized, engaging, competency-based and not restricted to the classroom.

LEARNING IS PERSONALIZED

Personalized learning recognizes that students engage in different ways and in different places. Students benefit from individually paced, targeted learning tasks that start from where the student is, formatively assess existing skills and knowledge, and address the student's needs and interests.

PERSONALIZED LEARNING

STUDENT-CENTERED LEARNING

LEARNING IS COMPETENCY-BASED

Students move ahead when they have demonstrated mastery of content, not when they have reached a certain birthday or completed the required hours in a classroom.

COMPETENCY-BASED LEARNING
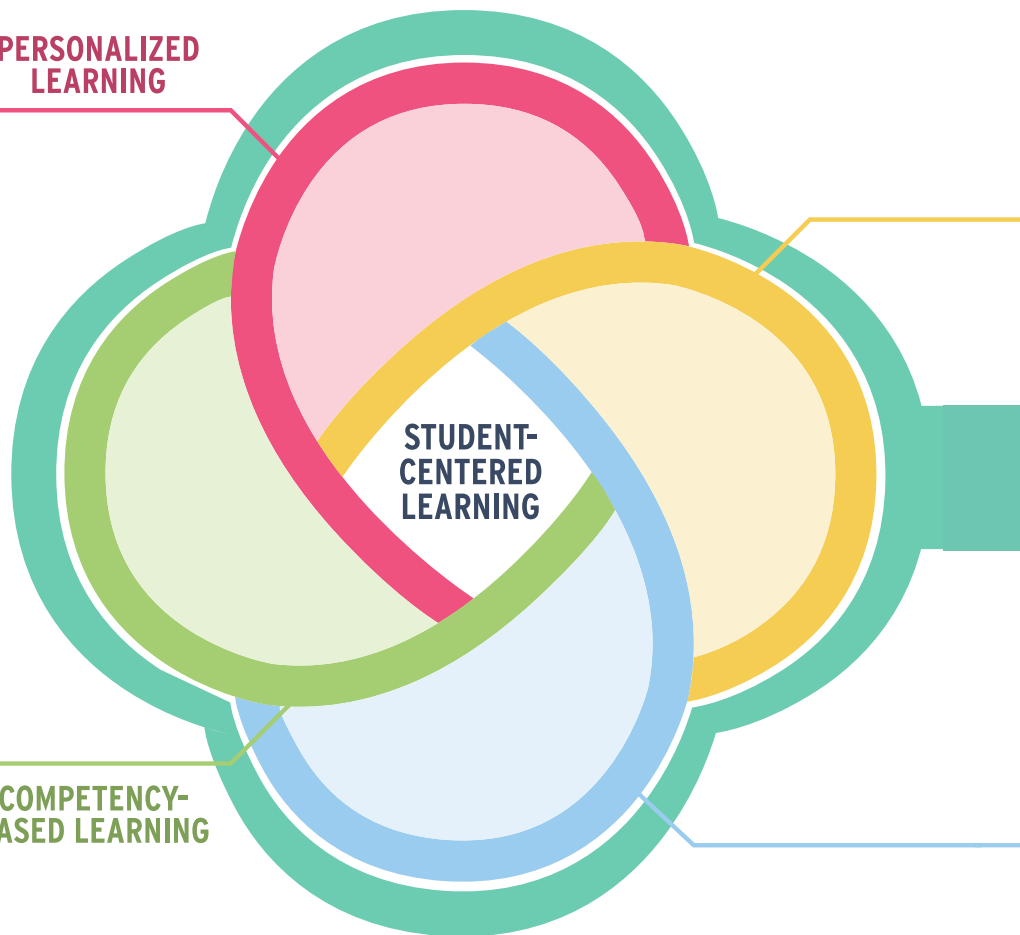
Centered Approaches?

Students take greater responsibility for their learning and support each other's progress, so every student gets the skills he or she needs to succeed and contribute to society. Student-centered learning engages students in their own success - and incorporates their interests and skills into the learning process. *Rather than having educators hand down information, students can engage with their teachers and peers in real time – preparing them to participate in a skilled workforce later in life.* Personalized learning recognizes that students engage in different ways, at different paces and in different places – and gives them the skills and tools to obtain the knowledge they need to stay engaged, learning throughout their lives. When every student is achieving at high levels, the rising tide will lift all of us towards a more equitable and prosperous future.*

Student-centered approaches to learning highlight four key tenets, drawn from the mind/brain sciences, learning theory, and research on youth development that are essential to students' full engagement in achieving deeper learning outcomes:

STUDENTS TAKE OWNERSHIP OVER THEIR LEARNING

STUDENT-OWNED LEARNING

Student-centered learning engages students in their own success—and incorporates their interests and skills into the learning process. Students support each other's progress and celebrate successes.

DEEPER LEARNING

KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, AND DISPOSITIONS TO SUCCEED IN COLLEGE, CAREER AND CIVIC LIFE

LEARNING HAPPENS ANYTIME, ANYWHERE

ANYTIME, ANYWHERE LEARNING

Learning takes place beyond the traditional school day, and even the school year. The school's walls are permeable - learning is not restricted to the classroom.

Start With Early Childhood

The Vision

Every child in Connecticut will have access to high quality, developmentally appropriate, "anytime; anywhere" educational options in order to provide a strong foundation for formal learning.

Why is this important?

Early childhood education provides an essential foundation for success in school. Investment in preschool is one of the most effective reform policies. Positive economic, education and social returns are well documented. Universal access is superior to targeted enrollment, as it reaches needy children from all walks of life. Early exposure to language lays the foundation for literacy and opportunities for complex play helps to develop social, mental, and physical abilities, according to the National Association for the Education of Young Children.[3] In too many cases, the cost of preschool is a barrier and creates an achievement gap before elementary school even begins. Universal access to preschool, regardless of family socio-economic status, can give every child a strong start.

Strategies to make the vision a reality

◆ **Universal access to preschool**
All 3- and 4-year olds will have access to high quality, developmentally appropriate preschool programs.

◆ **Universal access to full-day kindergarten**
Every family will have access to full-day kindergarten.

◆ **Successful preschool programs depend on the quality of the program**
For maximum effectiveness, preschool programs should be integrated with social and health programs.

◆ **Rigorous credentialing of early educators**
All early care and education professionals will have the foundational knowledge, competencies, and certification to implement and deliver high-quality learning experiences to children from birth to age 8.

◆ **Quality pK-3 programs**
Ensure alignment of high-quality standards, curriculum, instructional practices and assessments across the pK-3 continuum. If a school district does not have high quality pK-3 programs, the benefits of preschool education fade by third grade.

Current status

Connecticut leads the nation in access to preschool. In Connecticut, 63% of 3- and 4-year olds attend preschool, compared with 46% nationally (the range across states is 30% to 63%).[4]

3- AND 4-YEAR OLDS ATTENDING PRESCHOOL

NATIONAL (46%)

CONNECTICUT (63%)

RANGE ACROSS STATES
(30% - 63%)

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%
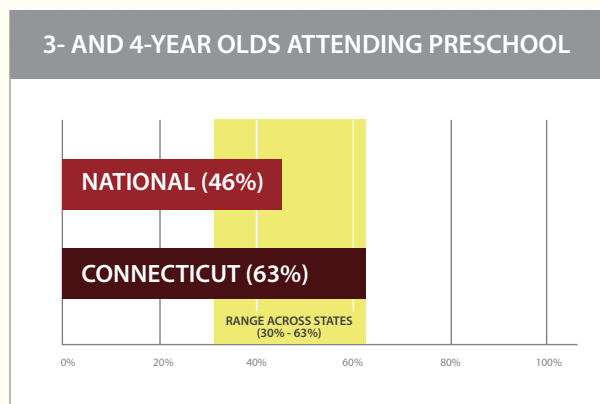
During the 2012-13 school year, roughly half of Connecticut's school districts offered full-time kindergarten to all of their students. By 2015, that percentage had risen to 93%.[5]

% CT SCHOOL DISTRICTS OFFERING FULL-TIME KINDERGARTEN TO ALL STUDENTS

2012-2013 (+/-50%)

2015 (93%)

0%   20%   40%   60%   80%   100%
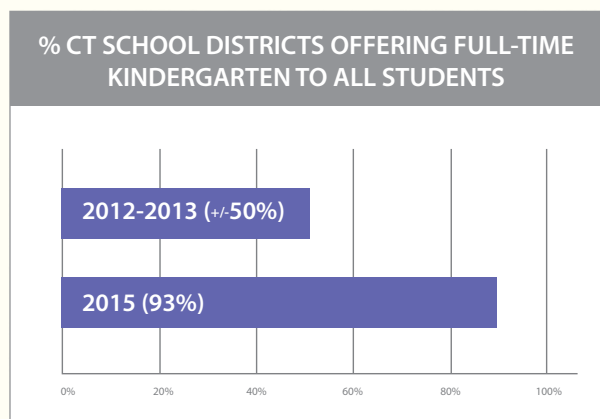
The University of Connecticut offers a focused early childhood leadership program for both aspiring and existing school leaders.

ACTION STEPS

✔ To better coordinate education policy in the state, all publicly funded pre-K programs should be under the authority of the State Department of Education.

✔ The state will support early childhood education by providing or reallocating funds and modifying policies to ensure a simplified, coordinated system for supporting early childhood development across health and education programs so that all students who want to attend have access to developmentally appropriate preschool and all-day kindergarten.

✔ The state will establish and strengthen competency-based requirements for all early care and education professionals working with children birth to age 8, including credentialing and ongoing professional development.

✔ The state licensure process for private preschools will ensure that all preschools in Connecticut offer high quality, developmentally appropriate programs.

✔ The higher education system will strengthen or develop programs to prepare early care and education professionals to meet the needs of all young children across all early care and education settings.

✔ The state should develop a support system that will help districts assess their pK-3 continuum and to develop and implement activities to strengthen the quality of the continuum.

Three scenarios are interspersed throughout this report. The purpose of the scenarios is to provide an image of what might be possible in a transformed school. There is no one formula for transforming education. Each school or school district will develop its' own roadmap to transformation. These scenarios are but one possibility.

The scenarios are based on interviews with Connecticut staff and students. The vision of these staff and students about what learning could be in a transformed school forms the substance of the scenarios. The individual and school names are fictitious in order to protect the privacy of those interviewed.

ily Takai is fascinated by robots. "When I visit my family in Japan I'm amazed at what robots can do. There was even one at my Obaasan's hospital!" When she was 9, her family flew to Japan because her grandmother got very sick. Obaasan Aiko was in a nursing home that pioneered the use of therapeutic robots – in this case, PARO, a robot that looks and acts like a baby seal. "When I patted PARO he wriggled around, just like a real animal!" When they returned home to Connecticut, Lily learned everything she could about robots and built toy robots from kits. Now that she's in middle school, Lily was thrilled to join the robotics club.

The after-school robotics club meets at the tech incubator run jointly by the town and the school district. The incubator's mission is to foster STEM careers and STEM education. It provides workspace and mentoring for start-up companies and hands-on learning opportunities for district students. One of the opportunities is the robotics club, which fields middle school and high school teams for the national FIRST Robotics competitions. Employees from a robotics company coach the teams.

FIRST Robotics competitions focus on real-world scientific challenges. In 2015, students in the middle grades were participating in the FIRST LEGO League's Trash Trek. During the year-long competition, the team builds robots to compete in regional and national trials of the Trash Trek game. Teams earn points for building robots of recyclable parts, programming the robots to move trash (represented by LEGO pieces) through processes to recycle, landfill, or compost used materials.
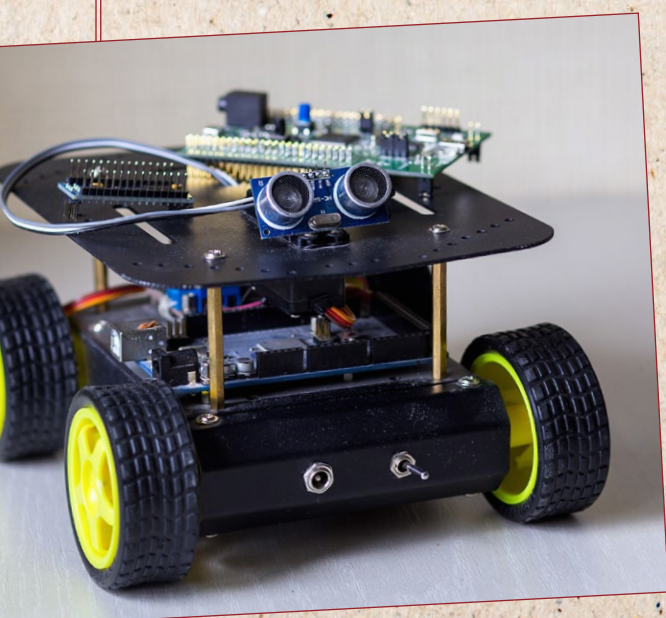
Although the robotics team takes place outside of school, Lily is earning credit for computer science, engineering, problem-solving (a graduation competency,) as well as environmental science. In addition, Lily and her homeroom teacher are weaving her interest in robotics across the curriculum to accelerate Lily's mastery of the targets in her personalized learning plan.

While Lily is an advanced student in math and science, she struggles with reading comprehension. Knowing Lily's interest in science, Ms. Farley suggested Lily pull together a variety of materials to extend her knowledge of robotics and

> *"Although the robotics team takes place outside of school, Lily is earning credit for computer science, engineering, problem-solving (a graduation competency,) as well as environmental science."*

environmental science. Her teacher provided a list of books on Lily's current reading level but also advanced texts to push her to improve.

Ms. Farley knows that building on Lily's interests provides motivation to learn and that her existing knowledge about robotics will provide a scaffold to understanding more advanced materials. They work together on reading strategies to help Lily dive into the materials, to focus her reading, and to construct meaning from the text. Ms. Farley and Lily meet biweekly to help Lily learn strategies to develop her reading comprehension and so Ms. Farley can assess her progress. In addition the learning platform knows Lily's passion for robotics, math, and science and has been sharing online articles at her reading level when she logs in every morning. Guided by Lily's "thumbs up" or "thumbs down" and her sharing things she likes, the platform shares articles that Lily likes to read that include interests such as dancing.

Lily finds the robotics competition time-consuming but invigorating. To support this "anytime, anywhere learning," the school helped students to carve out time when the team can work together. In Lily's case, she is earning credit for physical education through her weekend dance classes. Lily and her phys ed teacher worked with the dance studio to demonstrate her mastery of the performance indicators for physical education in middle school. Lily designed a fitness program to meet her personal fitness goals and developed a portfolio in which she describes how dance develops fitness components like balance, coordination, and agility. The portfolio will include a video not only of the dance recital, but also of the training needed to prepare for the performance. ◆

Raise The Bar

The Vision

Students in Connecticut are prepared for the global economy through robust and coordinated "anytime, anywhere" learning opportunities that help them communicate, collaborate and foster their abilities to be creative and think critically.

Why is this important?

Students in Connecticut will grow up to live and work in a global society that will require skills and knowledge that schools are now incorporating into curricula. **Children learn when they are provided with high-quality and equitable education opportunities.** Investing in ways that enhance these opportunities shows the greater promise for addressing the nation's achievement gap. To prepare students for post-secondary education, careers, and citizenship in the 21st Century, teaching and learning must be aligned to academic standards and curricula that have been benchmarked against those in high-performing school systems in this and other nations.[6] Within a balanced curriculum, students learn traditional academic subjects as well as art, physical education, technology, and life skills. Rather than adding courses, skills are integrated into academic content. An integrated, benchmarked curriculum will raise the achievement of all students.[7]

Strategies to make the vision a reality

- **Internationally-benchmarked standards**
  States and districts adopt or create high standards based on effective practices in high-performing nations and states.

- **Performance indicators**
  Performance indicators break down standards into concrete examples of the knowledge and skills students must demonstrate to show mastery of the standards. Performance indicators guide the development of curriculum and learning activities.

- **Assessments aligned to standards**
  In order to measure mastery of the content and skills, educators use a variety of assessments aligned with standards and performance indicators.

- **Resources and tools to support teachers in implementing standards**
  States and districts provide resources to help teachers design learning activities and develop curriculum to help students master the content and skills described in the standards. Schools organize schedules so teachers have time to collaborate around creating learning activities and curriculum aligned to standards.

- **Worked-based learning opportunities have been common for decades**
  Proficiency and competencies must be defined for these school venues and adopted as legitimate parts of the school curriculum.

Raise the Bar
[continued]

Current Status

In Connecticut, Core Standards for Mathematics and English Language Arts were implemented in 2013. Since 2010, across the state high school graduate rates have improved 5.2%, to 87%.[8] In 2015, graduation rates increased for nearly every group, and Connecticut leads the nation in closing achievement gaps around high school graduation.[9] (The one exception involved English Language Learners, whose graduation rate slipped .8%) In addition, in 2013, Connecticut's 12th graders achieved the highest scores in English Language Arts on the National Assessment of Education Progress.[10]

ACTION STEPS

✔ Professional learning for educators will address readiness standards for college, career, and citizenship.

✔ The state and districts will develop rigorous classroom assessments (both formative and summative) that allow learners to demonstrate mastery of world-class standards.

✔ Schools will help students live and work in a global society by teaching them about other cultures (both within the U.S. and globally) as well as the history, geography, and languages of other cultures.

✔ Schools will provide technology and expect students to utilize it so they acquire the skills required to compete in a global economy.

✔ State standards will be approved for all content areas.

Make It Personal

The Vision

All students in Connecticut will progress through school at a pace determined by their own abilities and challenges. They will be guided along the way with "just in time" supports designed to assure that all students master the graduation standards.

Why is this important?

In the world beyond school, citizens are being asked to manage their own time and work with others to solve problems and come up with creative solutions. The world around our students must become more and more personalized to meet this new reality.

Each student enters the classroom with different experiences and interests - **students learn best when they build on current knowledge and personal interests.**[11] In addition, personalization recognizes that students acquire knowledge and skills in a variety of settings and creates a process to allow students to demonstrate what they know and are able to do. To maximize the potential of each student, it is important not only to tailor learning to their needs and abilities but also to give them a voice in the learning process and choices on how to demonstrate their learning.[12] Student voice and choice foster engagement and motivation to persist with challenges. These factors make individualized progress through school paramount in meeting the needs of all students.

Strategies to make the vision a reality

◆ **Expansion of student success plans**
Student success plans will include learning goals and strategies that will guide the learning activities so each student progresses on mastery at his or her own rate and develops a body of evidence that reflects his or her learning over time. These plans empower students to pursue their passions while encouraging them to take more responsibility for their education. Students work with their teachers to identify their learning targets and the strategies to meet those targets. Although a class may work on a common topic, individual students work at their own pace to address their personal learning targets.

◆ **Personalized learning pathways**
Personalized learning pathways blend a variety of educational experiences that satisfy requirements and meet state-required standards. At the high school level, pathways can include career and technical education, college-level courses, online courses, as well as internships, apprenticeships, and volunteer opportunities that are designed to integrate with a student's academic learning. Schools may support institutionalized pathways (for example, career academies where learning is organized around preparation for a career in health care) but also work with individual students to develop personalized pathways to support them as they progress on mastery of knowledge and skills.

◆ **Mastery-based graduation standards**
Students earn credits toward graduation by demonstrating mastery of required knowledge and skills rather than by completing courses. Mastery is demonstrated within a traditional classroom setting or in other learning opportunities that are aligned with graduation standards.

Mastery Based Learning is an instructional strategy and educational philosophy. It maintains that students must achieve a level of mastery in prerequisite knowledge before moving forward to learn subsequent information. If a student does not achieve mastery on an assessment, he or she is given additional support in learning and reviewing the information, then assessed again. This cycle will continue until the learner accomplishes mastery and may move on to the next stage.

Mastery Based Learning methods require that the focus of instruction should be insuring that all students master the standards, realizing that the time required for different students to learn the same material and achieve the same level of mastery may differ. This is very much in contrast to classic models of teaching, in which students are given approximately the same amount of time to learn and the same set of instructions.

In Mastery Based Learning there is a shift in responsibilities so that students are responsible for their own learning. In a mastery-based learning environment, the challenge becomes providing enough time and employing instructional strategies so that all students can achieve the same deep level of learning.

◆ **Educators as facilitators**
When learning is student-centered, educators guide students through a learning process. In addition to offering their own content expertise, teachers also design learning opportunities, coordinate learning resources, and serve as advisors to help students construct and apply knowledge as well as develop skills.

◆ **Educational technology**
Technology opens up new avenues for student-centered learning. Whether students take courses online or use technology to enhance learning in the traditional classroom setting or to support learning in out-of-school activities, technology is a powerful tool for student-centered learning. Technology systems must be deployed in ways that enable data, content, and tools to be shared seamlessly.

Make It Personal

[continued]

Current Status

In May of 2013, the state legislature passed Connecticut's Act for Unleashing Innovation in Connecticut Schools.[13] This bill states that local boards of education may grant a high school diploma through a "demonstration of mastery based on competency and performance standards, in accordance with guidelines adopted by the State Board of Education."[14]

Currently, there are 29 secondary schools and 7 school districts in the process of transforming their education system to be based on a philosophy of personalized learning.

ACTION STEPS

✔ The state, districts and other entities will develop policies and resources to support anytime, anywhere learning, including ways to harness the power of technology to reach all learners anytime and anywhere.

✔ The state will review labor policies to ensure students have access to learning opportunities in a variety of organizations in order to pursue personalized learning pathways.

✔ Schools and districts will assess student mastery of standards and skills through a variety of authentic assessments. Students are offered choices among assessments.

✔ Schools and districts must organize systems and structures that create the conditions for student-centered learning that include student voice and choice.

✔ Schools and teachers should provide students a variety of learning opportunities inside and outside of school, including project-based and experiential education, peer learning, career technical education, internships, and apprenticeships. Out of school opportunities are intentionally designed to support mastery of standards.

Offer More Options and Choices

Why is this important?

Every student is an individual with unique needs and will be expected to master common rigorous expectations. Not every school or district has the resources to offer myriad options to meet the needs of every student. It has therefore become more common for states to allow students to enroll in schools outside their neighborhood or even their district. For example, while one high school may offer career pathways in science, another may invest resources in performing arts. Some schools may offer their courses online, available to students across the state. Consortia of schools and districts may offer transportation to connect students with programs that meet their needs. To further expand options, schools partner with community organizations to support authentic learning experiences aligned with high standards. There is some evidence that when offered a choice of schools, students who attend their first choice school are more likely to complete high school on time and attend college.[15]

The vision

Students, teachers, and families will benefit from more flexibility and choice with respect to how, when and where learning takes place. Students must be prepared to think critically, solve problems as they arise and exist comfortably in an ever-changing world. This means public school districts must have flexibility to design learning opportunities that really work for students and boards of education need the latitude to organize programs that extend beyond the typical school and classroom format. It also means a greater mix and variety of pathways to graduation and more opportunities for hands-on learning such as skills, trades, and technical training.

Strategies to make the vision a reality

◆ **Student success plans**
Student interest and aspiration are the basis for the development of the student's academic program. A planned academic program will lead to the acquisition of the skills, knowledge, and dispositions needed to be an effective learner in school and across the life span. The Student Success Plan (SSP) is designed to ensure that students complete their secondary education with 21st-century skills, with an emphasis on knowledge and skills necessary to compete in the global economy. The customized plan will include varied and flexible educational opportunities, personal connections, elective coursework, and targeted supports tied to each student's education and/or career goals. Further, the SSP supports positive social, emotional, and physical development, allowing students to more fully engage in the school environment and take the risks necessary for optimal performance.

Current Status

Several districts, including the greater Hartford area and New Haven, have substantially expanded the number of magnet programs in which schools specialize and offer unique opportunities to students living in those districts and to students from surrounding towns who want to be a part of those programs. These high-quality programs are often over-enrolled. In some districts, students are able to participate in specialized programs in other districts.

◆ **Public school choice policies.** Students will be able to attend the school that best meets their learning needs.

◆ **Online and dual enrollment courses provide students with opportunities to enhance and enrich their learning experiences.** They also provide schools with opportunities to meet students' requests for courses not offered in their program of studies.

ACTION STEPS

✔ State laws to support and encourage collaboration between districts will increase opportunities for students.

✔ Boards of Education will share resources and educate parents and students about learning opportunities in and around their communities.

✔ Expand enrollments at public schools of choice that have waiting lists. Research suggests that when students attend their first choice school they are more likely to succeed in high school and attend college.

✔ Revise and fully fund cost for school choice option.

✔ Make more flexible the current Department of Labor regulations and guidelines that are related to student internships and "on the job" learning experiences.

Retool Assessment and Accountability

Why is this important?

Mastery-based education focuses on supporting students as they develop knowledge and skills. **Assessments that measure learning and document mastery should therefore be given when students are ready. Given the variety of content and skills, a variety of measures are needed to assess mastery.** While statewide assessments are important for holding schools accountable to the Connecticut Core of Learning, additional assessments are also needed to document the full range of student learning.[16]

Accountability systems must allow for demonstration of student proficiencies through a broad array of assessment methods beyond conventional test-based systems tied to a system of test-based sanctions. Accountability systems must be re-focused to include the degree to which the school provides authentic opportunities to learn through a wide variety of learning experiences.

The vision

To support mastery-based education, students take assessments when they are confident they have mastered content and skills. Schools are held accountable by the results of a variety of measures that illustrate how they are supporting and improving student learning.

Strategies to make the vision a reality

◆ **Multiple measures**
Teachers have a range of assessments to measure student mastery in all subjects. These include formative assessments given alongside lessons to better determine if students are developing skills and understanding. Summative assessments are administered to determine the level of mastery. Students have a voice in which assessments they complete (essays, projects, presentations, tests), with teachers guiding them to ensure a variety of assessments measure various skills. Students can re-take assessments to demonstrate mastery.

◆ **Growth measures**
Schools are held accountable for student learning over time.

◆ **Adaptive assessments**
Assessments are designed so that the difficulty of the questions adapts to the student's ability to answer questions. The adaptive assessments include items appropriate to the student's state of readiness. If a student correctly answers questions at his or her grade level, the assessment offers more challenging questions.

Current Status

The new accountability system includes five categories. As part of this reform, the state test is computer-based and partially adaptive, allowing some adjustments to determine grade level. In 2016, when the state has several years of data, Connecticut's accountability system will hold schools accountable for improving student achievement over time, rather than just taking into account static measures of achievement. A revised accountability system is in the process of implementation with multiple data sources, not just test scores. In addition, the new accountability system has a major emphasis on growth of student learning.

◆ **Technology-based assessments**
Technology-based classroom assessments provide quicker, if not immediate, feedback on learning. Technology helps students self-monitor learning and with teacher guidance, recognize and respond to their strengths and weaknesses. It also provides teachers with ongoing data for immediate and targeted adjustments to instruction.

◆ **Professional opportunities to build assessment expertise**
Teachers know how to create and implement a variety of assessments and are provided the time to work with colleagues to calibrate common understandings of measuring mastery.

ACTION STEPS

✔ To continue toward implementation of mastery of competencies as an alternative to the Carnegie unit. The Carnegie unit, based on the time spent in a class, should be replaced by a system based on mastery of content and skills. To support a mastery-based system of learning, schools will be able to assess and give credit for content and skills learned outside of school.

✔ Connecticut will continue to develop the multiple measures in the accountability system to incorporate local assessments.

✔ Statewide assessments should take place at times in a student's schooling that represent critical developmental points (end of elementary school, end of middle school, mastery of graduation requirements). Students should be assessed when they have mastered content and skills rather than according to an arbitrary annual testing schedule. If the goal for students is mastery, students should be able to retake state and local assessments until mastery levels are reached. Retaking assessments should be allowed whenever a student invests in continuing to learn the assessed standards. In the case of a retest, only the best scores should be reported in state, local and individual reporting.

✔ The state should offer districts an effective and easy-to-use assessment data system that would provide teachers with timely access to assessment results, assistance in analyzing data, and the ability to share data with students and parents. The system offered by the state will establish basic, uniform data elements and allow districts to enhance the system.

Devon was surprised that Nina wanted to pair up to work on the civics project: "With your interest in science and nature, I thought you'd focus on something hands-on ...maybe the river cleanup project. Didn't your internship focus on water quality?"

The high school juniors were sitting in their civics class discussing the required community-based project. At Westfield High School, with the move toward "anytime, anywhere learning," the graduation requirement for civics includes a project in service to a community organization. Nina and Devon are earning mastery-based diplomas.

Although the process of earning a mastery-based diploma begins in middle school, in-coming high school students meet with their advisors to create a personalized learning plan to guide all four years of high school. It helps each student shape a unique path to postsecondary education, careers, and life goals. To link learning with life goals, students are encouraged to pursue internships and other learning opportunities outside school. Within their personalized learning plans, Nina and Devon pursued internships to follow personal interests, explore career options, and earn academic credit. The civics project is another opportunity to connect learning to the world beyond school.

Advisors help students understand the graduation requirements and develop individualized learning targets to demonstrate mastery. Each student has an electronic portfolio to organize work that documents progress through their learning plan. The portfolios not only help Nina and Devon reflect on their learning with their parents and teachers, but also allows them to get feedback on what they are learning.

Devon, an African-American and the son of a law professor, is interested in civil rights. Hoping to follow in his mother's footsteps, he interned at the Legal Aid Society. Although environmental justice was a small part of legal aid work, he developed an interest in helping urban neighborhoods improve health and standards of living by addressing environmental issues. The internship inspired Devon. He now dreams of becoming an attorney specializing in environmental law and policy. As part of the internship, Devon wrote a report on differences in environmental policy across the New England states. It informed the work of Legal Aid and earned him academic credit for social studies and writing.

Nina, the daughter of Polish immigrants, is passionate about animals and the environment. Last fall she interned at the town of Westfield's water reservoir and

"To link learning with life goals, students are encouraged to pursue internships and other learning opportunities outside school."

purification plant. Although she initially sought the internship because of her love of nature, the experience put her science classes in context. *"I didn't think of myself as good at science, but what we learned in chemistry class made sense when I worked at the water quality plant,"* she told Devon. The internship accelerated her understanding of biology and chemistry. Teachers worked with Nina to devise an individualized plan that would prepare her to take the biology Advanced Placement (AP) exam without enrolling in the AP biology course. Scoring well on the test would enable her to earn college credit.

Teachers and the principals at Westfield High have developed strong relationships with community organizations that enable them to recruit organizations to participate in the civics project. Their involvement builds community support for schools. Students select organizations based on their interests and work to complete a project that meets an organizational need.

This year, one of the participating organizations is an environmental justice coalition that helps residents in poor and minority communities gain access to information on health and safety and ensures that residents know their legal rights. The environmental justice group needs a new website. Developing the website will allow Devon and Nina to demonstrate mastery of graduation requirements for writing, computer science, and civics. The project requires researching and writing about environmental issues facing Connecticut communities as well as the technical skills to create web pages. Devon started programming in elementary school and teaches Nina some basic HTML. The civics project allowed Nina and Devon to pursue their interests while completing the civics graduation requirement, demonstrating mastery of computer science and deepening their knowledge of environmental issues and policy.

Throughout the process, Nina and Devon were able to update their progress and share their products in their digital portfolio. Not only were they able to reflect on their learning with their parents and teachers, they were able to share what they learned with the wider community. ◆

Leverage Technology

The vision

All students in Connecticut have access to technology that supports and extends learning opportunities, that facilitates "anytime anywhere" learning, and enables educators to implement student-centered, mastery-based learning.

Why is this important?

Technology is an essential part of life and work in the 21st century. Technology has led to transformation of how we live and work, and graduates of Connecticut schools must be able to use these tools of society and the economy. While students should learn how to use technology, technology is also a tool that can transform education. Networking platforms can connect students, teachers, and schools to learning partners in other locations. Information technology can help teachers document how each of their students has mastered academic standards.[17] Technology can facilitate access to a range of assessments and make assessments adaptive to pinpoint a student's level of mastery.[18]

While technology-assisted education has many advantages, three components are especially important to student-centered learning. These include:

1. Technology can assist both teacher and students in monitoring progress on the standards toward learning milestones. This is especially important with student-centered learning because of many standards and indicators.

2. Technology provides one method of allowing students to progress to mastery at their own pace.

3. Technology done right is a key tool in efforts to provide an equitable education for all.

Strategies to make the vision a reality

◆ **Access to current technology**
All students have access to current technology. Technology hardware and software are constantly evolving and shaping how we live and work. Students need access to technology that is currently in wide use in homes and workplaces.

◆ **Access to high-speed internet**
Many education resources are available online, but without a strong connection to the internet it can be difficult to download or stream materials. All schools need access to high-speed internet and adequate bandwidth so students and teachers can simultaneously connect.

◆ **Seamless information and data systems**
Educators and students need information and data systems that seamlessly connect educational resources, platforms

Current Status

Some districts have adopted Blended Learning and some are using the Flipped Classroom model. Also, because the state assessment is administered online, there has been a strong effort to improve access to computers and making sure students are accustomed to using computers. Almost every school in Connecticut has high-speed internet access. To assure equity of access beyond schools, students use libraries and other community facilities, wireless access in stores and restaurants. Efforts to expand high-speed, affordable access help ensure equitable access for all.

ACTION STEPS

✔ The state will provide continuing support to build and upgrade the capacity of districts and schools to provide an evolving infrastructure for learning, including computers and network hardware.

✔ Districts will provide on-demand access to learning experiences, resources, and information and services 24/7.

✔ The state in collaboration with higher education should establish demonstration sites for the application of technology to enable students to progress through standards as they master content and skills.

to share student work, for students and teachers to keep track of the progress and systems to communicate information between stakeholders.

◆ **Support for educators to integrate technology**
Educators need training to learn how to use a variety of educational technologies and time to integrate technology into their practice. This should begin in preparation programs and continue in ongoing professional learning opportunities.

◆ **The role of technology in educational transformation**
Time, talent and technology-enabled learning environments all inform instruction, but are secondary to it. They are important elements, but they shouldn't drive learning and instructional decisions. Instead, time, talent, and technology are flexible and dynamic tools to help educators create learning environments that lead to desired student outcomes. Technology should not lead the change, but it should enable teachers to personalize instruction or help a school realize its mission.

Strengthen the Profession

Why is this important?

Effective educators have a dramatic impact on learning. By some estimates, having a great teacher for two years in a row can push an average student to the 96th achievement percentile.[19] Effective principals also have an impact by organizing schools focused on learning, by supporting and strengthening classroom teachers, and ensuring students have the resources they need to learn.[20] Successful superintendents set strong goals, align resources with those goals, while providing principals and teachers with the autonomy to achieve those goals.[21] To remain effective, educators need strong preparation and credentialing programs and time for ongoing professional learning. Principals and district leaders must ensure schools have the resources to create an environment focused on learning.[22]

Student-centered teaching is a cultural shift involving virtually every aspect of what goes on in a school and district.

The Core Elements of Teaching Practice in Student-Centered Learning*

STRONG RELATIONSHIPS WITH STUDENTS

» Teacher-student advisement
» Forms of trust, respect, and inclusiveness
» Easy contact among students and teachers
» Reaching out to families
» Connecting students with community

ANYTIME, ANYWHERE AND REAL WORLD LEARNING

» Flexible schedules
» Community internships
» Curricular projects that engage the world outside school

PERSONALIZATION AND CHOICE IN CURRICULAR TASKS

» Personal learning plans
» Substantial choice in curricular tasks
» Opportunities to show mastery in varied ways
» Independent projects that build on special interests

TECHNOLOGY THAT IS INTEGRAL TO TEACHING AND LEARNING

» Online learning adapted to individual student needs
» Online tools that promote student collaboration
» Email

APPROPRIATE CHALLENGE LEVELS FOR EACH LEARNER

» Scaffolding
» Differentiated instruction
» Supporting students with special needs
» Focusing on habits of practice and revision so that students push themselves

CLEAR, TIMELY ASSESSMENT AND SUPPORT

» "Just in time" feedback
» Gateways and exhibitions
» Customized assessments
» Student feedback on curriculum and instructions

SUPPORTING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL GROWTH

» Educating the "whole child" – and knowing students well
» Student reflection
» Engaging peers
» Coaching students on presenting themselves publicly

FOSTERING AUTONOMY AND LIFELONG LEARNING

» Building students' skills around planning, time management, self-pacing, persistence, self organizing, and taking initiative
» Learning to learn

* Teachers at Work; Six Exemplars of Everyday Practice; Barbara Cervone and Kathleen Cushman, The Students at the Center Series.

Strategies to make the vision a reality

◆ **Learner-centered professional learning**
To internalize concepts of student-centered learning, educator preparation and professional learning is learner-centered. Aspiring teachers and education leaders develop mastery of professional knowledge and skills through the kinds of learning activities they will implement in schools and classrooms: active learning, directed by the learner; learning experiences both in and outside of classrooms; and learning is gauged by a variety of assessments. Certification is mastery-based: educators complete their professional credentials when they demonstrate they have mastered the professional standards.

◆ **Adoption of Educator Competencies for Personalized, Learner-Centered Teaching.**
The Educator Competencies for Personalized, Learner-Centered Teaching build on and push beyond the best existing teaching competencies and standards to capture what educators need in order to create and thrive in personalized, learner-centered systems. The competencies are organized into four domains. Cognitive Domain/ need to know: the academic content and knowledge of brain and human development that personalized, learner-centered educators need to know in order to foster students' cognitive and metacognitive development; Interpersonal Domain/ need to process - the set of "internal" skills and habits of mind that personalized, learner-centered educators need to process, such as a growth mindset, high expectations for students, and inquiry-based approaches to the teaching profession; Interpersonal Domain/ need to relate –the social, personal, and leadership skills educators need to relate with students, colleagues, and the greater community, particularly in multicultural, inclusive, and linguistically diverse classrooms; Instructional Domain/ need to do –the pedagogical techniques that educators use-what they need to do in order to sustain a personalized, learner-centered environment for all students.[23]

◆ **Career-staged professional development**
Professional learning is targeted to educators based on their career needs and aspirations. For example: induction for novice teachers; leadership opportunities for experienced teachers; mentoring by more experienced educators; collaboration across schools and districts for teachers and principals; collaboration across districts for superintendents and district leaders.

◆ **Professional learning groups**
Educators work with colleagues to reflect on their work and improve their professional practice. Learning groups within schools, across schools and districts, and beyond are formed to pursue action research and/or innovative teaching and learning.

◆ **Create flexibility in certification**
Give districts the flexibility with certification to create new roles for teachers and administrators, such as positions to support the development of expertise within the job.

◆ **Technology to enhance educator learning**
Technology is a powerful tool to organize information and foster communication. Online portfolios organize work products to document mastery of certification standards and completion of ongoing career goals linked to educator evaluations. Social networking technologies and platforms support professional learning groups across schools and districts.

Current Status

In May of 2015, the Connecticut State Board of Education adopted the *Definition for Professional Learning and the Connecticut Standards for Professional Learning,* including standards for professional learning groups.
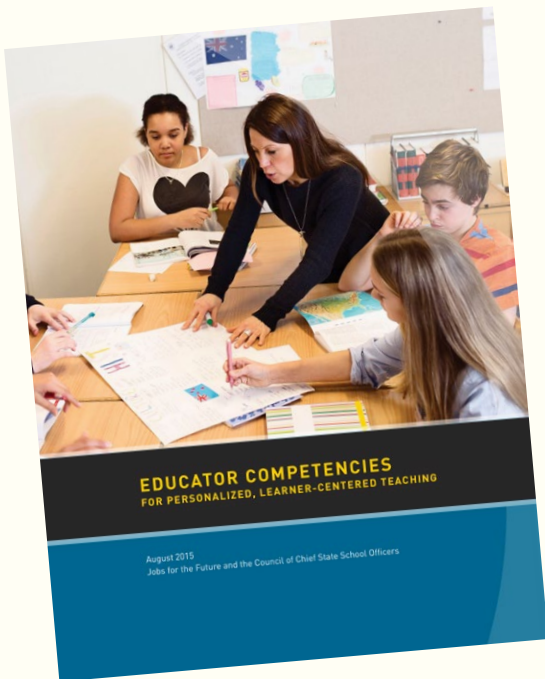
To download a copy of Educator Competencies for Personalized, Learner Centered Teaching, visit: *http://studentsatthecenterhub.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/EducatorCompetencies_081015.pdf*

ACTION STEPS

✔ Connecticut will grant certification to teachers and educational leaders based on demonstrated competency, not on accumulation of university credits.

✔ The first year in a teaching or leadership role will be structured as an internship with strong, consistent coaching by experienced educators committed to transformation.

✔ Educator certification will provide flexibility to allow greater leadership and coaching opportunities and facilitated job-embedded professional development for teachers.

✔ Evaluation systems will include criteria that encourage educator collaboration and innovation rather than penalizing teachers and educational leaders for taking risks to improve their practice.[23]

✔ Performance, professional activity, and student achievement will be the determinants when acting upon a necessary reduction in force.

✔ In shortage areas only, a superintendent can grant a temporary certificate for up to two-years as long as the teacher enrolls in a higher education program to get that endorsement.

Reform System Leadership and Governance

Why is this important?

School and district leadership have a strong impact on student achievement.[24] School leaders include all educators, principals and teachers, working together to create an organization focused on learning.[25] Their efforts are most successful when working within a system that provides a framework focused on achievement and continuous improvement and that allows for local variation to meet the needs of students.[26]

Strategies to make the vision a reality

◆ **Developing transformational leaders**
The education and credentialing of educational leaders should equip them with the tools to lead student-centered, mastery-based schools.

◆ **Developing a leadership pipeline**
Schools and districts offer formal leadership roles to teachers and support them in developing leadership skills.

◆ **Evaluation aligned with mastery-based education**
Evaluation of school and educator effectiveness includes criteria based on student progress rather than absolute achievement. Successful principals and teachers help students increase their mastery of knowledge and skills.

Current Status

The current educator evaluation system is based on requirements of the NCLB law. Congress passed a law eliminating the federal role in educator evaluation. This change in federal policy will give Connecticut the opportunity to rethink its teacher evaluation system to encourage professional growth and collaboration to improve student outcomes. The reduced tenure of leadership in districts, including superintendents, principal and teachers, has eroded the ability of schools and school districts to innovate policies and practices that will lead to substantial growth in student outcomes. Short-term leadership often causes leaders to focus on short-term goals.

ACTION STEPS

✔ State policy will create a framework that defines the goals for the entire educational system, ensuring equitable distribution of resources and holding districts accountable for meeting system-wide goals. In addition, the state will provide the training and technical assistance to support educators in providing student-centered, mastery-based learning opportunities to students.

✔ The state will clearly delineate leadership roles, including the following:

  ✔ The Superintendent answers to the Board of Education.

  ✔ The Board of Education makes decisions regarding policy matters, the annual budget, the hiring, supervision and evaluation of the Superintendent

  ✔ The Superintendent contract duration will be increased from a limit of three years to a limit of five years to ensure consistent leadership.

✔ The evaluation of school system and school leaders will be based on their success in leading transformation efforts as well as on their success in growing student outcomes.

✔ Enhance stability and sustainability of the leadership of superintendents, principals, and teacher leaders in a school system.

✔ The state and higher education should review leadership preparation programs to increase the probability that graduates will actually serve as transformational leaders in districts.

✔ The state, higher education, and districts should review leadership programs to ensure the knowledge and skills needed to be transformational leaders are included in the programs.

Students lead learning at Nathan Hale Elementary School by working with teachers to develop individual learning plans, identify personal learning targets and demonstrate they have met their goals. In the upper grades, student-led meetings have transformed parent-teacher conferences.

Lucas is in the fourth grade. He has many interests and talents, but has struggled with math. He is eager to lead the conference with his parents and his teacher, Ms. Cameron, especially to demonstrate the progress he has made in the first half of the year. At the beginning of the year, Lucas and Ms. Cameron crafted individual learning targets and discussed various strategies to meet them. As Lucas reflected on his learning style, he shared his interests, strengths, and challenges with Ms. Cameron. Lucas also had access to an educational software program that tailors resources for Lucas to support his learning based on his preference and styles. The learning plan leverages Lucas' interests to make math more accessible. Lucas is excited about math for the first time.

To prepare for the conference, Ms. Cameron helped Lucas compile his work in an electronic portfolio. Showing the portfolio to his parents, he said, "I can't just tell you I'm good at this. I had to gather evidence." The portfolio included learning targets and examples of work to show how he has met them. He is particularly proud of mastering fractions: "When we started, everything was a challenge. But Ms. Cameron pushed me to go places I never thought I could!" Assessments before each unit allow Ms. Cameron to provide targeted support. Using this information, Ms. Cameron quickly identified Lucas' challenges with fractions. When she learned that he has studied piano since first grade, she found lessons that he could do at the piano that allowed him to use musical skills to explore mathematical concepts. Connecting academic goals with Lucas' interests provided a scaffold between his current knowledge and developing skills. Building on his strengths motivated him to tackle his challenges.

Before the conference ended, Ms. Cameron prompted Lucas to share his on-going successes. An advanced reader, Lucas often leads mini-lessons for his classmates. Before each new unit, Ms. Cameron introduces the learning targets and gives a pre-assessment to see what students already know and how to target support. In reading, Lucas often demonstrates mastery on the pre-assessment, and then helps explain the concepts to his classmates. Teaching his classmates allows Lucas to develop multiple skills, academic and social, and helps deepen his own knowledge. In addition, teaching develops his leadership skills as he helps other students meet their learning targets.

Lucas' parents were amazed with his progress and his self-confidence. "What's so different about fourth grade?" they asked. He laughed, "Now I'm the boss of me!" At Nathan Hale, teachers allow students to make choices and only direct them if they aren't making good choices or fail to challenge themselves. Having a voice in his education keeps Lucas engaged and pushes him to achieve his goals. ◆

Involve Students and Parents

The vision

Parents in Connecticut help schools understand their children's academic needs, set high expectations for their children, and help to provide the support necessary for their children to be successful and graduate from college, be prepared for a career, and be ready for life. Students in Connecticut are highly engaged in their learning and demonstrate agency of self and ownership of their own learning.

Why is this important?

Parents are the number one influence on their children's educational achievement.[27] Especially in transformed educational systems, educators need to work with parents to better understand student needs and to coordinate learning opportunities both within and outside school.[28] When the responsibility for learning is shifted to the student, that student becomes energized and dedicated to pursuing his or her learning goals. It is critical that the transformed school make "student voice" an integral component of the culture of the school.

Families, schools, programs, neighborhoods, communities, and virtual spaces where our children and youth live and learn have tremendous potential to address the challenges that young people face while also nurturing in them key character strengths that are foundational for success in life. Therefore we must be intentional and purposeful about how we weave these components into a system of support for all students.

Strategies to make the vision a reality

◆ **Opportunities for parental involvement**
Parents have chances to connect with their children's schools, classrooms, and other learning opportunities. Educators can include parents as content experts for learning activities at school and can provide parents with activities so students can extend their learning at home. Listen to families first rather than developing and sending messages that don't resonate or motivate. Effective parent involvement programs include activities that are addressed by the following National PTA Standards:

- Collaborating with the community – Community resources are used to strengthen schools, families, and student learning.
- Communicating – Communication between home and school is regular, two-way, and meaningful.
- Parenting – Parenting skills are promoted and supported.
- School decision-making and advocacy – Parents are full partners in the decisions that affect children and families.
- Student Learning – Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning.
- Volunteering – Parents are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought

◆ **Parental education**
Schools and districts offer classes for parents so they better understand the school's expectations for students, the transformed opportunities for learning, and know how to access information about their students' progress towards mastery of standards. Focus on building relationships with families, rather than only providing programs.

◆ **Data portals**
To be active partners in their children's education, parents need access to current information about their students' learning and achievement. Technology can provide ready access to up-to-date information about students' learning activities, their mastery of standards, and resources to help students make progress.

◆ **Training for educators**
Educators need training and support to understand how to best to reach parents, to solicit information from parents to better tailor learning opportunities for each student, and to leverage the strengths of parents from every background. It is the education system's responsibility to find the key adult in the life of each student and create and sustain a meaningful relationship with that adult.

◆ **Student leadership opportunities**
Providing students with the opportunity to lead and the responsibility to learn, will put students in a very good position to master standards. Broaden coalitions of families that are focused on students' success as a focal point for strengthening developmental relationships.

Current Status

School Governance Councils:
Several districts have determined that half the membership of their governance council will include parents of students at that school; with the other members coming from the school (including students,) community, or other partners.

Some schools pilot student led conferences during which students review their portfolio and discuss their progress toward mastering standards with their parents. The teacher is present and acts as a guide and support to the students.

Parent University:
There are a few school districts that have a program of classes for parents such as: "The Roadmap to Graduation"; "I'm Glad I Am Me: Developing Self-Esteem"; and "Monitoring Your Child's Progress – What Are Assessments?"

ACTION STEPS

✔ The state and districts will create structures and policies to support leadership, procedures, and processes that encourage and sustain family involvement in schools.

✔ Communities will create mechanisms to seamlessly connect community and school programs so parents and children can easily access the supports and services they need, beginning at birth and continuing through high school.

✔ Districts will create opportunities for continuing education for parents so that they access the tools required for their children to reach high expectations and understand the role of effort in producing well educated students. In addition, this will allow parents to serve as models of life-long learning.

✔ Districts and schools will develop processes that privilege the voices of students and their families.

Continue the Transformation

The vision

Educators continually seek multiple ways to provide better learning opportunities to students.

Why is this important?

Life and work in the 21st century are constantly changing, requiring the capacity to adapt and learn new skills. In order to prepare students for post-secondary education, career, and citizenship, teaching and learning must be a dynamic process.[29] Schools that are learning organizations, with a focus on an ongoing process of learning for students and educators, are best suited to maintain innovation and effectiveness.[30]

Strategies to make the vision a reality

◆ **Organizational structures foster innovation**
District and school organizational structures facilitate collaboration and professional growth. Organizational processes encourage innovation.

◆ **Regularly-scheduled time for professional learning**
In order to reflect how to improve teaching and learning, educators need regular time to examine their practice with the support of colleagues.

◆ **Research and Development (R & D)**
To ensure that students are offered the best educational opportunities, schools and districts must engage in research to understand the effectiveness of their programs and to develop new strategies to support learners. The state must engage in policy research and analysis to understand the impact of statewide policies and regulations. This research must be designed to influence the design and implementation of effective programs and policies, rather than summative judgments with penalties.

Current Status

Many districts are moving towards student-centered, transformative practices. Under the law, "Unleashing Innovation in Connecticut Schools," districts have a limited ability to apply for waivers to try new ideas, new strategies, and to customize education to their students' needs.

- ◆ **Commitment to continuous progress**
  Continuous improvement is about setting clear goals, having ways to measure progress toward those goals, refining goals and strategies based on those measurements and setting new goals over time to improve student learning. The basics of continuous improvement are about involving all members of the district community at all levels to make improving student learning an inherent aspect of the way a district functions.

ACTION STEPS

✔ The 2015 Connecticut Statute "Unleashing Innovation in Connecticut Schools" will be revised to expand flexibility in several areas, including certification and definitions of course credit.

✔ The state and districts will streamline mechanisms for teachers and administrators to propose and receive approval for innovative practices.

✔ The state and districts will set aside Research & Development funds to support innovation in education, to promote teachers in ongoing inquiry into best practices, and to evaluate the effectiveness of current programs.

✔ In order to reflect how to improve teaching and learning, educators need regularly scheduled time to examine their practice with the support of colleagues.

Statues and regulations should focus on the outcomes of education, not restrict the processes for supporting student learning. Until that transition, the state needs a process to review outdated regulations and should include a sunset provision in new regulations.

Social and Emotional Learning

Why is this important?

We live in a world of increasing stressors. Unlike previous generations, today's students are less protected from the world. They are inundated by social media with cyber-bullying, a violent 24-hour news cycle, and constant pressure to conform to unrealistic stereotypes of masculinity and femininity. As parents work longer hours,[31] students need additional guidance and support from schools around developing social and emotional skills – and interventions to avoid a crisis. This can both help students manage stress and to develop positive social interactions, but evidence suggests that emotional intelligence is a better predictor of success than intellectual aptitude.[32] But the two abilities are linked: **without social and emotional intelligence, it can be difficult to focus on academics.**

SEL helps students develop self-control, social awareness and group participation skills, and strategies for making decisions and solving problems – and using these skills when under stress.[33] SEL programs are linked to improved academic achievement, improved attendance, and reductions in dropout rates.[34] Like other important skills, social and emotional intelligence is most effective when integrated into core learning activities: teaching students to work in teams, to effectively communicate their opinions, and to actively listen to peers. Further social and emotional skills are learned over time, so schools should begin SEL in kindergarten and develop those skills over the 13 years of schooling.[35]

The vision

All students graduate from Connecticut schools with the social and emotional skills to thrive in postsecondary education, career, and citizenship. Schools provide social and emotional learning (SEL) and, when students have behavioral and mental health issues, schools work closely with community organizations to address students' needs.

Strategies to make the vision a reality

◆ **Develop a process to identify students at risk.**
Although teachers are in the best position to notice student behaviors and mental health issues, school nurses and counselors are best positioned to conduct initial screenings for mental health issues and make referrals to services in the community. School staff needs to develop a protocol to guide teachers as to when they should alert health and mental health professionals working with the school.

◆ **Develop partnerships with mental health services**
Schools should develop relationships with local organizations that provide mental health services. These organizations can advise the schools on developing screening protocols. Local mental health care professionals will become aware of the issues facing students and can seamlessly supporting students referred for their services.

◆ **Integrate SEL into existing curriculum**
SEL is most effective when taught in context. Literature can provide content for discussing inter-relational skills and appropriate social interactions. Social studies and history provide a context to discuss the character development of historical figures or problem-solving strategies that facilitate building community and social movements. Existing curriculum can provide opportunities to reflect on social and emotional skills.

◆ **Service learning**
Community service or service learning can offer opportunities for students to develop empathy, collaboration skills, and offer important contexts for SEL.

◆ **Support for teachers to integrate SEL**
Teachers need time and resources to integrate SEL into existing curriculum. They may also need coaching on how to explicitly model social and emotional skills and to lead discussions about such skills.

◆ **Designate a point person**
Unless an individual takes ownership of developing and implementing SEL programs, it is likely the programs will be lost amid existing duties.

Social and Emotional Learning

[continued]

Current Status

All schools in Connecticut have school nurses and all high schools have counselors. Many districts have advisory programs, crisis plans, and school/community partnerships all designed to identify and support students who may need assistance.

ACTION STEPS

✔ The state should create a crosswalk between the state's counseling standards and the interpersonal and character skills in the Connecticut Common Core. This process will help create common statewide terms related to social and emotional skills and learning.

✔ Counselors should sit on curriculum-writing committees to integrate the counseling standards around personal and social relationships into academic content.

✔ The state accountability system should include measures related to SEL, for example attendance and suspension rates and survey-based measures of social and emotional skills.

✔ The State Department of Education, districts, and larger schools should create staff positions charged with developing and implementing SEL programs and coordinating mental health and behavioral support services.

FOOTNOTES

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http://achieve.org/

College & Career Readiness & Success Center
http://www.ccrscenter.org/

Competency Works
http://www.competencyworks.org/

Competency Works Wiki
http://competencyworks.pbworks.com/w/page/66734498/Welcome%20to%20the%20CompetencyWorks%20Wiki

Education Reimagined
http://education-reimagined.org/

Educational Policy Improvement Center (EPIC)
http://www.epiconline.org/

Great Schools Partnership
http://www.greatschoolspartnership.org/

Knowledgeworks
http://knowledgeworks.org/

Nellie Mae Education Foundation
http://www.nmefoundation.org/

Partnership for 21st Century Learning
http://www.p21.org/

Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education (SCOPE)
https://edpolicy.stanford.edu/

Students at the Center
http://www.studentsatthecenter.org/

Students at the Center Hub
http://studentsatthecenterhub.org/

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Other States and Districts Doing Similar Work

British Columbia's Education Plan
http://www.bcedplan.ca/

Lindsay Unified School District, California
http://www.lindsay.k12.ca.us/

Maine Department of Education – Getting to Proficiency
http://maine.gov/doe/proficiency/

New Hampshire Department of Education – NH Vision 2.0
http://www.education.nh.gov/vision.htm

Vermont Agency for Education – Personalized Learning Plans
http://education.vermont.gov/plp-working-group/main

Print

Reports

Blueprint for Personalized Learning in Delaware, Rodel Foundation of Delaware

British Columbia's Education Plan—Focus of learning

Education Reimagined: A Transformational Vision for Education in the U.S., Convergence

Igniting the Unique Potential of Colorado's Students

Implementing Competency Education in K–12 Systems: Insights from Local Leaders by Chris Sturgis

Mean What You Say: Defining and Integrating Personalized, Blended and Competency Education, iNACOL

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Books

Delivering on the Promise: The Education Revolution
by Richard A. DeLorenzo, Wendy J. Battino, Rick M. Schreiber, Barbara B. Gaddy Carrio

The Global Achievement Gap
by Tony Wagner

Most Likely to Succeed: Preparing Our Kids for The Innovation Era
by Tony Wagner and Ted Dintersmith

Off the Clock: Moving Education From Time to Competency
by Fredrick (Fred) J. Bramante, Rose L. Colby

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