




STATE OF CONNECTICUT
STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION



TO: Superintendents of Schools

FROM: Dr. Miguel A. Cardona, Commissioner of Education 

DATE: August 22, 2019

SUBJECT: Back to School 2019-20

LEARN TOGETHER, GROW TOGETHER

It was a pleasure seeing you at our Annual Back to School meeting yesterday.

I am honored and humbled to have been chosen as the new Commissioner of the Department of Education. Having the opportunity to start our year on an uplifting and collaborative note will benefit the 500,000+ students that will eagerly enter our classrooms next week. Like it did for me, the experiences in our public schools will undoubtedly shape the lives of our students, and shape our growth as a state.

As I shared yesterday, the major points of focus were developed with the understanding that together, we can lead the nation in educating our youth! The following major points will take shape at the CSDE in the coming months.

Education is the best economic driver in the state: Together we will determine CT's growth.

In order to ensure that every child is receiving an equitable education and is graduating high school prepared for college, career and life, there are some roadblocks we need to face and some partnerships we need to foster. It is my plan to build close relationships with the leaders of our business communities across the state, so that our workforce development is specifically tailored to meet their needs. By allowing businesses to have a seat at the table, we will be far better positioned to offer workforce preparation during high school that will result in successful employment post-graduation for students looking to start their career in CT.

It is also vitally important to build stronger partnerships with our colleagues in higher education. By generating more opportunities for dual enrollment, we can create innovative high school programming so that driven high performing students that put in the work can also graduate with an associate's degree. If we can get our students excited about earning college credits we are piquing their interest in higher education and better positioning them for success beyond high school.

Learn together, grow together: We will evolve through our collective capacity.

If we focus solely on education alone, we fail to grasp the potential we have to influence policy in the state; therefore, it is vitally important for us to partner with our sister agencies and collaborate on mutual goals. We need to blur the lines between our work and leverage our limited resources to

benefit the populations that we serve. They are all of our kids. With that in mind, in the coming weeks, I plan to engage with the Commissioners of the Departments of Transportation, Housing, Economic Development and Early Childhood to redefine how we serve our shared constituents.

I look forward to promoting practices that also share our collective capacity. There are districts that are grappling with issues that another district might have just overcome. We know students learn best from one another, and teachers do too, the same is true for leaders. *WE* will always be better than me.

Unapologetically Challenge Normalization of Failure: All kids deserve a shot!

As we lay that foundation, we must remember that equitable outcomes is all of our goal. We must aggressively and unapologetically address the root causes of the achievement disparities that exist within our schools. While those disparities come to light in our classrooms, we cannot operate in silos. We need to highlight the root causes that lie outside the schoolhouse, and collaborate with parents and leaders within our communities to find solutions. As our data suggests, this is not an urban issue, this is a CT issue. Let's address what Pedro Noguera calls the "Normalization of Failure."

The Core is the Core: Educators, Students, and Content Matter Most.

The State Department of Education is a service agency. We will strive to provide support, guidance, direction, and help as you do the difficult job you were hired to do. As we have the constitutional responsibility to provide a free, appropriate, public education, we also will work closer with districts that need it- in a supportive manner.

To do this, we will evolve our agency to ensure we are supporting you with the instructional core. Providing a high quality education requires: connections with our students, a highly competent workforce, and rigorous content that prepares our students for life after school. Ensuring this will improve academic outcomes for all students and reduce disparities and the over-identification of students. A quality educational program includes attention to early childhood needs, strong tier 1 programming, social-emotional development, and appropriate supports for students with exceptionalities or students that are fortunate to be bilingual. The instructional core is the core of what we do.

A Good Offense is the Best Defense: Together, let's write the narrative of CT Public Education

Finally, we are responsible for our narrative. Yes we have significant challenges ahead, but we should not be defined by our challenges. I have confidence in what we can and will accomplish together. I am confident that if we put our energy into working collaboratively, promoting successes, aggressively attacking our challenges, fighting as lead child advocates in the state, and focusing on maintaining the instructional core at the heart of our work, not only will we learn together and grow together, we will lead the nation together! We have the capacity to do it in Connecticut, let's do it together!

Have a great year!!!!