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STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION APPROVES NEW LONDON SCHOOLS RESOLUTION, ADOPTS GUIDELINES FOR ALLIANCE DISTRICTS AND COMMISSIONER'S NETWORK SCHOOLS

The Connecticut State Board of Education Wednesday approved several action items aimed at improving student achievement, supporting local school districts, and addressing Connecticut's largest-in-the-nation achievement gap.

The Board unanimously approved a resolution authorizing Commissioner Stefan Pryor to appoint a special master for the New London Public Schools and to require the New London Board of Education to participate in training to improve its operational efficiency and effectiveness. This action follows the Board's consideration of a government and management audit completed by the State Department of Education's Bureau of Accountability and Improvement on May 7, 2012.

"The Board was presented with compelling evidence that intervention, given our responsibility and statutory authority, was required," said State Board of Education Chairperson Allan Taylor. "As the result of these steps to improve Board and district effectiveness, we expect the most important outcome - student achievement - to improve measurably."

"New London is in need of intensified involvement and enhanced oversight given the challenges facing the district," said Commissioner Pryor. "The State Department of Education and New London Schools will now collaborate on developing management practices and executing policy decisions leading to improved student achievement. We know that New London can position itself for success."

In other actions, the State Board of Education adopted guidelines to govern the implementation of two new initiatives: the Commissioner's Network and Alliance District funding. Both were created as part of education reform legislation passed by the Connecticut General Assembly and signed by Governor Dannel P. Malloy.

In his December, 2011 letter to the legislative leadership, Governor Malloy announced a set of principles that would govern his efforts to reform Connecticut schools. One of these principles was to "Deliver more resources, targeted to districts with the greatest need - provided that they embrace key reforms that position our students for success." In his subsequent legislative proposal, the Governor proposed to allocate the greatest increases in Education Cost Sharing (ECS) funding - a collective increase of \$39.5 million - to the Alliance Districts, identified as the 30 districts with the lowest district performance index scores statewide. To qualify for these new funds, Alliance Districts will submit, for Department consideration and approval, a strategy detailing how the funds will be used to improve district achievement. The term "Alliance Districts" signifies the partnership between state and school district to deploy new resources to raise student performance. The guidelines approved today will be used by the Department to develop an application for district plans.

Another of the Governor's principles presented in December was the following: "Authorize the intensive interventions and enable the supports necessary to turn around Connecticut's lowest-performing schools and districts." As part of the realization of this component of reform, the Commissioner's Network, designed as a partnership between state and local stakeholders, will provide new resources and flexibilities to improve student achievement in up to 25 of the state's lowest performing schools over the next three years. The guidelines approved today define the process of developing and implementing turnaround strategies in schools selected for the network. The Department has begun evaluating indications of interest from school districts that contain schools eligible for potential Network inclusion in the first year of implementation, and will announce the schools selected for such inclusion in the coming weeks.

Chairperson Taylor commented, "The Alliance Districts and Commissioner's Network initiatives signify that the State Board of Education and Department of Education are focusing our attention, supports, and resources where they are needed most – in our schools and districts with the greatest need."

Commissioner Pryor stated, "I'm pleased that the State Board has provided its guidance and support in the implementation of these pillars of Governor Malloy's education agenda. We look forward to implementing these key initiatives – which are aimed at dramatically improving student achievement in our state's lowest performing schools."

Electronic copies of guidelines available. Please email james.polites@ct.gov to request.

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