



Connecticut's Charter Schools

Best Practices Annual Report 2017 - 2018

Charter School Office
State Department of Education
450 Columbus Blvd. | Hartford, CT
Phone: 860-713-6573





Table of Contents

Connecticut's Charter Schools	2
Charter School Performance Standards	3
Performance Standards Definitions	4 - 5
Charter School Performance	6
School Performance: Best Practices	7
School Performance: Best Practices	8
Stewardship, Governance, and Management: Best Practices	9
Student Population: Best Practices	10
Legal Compliance: Best Practices	11

Photographs throughout the report were retrieved from websites of Connecticut's charter schools.

Connecticut's Charter Schools

In 1996, Connecticut's General Assembly and Governor enacted legislation establishing charter schools in the state and empowering the State Board of Education (SBE) as the sole authorizer of charter schools. As non-sectarian public schools, charter schools represent innovative school models utilizing diverse, research-based educational methods. Currently, there are 23 charter schools statewide. Located in 10 host districts, these schools serve over 10,000 students.

Connecticut has both state and local charter schools. A local charter school is a new school or part of a public school that is converted into a charter school and is approved by the local board of education and the SBE. As independent local education agencies, charter schools are granted significant autonomy in exchange for strict accountability and high expectations for school performance.

Every year, charter schools prepare and submit to the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) annual reports summarizing school progress, strategies,

and results aligned to the CSDE's performance framework for charter schools. The annual reports also include certified financial audit statements of all revenues. The CSDE subsequently prepares a best practices report, providing data on the status and achievement of Connecticut's charter schools and identifying innovative and impactful practices.



Charter Schools Statewide

Amistad Academy

New Haven, CT

Achievement First Bridgeport Academy

Bridgeport, CT

Achievement First Hartford Academy

Hartford, CT

Booker T. Washington Academy

New Haven, CT

Brass City Charter School

Waterbury, CT

Capital Preparatory Harbor Charter School

Bridgeport, CT

Common Ground High School

New Haven, CT

Elm City College Preparatory School

New Haven, CT

Elm City Montessori School*

New Haven, CT

Explorations Charter School

Winsted, CT

Great Oaks Charter School

Bridgeport, CT

Highville Charter School

Hamden, CT

Integrated Day Charter School

Norwich, CT

Interdistrict School for Arts & Communication

New London, CT

Jumoke Academy

Hartford, CT

New Beginnings Family Academy

Bridgeport, CT

Odyssey Community

Manchester, CT

Park City Prep Charter School

Bridgeport, CT

Side By Side Charter School

Norwalk, CT

Stamford Charter School for Excellence

Stamford, CT

Stamford Academy

Stamford, CT

The Bridge Academy

Bridgeport, CT

Trailblazers Academy

Stamford, CT

* Local charter school

Charter School Performance Standards

The CSDE's charter school performance framework holds charter schools accountable for impact and results in four key areas: **school performance**; **stewardship, governance, and management**; **student population**; and **legal compliance**.

These four performance standards are consistent across all charter school accountability systems and processes,

including the initial application and granting of the charter, annual reporting, and charter renewal. The best practices highlighted in the following sections of this report represent promising practices across Connecticut's charter schools in these areas.

The Performance Standards are clearly defined on page 4.



STANDARD 1: SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

Is the school a successful model resulting in strong student outcomes and a positive school climate?



STANDARD 2: STEWARDSHIP, GOVERNANCE, AND MANAGEMENT

Is the school financially and organizationally healthy and viable?



STANDARD 3: STUDENT POPULATION

Is the school promoting equity by effectively attracting, enrolling, and retaining students, particularly among targeted populations?



STANDARD 4: LEGAL COMPLIANCE

Is the school acting in compliance with applicable laws and regulations?



Performance Standards Definitions

STANDARD 1: SCHOOL PERFORMANCE

Based on Connecticut's Next Generation Accountability System launched in the 2014-15 fiscal year, the accountability system is a broad set of 12 indicators that help tell the story of how well a school is preparing its students for success in college, career, and life. The system moves beyond test scores and graduation rates and instead provides a multifactor perspective of performance that will incorporate student growth over time.

STANDARD 2: STEWARDSHIP, GOVERNANCE, AND MANAGEMENT

Financial Management - The school materially complies with applicable state and federal laws, rules and regulations relating to financial management and oversight expectations as evidenced by an annual independent audit.

Financial Reporting and Compliance - The school materially complies with applicable state and federal laws, rules and regulations relating to financial reporting and compliance requirements (e.g., submits reports on time, annual inventory of current assets and review of appropriate financial controls).

Financial Viability - The school demonstrates strong short and long-term fiscal viability evidenced by ability to meet enrollment projections; reasonability and certainty of revenue projections and funding sources; margins and cash flow; and debt levels.

Governance and Management - The school materially complies with applicable state and federal laws, rules and regulations relating to governance by its board, including training related to charter school governing council responsibilities during the term of the charter.

School Facility - The school materially complies with applicable state and federal laws, rules and regulations relating to the school facilities, grounds, and transportation. Viable certificate of occupancy or other required building use authorization, health, safety and fire code requirements and maintaining and documenting requisite insurance coverage.

STANDARD 3: STUDENT POPULATION

Recruitment and Enrollment Process - The school materially complies with applicable state and federal laws; rules and regulations relevant to student populations; fair and equitable enrollment and recruitment processes; and transparent and open access.

Waitlist and Enrollment Data - The school's enrollment variance equals or exceeds 95 percent in the most recent year.

Demographic Representation - The student body reflects the demographics of the target population and/or surrounding communities. There is strong evidence of efforts to attract, enroll and retain special populations.

Family and Community Support - The school maintains strong parent satisfaction and community support.

School Culture and Climate - The school maintains clear policies and consistent implementation of policies. Ongoing behavior intervention monitoring, low frequency of suspensions and/or expulsions.

Performance Standards Definitions

STANDARD 4: LEGAL COMPLIANCE

Open Meetings/Information Management - The school materially complies with applicable state and federal laws, rules and regulations relating to the maintaining and handling of information; all Governing Board meetings are open and accessible to the public; proper and secure maintenance of education records and regulations; proper transferring of student records; proper and secure maintenance of testing material.

Students with Disabilities - Consistent with a state charter school's status as a Local Education Agency (LEA), the school materially complies with applicable state and federal laws, rules and regulations, (including but not limited to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Americans with Disabilities Act, C.G.S.A. § 10-66ee(d)(3), and the school's policies and procedures governing the education of students with disabilities) relating to the education of students with identified disabilities and those suspected of having a disability. A state charter school is a Local Education Agency (LEA), except that state law designates the LEA of the child's residence responsible for the identification of student eligibility for special education services and determination of the special education services to be provided, pursuant to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to students attending a charter school.

English Learners - The school materially complies with applicable state and federal laws, rules and regulations, (including but not limited to Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act [ESEA] as amended by Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), U.S. Department of Education authorities, Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974 (EEOA)) relating to requirements regarding English Learners (ELs). Required policies related to the service of EL students.

Rights of Students - The school materially complies with applicable state and federal laws, rules and regulations relating to the rights of students, including but not limited to, appropriate handling of student information, due process protections, and State nondiscrimination laws.

Teacher/Staff Credentials - The school materially complies with applicable state and federal laws, rules and regulations, relating to state certification requirements as modified by any waivers that have been granted. C.G.S.A. § 10-66dd, Regulations CT State Agencies § 10-145d-401.

Employee Rights - The school materially complies with applicable state and federal laws, rules and regulations, relating to state certification requirements as modified by any waivers that have been granted. C.G.S.A. § 10-66dd, Regulations CT State Agencies § 10-145d-401.

Charter School Performance

Despite growth in the number of charter schools statewide and increases in the amount of students they serve, charter schools account for a small fraction of Connecticut's total student population. Many of Connecticut's charter schools maintain wait-lists of hundreds of students, demonstrating strong demand for charter schools that outpaces the sector's capacity to serve interested students and families. In 2018, over 7,200 students sought enrollment and were wait-listed. Charter schools account for 1.9 percent of the state's public schoolchildren. By contrast, charter schools in all of Connecticut's neighboring states serve a higher proportion of students relative to the states' total number of students.

Connecticut's Next Generation Accountability System launched in the 2014-15 school year, a system developed under ESEA Flexibility included as part of Connecticut's state plan under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). The accountability system is a broad set of 12 indicators that help tell the story of how well a school is preparing its students for success in college, career, and life. The system moves beyond test scores and graduation rates and instead provides a multifactor perspective of performance that will incorporate student growth over time.

As part of the Next Generation Accountability System, all public schools, including charter schools receive a report that provides a picture of how the school measures on all 12 of the indicators. The data will provide a more comprehensive holistic picture of student and school performance.

Connecticut charter schools continue to provide public school choice options for students and their families.

*Connecticut's charter schools currently serve approximately 10,072 students.
A total of 83 school districts have students enrolled in charter schools.*

Of the 23 charter schools that conducted a lottery during the 2017-18 school year, 7,209 students were wait-listed. In the 2016-17 school year, 6,762 students were wait-listed.

Please visit the CSDE's Charter School Office [website](#) for more best practices and to access schools' annual reports.



School Performance: Charter School Best Practices

Best Practice #1: Stamford Charter School for Excellence

Stamford Charter School for Excellence (SCSE), was recognized as one of Connecticut's Schools of Distinction, identified for High Performance for the 2017-18 school year. SCSE utilizes a holistic approach to cultivate lifelong scholars equipped with the skills, knowledge, and habits for success in high school, college, and chosen careers. The twelve key design elements summate the school's model and serve as the cornerstones of the instructional program. Through the levers of high academic standards, extended school days, academic performance accountability, positive work habits, and persistence, SCSE prepares the next generation of innovators and problem-solvers. The model is designed specifically to address the individualized needs of every student and promote maximum achievement through collaborative and data-driven instruction. SCSE offers courses in core subjects of language arts, mathematics, social studies, and science, as well as art, music, and physical education.

The 2017-18 Smarter Balanced Assessment data shows 81.6 percent of SCSE students achieving at or above proficiency (level 3 and 4) in ELA and 93.9 percent in mathematics for all students. SCSE attributes these outcomes to hard work of the scholars and staff, and their adherence to the school model that promotes collaborative, data-driven, differentiated instruction.

Best Practice #2: Achievement First Hartford Academy

Achievement First Hartford Academy (AFHA), was recognized as one of Connecticut's 2017-18 Schools of Distinction, identified for High Growth for High Needs Students in both English Language Arts and Mathematics. AFHA's organizational priorities drive instruction, culture, and procedures. The basis of these goals and measures of performance are aligned with the school's mission. The 2017-18 organization priorities focus on ensuring that lessons promote deep thinking, make learning fun, fulfilling, and create challenges worth mastering. This requires the exploration of worthy and stimulating material that yields deep and nuanced thought. Meaning that, the default setting in the classroom is for scholars to be "doing", working, discussing, and thinking.

AFHA takes a strong Looking at Student Work (LASW) approach to ensure quality and outcomes are driving the instructional cycle: planning/IPP, execution, LASW. Frequent feedback to a high bar drives rapid student growth. Every AFHA class, therefore, should be marked by clarity of expectations and aggressive monitoring of student work with a rate and quality of teacher feedback that maximizes scholar learning each day.

The 2017-18 Smarter Balanced percentage of AFHA students achieving at or above proficiency (level 3 and 4) in ELA at 73.0 percent and 76.3 percent in mathematics for all students, exceeding Hartford, the host district and the state.

Please visit the CSDE's Charter School Office [website](#) for more best practices and to access schools' annual reports.



School Performance: Charter School Best Practices

Best Practice #3: Side by Side Charter School

Side by Side Charter School immerses their students in a culture that believes that they and their families are valuable, and student success is expected. Embedded in “it takes a village” approach, they strive to ensure that the unique needs of all individual students are met. In many ways, the 2017-2018 school year was a living testament to these ideals and principles.

Side by Side outperformed the host district on three out of four indicators on the English Language Arts and Mathematics Smarter Balanced Assessments. When looking at the proficiency in Grades 3-8 on the 2018 SBA, 48 percent of the students achieved at or above proficiency (level 3 and 4) in ELA and 53 percent in mathematics. When looking at growth targets met, Side By Side achieved 62.7 percent growth in ELA, and 69 percent in mathematics.

Some community highlights for the school include a National Endowment for the Arts Grant in partnership with The Aldrich Museum of Contemporary Art, through the Common Ground artist residency program. An academic and enrichment infused after-school program provided in partnership with The Carver Center Middle School Afterschool Program, provides tutoring, peer mediation with enrichment activities such as robotics, engineering, and poetry slam for middle school students.

Additional collaborations with Norwalk Community College and New Canaan Country School also provide student enrichment programs.

The Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) professional development initiative supported middle school math and science teachers to work with Cooperative Education Services (CES) and experts from the field on high quality technology, engineering and makerspace learning with other schools in Fairfield County. Through a partnership with the Amazing Girls’ Science Program, last year, 71 scholarship were awarded and utilized for summer camp, science enrichment programs, and a weekend museum family retreat.

The Side by Side Preschool program was accredited by NAEYC receiving an exemplary overall 95 percent pass rate.

Please visit the CSDE’s Charter School Office [website](#) for more best practices and to access schools’ annual reports.



Stewardship, Governance, and Management: Charter School Best Practices

Best Practice #4: New Beginnings Family Academy

New Beginnings Family Academy has the financial resources, infrastructure and demand to maintain organizationally viable for the community it serves. With an enrollment of 496 students in 2017-2018, tight fiscal control over costs and an ongoing ability to raise approximately 15 percent of its operating budget through private philanthropy, NBFA looks to maintain its long-term fiscal stability. With no significant changes to staff size and administration, future operating expense increases will stem primarily from annual increases in staff salaries and benefits. The benefit costs will be managed by increasing medical and dental coverage contribution percentages for staff. In addition, health insurance cost increase will be limited by establishing a base level of coverage that NBFA will provide. Employees will pay additional for any selection above base level coverage. Other expense increase should mirror inflation and be controllable.

Best Practice #5: Elm City College Prep

Elm City College Prep's (ECCP) Board has revamped orientation for new board members, instituting a mentor system, connecting new board members with members with experience who have previously or currently serve in the capacity of a board member. Also, making data sharing practices uniform across all boards is being enforced. Achievement First held its annual board retreat in July, where the four school boards came together for joint presentations and information sharing. This is one way ECCP strives to improve and ensure best governance practices are shared and implemented.

As a standard practice, ECCP Board Chairperson invites and welcomes participation from the host district school's board, representatives that have been appointed by their respective boards of education to attend school meetings.

Please visit the CSDE's Charter School Office [website](#) for more best practices and to access schools' annual reports.



Student Population: Charter School Best Practices

Best Practice #6: Capital Prep Harbor

Capital Prep Harbor (CPH) was designed and developed in urban communities with the hopes of sending children from all backgrounds to college. The Capital Prep model is to educate students from historically disadvantaged populations to attend four-year colleges and become engaged and active citizens in their communities. Features such as extended school days and weeks, advisory, a two-sport requirement, and capstone projects are elements of the school's model.

CPH's unique curriculum weaves together college preparation with themes of social justice and civic responsibility, as well as social entrepreneurialism. These themes promote a culture where students are equipped to find their passion and to pursue it, with early-college exposure and an individual and social responsibility. In addition to challenging students to be individual achievers, the ethos of the model encourages students to view themselves as part of a community and to be prepared to serve as agents of change.

CPH designed a daily advisory system to help foster personalization, strengthen relationships between student, teachers, and their learning environment. The goal of this model is to provide multiple opportunities for students to establish meaningful, supportive relationships.

Best Practice #7: Park City Prep Charter School

The Park City Prep school population consists of students from every non-magnet public school in Bridgeport, representing a full spectrum of students.

In an effort to reach out to every segment of the larger Bridgeport community, the recruitment process includes a direct mailing with an enrollment application, in both English and Spanish to parents of every fifth grade student attending a Bridgeport Public School. An individual mailing is made to Bridgeport Public School principals, school counselors and the parents' association president.

In addition, Park City Prep has advertisements published each year in the Connecticut Post. These articles introduce Park City Prep as an attractive educational option for middle school age students and their families in and around Bridgeport.

Please visit the CSDE's Charter School Office [website](#) for more best practices and to access schools' annual reports.



Legal Compliance: Charter School Best Practices

Best Practices #8: Elm City Montessori Charter School

Elm City Montessori Charter School's (ECMCS) Scientific Research Based Intervention (SRBI) team works with leadership to bring together academic leaders, Dean of Students, and social workers to develop and monitor interventions for students in the Tiered System. ECMCS provides both social emotional interventions and academic interventions for children to support for high-quality teaching and learning. A Child Study process helps to provide individualized intervention, which works with classroom teachers and families.

ECMCS works in conjunction with New Haven Public Schools to facilitate PPT's and service Individualized Education Program's (IEP's) for identified students. The school conducts regular PPT's to review services and provide educational benefits. This year, students with IEP's continued to grow in reading, making over a year's growth as a result of Tier 1 instruction, interventions, and special education services.

For English Learners (ELs), ECMCS works in collaboration with New Haven Public Schools to evaluate and serve identified children. The support from NHPS to provide LAS Links assessments is vital to continue to chart student's growth and needs.

Best Practices #9: Achievement First Bridgeport Academy

Achievement First Bridgeport Academy (AFBA) has policy documents that set forth compliance with applicable laws and regulations. Those policies including the Family Handbook, Employee Handbook, Fiscal Policies and Procedures, Special Services Playbook, and Behavior Policy, that have been reviewed by the Connecticut State Department of Education and other key stakeholders.

Additionally, the school has retained a charter management organization to assist in compliance-related areas, including training and accountability for the policies.

Please visit the CSDE's Charter School Office [website](#) for more best practices and to access schools' annual reports.