Connecticut's Charter Schools

Best Practices Annual Report
2018 - 2019

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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. There are 23 charter schools statewide. Located in 10 host districts, these schools serve over *6,000* 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

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 (e.g., ongoing behavior intervention monitoring, low frequency of suspensions and/or expulsions).

Performance Standards Definitions

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

Connecticut charter schools account for a fraction of the state'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 2019, over 6,000 students sought enrollment and were wait-listed. Charter schools account for approximately two percent of the state's public schoolchildren.

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 10,410 students.
A total of 86 school districts have students enrolled in charter schools.

Of the 23 charter schools that conducted a lottery during the 2018-19 school year, over 6,000 students were wait-listed. In the 2017-18 school year, 7,209 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: Brass City Charter School

The Brass City Charter School's mission to "provide a rigorous academic and holistic social-emotional learning program that will eliminate the achievement gap for underserved students" is supported by a model to improve student outcomes and school culture.

Collaborations with Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence to implement the **RULER** program, which teaches the skills of emotional intelligence — those associated with **r**ecognizing, **u**nderstanding, **l**abeling, **e**xpressing, and **r**egulating emotion, and El Sistema music program, a rigorous music and arts education that fosters creative expression and community engagement, have informed discipline practices which have resulted in a suspension rate below the state's average over the past three years.

These practices not only work in tandem to address students' emotional learning, but have also positively impacted academic outcomes.

According to the 2017-18 Next Generation Accountability Report, Brass City Charter School outperformed the state and host district in English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics performance indices for all and High Needs students, ELA and Mathematics growth measuring average percentage of target achieved indices for all and High Needs students, chronic absence, and overall accountability index.

Moreover, Brass City Charter School's 2018-19 Smarter Balanced Assessment (SBA) percentage of students who met or exceeded Level 3 or 4 in ELA at 57.3 percent and 50.3 percent in Mathematics outperformed the host district and state percentages.

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Best Practice #2: Stamford Charter School for Excellence

Stamford Charter School for Excellence (SCSE), recognized as one of Connecticut's 2017-18 Schools of Distinction, is in its fifth year of operation, serving scholars in Grades PK-5. 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 school's instructional model is designed specifically to address the individualized needs of every student and promote maximum achievement through collaborative and data-driven instruction.

The school uses a cohort model at each grade level where teachers within a grade level are collectively responsible for the learning of all students within that grade. Flexible instructional groupings uniquely tailored for every child's needs are availed daily and decisions are made using data in real-time. Teachers monitor students' progress through a robust assessment model to offer highly supportive and differentiated instruction that targets the needs of students.

These practices have yielded strong student achievement outcomes on performance and growth measures. The 2018-19 SBA results showed 85.3 percent of SCSE students met or exceeded Level 3 or 4 in ELA. Similarly, SBA Growth Model results for the same year showed 89.8 percent of average percentage of target achieved in ELA and 74.1 percent of average percentage of target achieved in Mathematics.

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Stewardship, Governance, and Management: Charter School Best Practices

Best Practice #3: Integrated Day Charter School

Integrated Day Charter School's (IDCS) organizational structure and membership expertise promotes best practices in stewardship, governance and management. The school administrative team includes a business manager and is supported by a nine-member Governing Board consisting of a variety of stakeholders. Additionally, three subcommittees meet on a regular basis and are charged with overseeing governance, finance, and strategic-planning tasks, which collectively work to ensure the school's financial viability, compliance, and effective school operations.

The Governance subcommittee partners with legal counsel to update policies and ensure compliance with any changes in regulations; the finance subcommittee reviews the budget and investments; and the Strategic Planning and Communication Committee is responsible for reviewing and making any necessary revisions to the school plan's various components which include student achievement, school climate and culture, enrollment and retention, and organizational management.

Best Practice #4: Capital Preparatory Harbor School

Capital Preparatory Harbor School includes a finance team to assist in purposeful fiscal planning. In an effort to support fiscal and operational sustainability of short and long-term goals, a model was developed which assesses the necessity of and prioritizes activities, informs the annual budget development process, and supports fundraising goals.

While the finance team works to support fiscal and operational sustainability, the school's Board of Directors and leadership team collaborate to ensure that data informs decisions and oversight through the utilization of a data dashboard and rubrics of key performance indicators.

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 #5: Common Ground High School

Common Ground High School utilizes a multitude of ways to retain its students. Green Jobs Corps, their youth employment program, connects approximately 80 students with paid work opportunities, career and leadership development, and wraparound supports.

Out-of-school programs -- from robotics to rap and poetry, medical arts to writing lab -- provide enrichment opportunities and academic supports. The school's urban farm benefits students and families fostering a sense of community through providing ingredients for healthy, universal free lunch, and fuels a vegetable share that provides access to fresh produce for families on a sliding fee basis. Additionally, a sense of ownership is created through the inclusion of student voice and leadership opportunities that promote student agency.

Best Practice #6: The Bridge Academy

The Bridge Academy strives to recruit students in several ways. School representatives attend large functions, such as church fairs, to distribute school information to prospective students and their families. Pamphlets and applications are delivered to the local K-6 schools to attract the sixth-graders.

In conjunction with traditional methods such as informational mailings, putting up yard signs and posting flyers, the school employs various media platforms such as Facebook and press releases to local news outlets to raise its profile. As an assurance measure, an "Accepted Students Dinner" is hosted to ensure that applicants who commit to enrolling in the school actually do.

Please visit the CSDE's Charter School Office website for more best practices and to access schools' annual report.

Legal Compliance: Charter School Best Practices

Best Practices #7: Elm City Montessori School

Elm City Montessori School's Scientific Research-Based Intervention (SRBI) team is a partnership between school and instructional leaders to oversee behavioral and academic interventions for students in a tiered system. Elm City Montessori provides social-emotional and academic interventions for children to provide high-quality instruction. A Child Study process, working with classroom teachers and families, is utilized to provide individualized intervention for students.

Elm City Montessori continues efforts to strengthen its SRBI processes and implementation. SRBI data and the intervention process support students in making gains and identify children who are in need of specialized instruction. The school partners with New Haven Public Schools to conduct Planning and Placement Teams (PPT) in order to establish and review services of Individual Education Plans (IEP) for identified students. Regular PPTs are held to review services and provide educational benefits for all identified children. With support in Tier 1 instruction, an intervention system, and special education services, this year's students with IEPs continued to grow in reading, making over a year's growth.

Best Practices #8: Odyssey Community School

Odyssey Community School complies with applicable state and federal laws and regulations concerning the identification, entrance, exit, and parent notification of its English learner (EL) population. In addition to adhering to these state and federal requirements, school leadership has sought to address the needs of its expanding EL population by hiring a certified Teacher of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) teacher and an English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) tutor to support core instruction and positively influence academic outcomes for these students.

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