NextEd

TRANSFORMING CONNECTICUT'S EDUCATION SYSTEM

Continuous Improvement Plan from The Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents

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

For more than 150 years, the public school system in Connecticut has been successful at providing children with access to a quality education. But that's no longer enough. Thanks to the dawn of the Information Age, the transition from a manufacturing economy to a service economy and the development of a global economy, a new system is needed to best prepare our children to succeed in 2011 and beyond.

Going forward, public education must integrate services to children and raise community expectations for higher learning standards. Family structure must be reinforced on an equitable and consistent basis. And all students must be educated to be college or career ready with internationally competitive skills and knowledge.

In short, our public education must be transformed. With effective leadership and the help of every citizen in Connecticut, CAPSS truly believes that's possible. This report recommends exactly how we can benefit all students in our state.

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

Just like many communities across the nation, Connecticut's public education system faces a series of complex problems—a mass of challenges that have multiple causes and cannot be solved in a set time period by using standard techniques and conventional processes. These complex problems include:

- International and racial achievement gaps
- Low level of student engagement in their education and motivation for learning
- Limited measures of assessment and accountability
- Inadequate preparation for today's higher education and workforce
- Changing U.S. demographics
- Little emphasis on modern skills to meet the needs of a global economy
- Impact of disruptive innovations

Obviously, solving these problems is not easy. Traditional solutions are inadequate. And to complicate things even further, many people disagree about the right approach to address them.

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

So what can be done?

As the leaders of public schools in Connecticut, the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS) suggests that the system, which has served children well in the past, must be transformed so that it is able to meet the needs of students in the future. 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.

| Typical Current Practices	VS	Examples of Transformative Practices
Goal is universal access to education		Goal is to educate all students with high standards
Age-based cohorts		Learning/progress-based groupings
Standardized solutions		Customized learning plans and processes
Begins at different ages		Begins at three years of age for all students
Limited choices and options		Many choices and pathways to learning
Patchwork of standards drives educational organization and processes		Coherent, flexible, research-based, innovation-focused teaching and learning processes
Highly structured, traditional staffing models		Student-centered, relational staffing featuring professional partnerships with experts, certified staff, community resources and mentors
Technology used to make teaching more efficient		Technology used to transform teaching and learning
Educational progress measured by seat time and credits		Progress toward graduation measured by authentic learning, using direct measures
Traditional annual school calendar and schedule		Instruction and learning delivered anytime, anywhere, whenever students are ready to learn
Learning almost exclusively based in schools		Learning occurs where students are; schools serve as the base from which students and teachers work

We invite you to learn more about these recommendations on the following pages. For more details, download the full report at www.ctnexted.org.

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Recommendations for Transformation

In order to transform Connecticut's current pre-K to 12 public school system and address today's challenges, CAPSS has developed a series of action-oriented recommendations that all revolve around the learner.

This executive summary contains the key recommendations. To learn more about the full set of recommendations, please visit **www.ctnexted.org**.

Learner
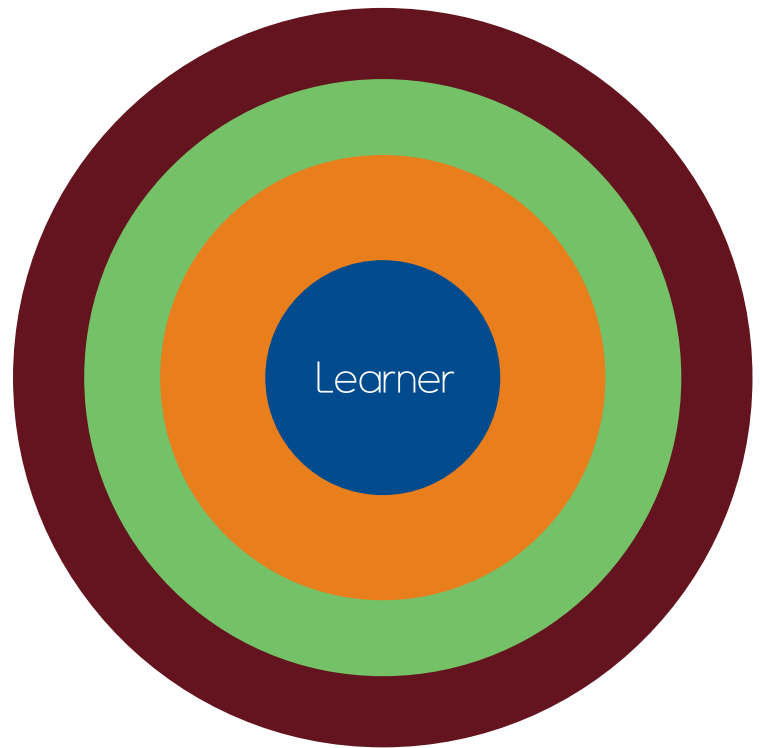
Raise the Bar.

Establish globally competitive, internationally benchmarked standards in language arts (reading, writing, speaking and listening) science, social studies, world languages and the arts.

|| **Establish** ambitious, focused and coherent education standards in all major education disciplines.

|| **Ensure** that our children will be globally competitive by benchmarking Connecticut's educational standards to established international standards.

|| **Measure** child progress on college and career readiness standards and get public school systems and postsecondary institutions to agree on those standards.

Make it Personal.

Personalize learning to give all students the opportunity to learn at high levels.

|| **Build** instructional program on student learning needs, styles and interests.

|| **Create** multiple learning pathways that enable children to master essential standards, content and skills, and offer diversity and choice in the school system.

|| **Allow** children to advance through school and ultimately graduate based on their own demonstration of essential knowledge, skills and dispositions—not on the amount of time they've spent in the classroom.

|| **Redefine** the use of time (Carnegie unit/calendar) in order to support a personalized learning system; make achievement the constant and time the variable. Allow students to learn anytime, anywhere.

Start with Early Childhood.

Make quality early childhood experiences available to all three- and four-year-olds in order to get all children ready to learn as they enter kindergarten.

|| **Make** quality preschool education universally available in Connecticut.

|| **Reallocate** state funding and alter educational policy so that programs are positioned for measurable success at raising oral language, reading and numeracy skills.

|| **Establish** a structural relationship between preschool and the K-12 system.

|| **Provide** a challenging all-day kindergarten program to all children.

Retool Assessments and Accountability.

De-emphasize standardized tests and create new methods of assessments to give students choices for how and when they demonstrate their knowledge and skills.

|| **Adopt** a more varied system of assessment to account for the fact that students not only learn best in different ways, they also demonstrate their mastery of information in a variety of ways.

|| **Make** accountability transparent, tailored to different uses and able to communicate student progress.

|| **Replace** instructional state mandates—focused on inputs—with student learning outcomes.

|| **Include** rewards/incentives in accountability system.

|| **Base** accountability on the four core disciplines—language arts, science, mathematics and social studies.

Offer More Options and Choices.

Increase diversity, flexibility and autonomy in school districts to maximize resources and better address the needs and interests of all students.

|| **Review** existing district structures based on 1) the capacity to provide different options for children to meet education standards; 2) economic, social and geographic factors.

|| **Provide** students and their parents with a menu of options, including magnet schools, charter schools and vocational-technical schools as well as different schedules and curriculums.

|| **Increase** capacity for educators to provide options and choices for children.

|| **Structure** school districts so that they're fiscally independent.

Reform Leadership.

Realign Connecticut's education system for success by making authority and responsibility equal.

|| **Define** the role and responsibilities of the Superintendent of Education (formerly Superintendent of Schools) in state statutes; make authority commensurate with responsibilities and eliminate ambiguity.

|| **Change** the state statutes so that:

– The Governor appoints the Commissioner of Education with the statutory authority and responsibility to provide educational leadership.

–The position of the Superintendent of Education provides leadership to the Board of Education.

–The District Board of Education makes decisions only on policy matters, the annual budget and the hiring, supervision and evaluation of the Superintendent.

–The contract between the District Board of Education and the Superintendent of Education can be for a five-year period and is renewable.

|| **Restrict** authority of the Board of Education to its role as a representative body for the community it serves.

Boost Quality.

Attract, develop, support and retain teachers and principals of the highest quality.

|| **Recruit** and retain the best and brightest in the education profession.

|| **Require** first-year teachers to have extensive clinical experience, supported by strong coaching from experienced teachers as well as content knowledge and teaching skills.

|| **Support** exemplary teacher and school district leadership development programs and publicize key achievements.

|| **Revise** tenure law to include a rigorous, standards-based review process more closely tied to student learning. After educators show outstanding performance in student learning, they will receive five-year contracts, which districts may or may not renew.

Involve Students and Parents.

Engage parents, caregivers and community organizations as partners in a child's education.

|| **Foster** a partnership for success among parents, schools and communities.

|| **Help** parents and caregivers understand how they make a difference in a child's education.

|| **Provide** parents with choices for educating their children.

|| **Work** with parents and adults to support high expectations for learning.

|| **Utilize** community organizations to help families foster reading skills and produce literate children by grade three.

Leverage Technology.
Use technology to transform teaching and learning.

|| **Provide** educators and students with equal access to technology.

|| **Personalize** learning with technology-based systems.

|| **Ensure** broadband access to Internet and wireless connections.

|| **Provide** on-demand access to learning resources, information and services 24/7.

|| **Integrate** technology throughout school districts, facilities, leadership and management to increase efficiency and safety.

Continue Transformation.
Ensure that transformation is a continuous process, not a one-time event.

|| **Keep** the educational system flexible to meet changing needs and expectations.

|| **Support** innovation in the public school systems. Change state regulations to promote and reward continued transformation.

|| **Create** mechanisms for teachers and administrators to propose and obtain approval for innovative practices that lead to improved student outcomes.

Learn more.
You can make a difference in transforming Connecticut's education system. Consider all these ways to get involved:

|| **Download the full CAPSS report** and sign up to get more information at **www.ctnexted.org**.

|| **Call or write your legislators** to find out how they're addressing the complex problems facing schools today.

|| **Talk to the members of your local Board of Education** about what they're doing to transform education.

|| **Meet with community leaders or your parent/teacher association,** and talk about what can be done at your school and in your district.

Introduction

The public school system is not meeting the expectation that all children will learn what they need to know and be able to do in order to lead decent and productive lives.

The major reason for this is that today's public schools are not designed to enable universal student success. Instead, they are still based on the mid-19th-century expectation of supplying universal access.

Under the current system, children have 13 years to learn what they are being taught. As a result, they receive high school diplomas even though there is a wide disparity among them with respect to what they have actually learned.

The Future of Connecticut's Public Education

Going forward, our education system should be designed to make sure that every child meets a set standard of learning. No child should be certified as sufficiently educated until he or she can demonstrate having met the standard of learning. More important, every child should be given the amount of time needed to meet that standard.

If we try to meet the expectation that every child will learn with a system that is not designed to produce this result, no amount of effort or improved practices will enable schools to achieve it.

We need to transform the present school system so that it can achieve the overall goal of universal success.

What's Necessary for Successful Transformation?

|| Agree on the components of a new system.

|| Make "learners" the foundation of our education system.

|| Align education with how students learn.

|| Realign support systems with the goal of universal success, not just universal access.

|| Prepare education leaders with the knowledge and skills to lead the process of transformation.

CAPSS: Leading the Effort

As an organization founded to supervise structures that support teaching and learning, the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS) is in a unique position to lead the effort to transform public education in the state. It assembled a group of 17 of its members, provided these members access to national experts on transformation issues, and charged the group with developing a comprehensive report to represent the best-informed thinking of the people who lead Connecticut's public education system.

This report outlines 10 core recommendations to transform Connecticut's public school system. These include: driving achievement, increasing flexibility and choices, involving parents, retooling assessments and accountability, leveraging technology and boosting quality.

In support of these recommendations, CAPSS has created the following:

|| Outreach efforts to other educational stakeholders to explain its perspective, enlisting others to strengthen its recommendations and building alliances to implement these recommendations.

|| A legislative agenda that reflects the recommendations in this report.

|| A leadership development program designed to help educators acquire the skills necessary to lead the transformation.

|| A website that supports both public policy/legislative efforts and leadership development activities.

> "Our mission is to lead the continuous improvement of public education for all students by advocating public policy for children and by developing and supporting executive school leaders."
>
> —CAPSS

An Exciting Opportunity

CAPSS and its members are excited about the opportunity to help transform the public school system to ensure that it better meets the needs of children well into the 21st century. We urge you to join us as we structure a system that will not rest until all children have learned what they need to know and can lead productive and dignified lives.

Recommendations

CAPSS has outlined 10 major recommendations for transforming education in Connecticut.

Recommendations in Action
A Student's Story: Jessica, an Oceanographer-to-Be

Jessica woke up with a start, looked at the alarm clock and panicked briefly before she remembered it was Tuesday, and she could go into school later because she had taken her Japanese class the night before.

As she did three times a week, she studied Japanese with her neighbor Mr. Nakamura instead of taking a language at her high school. She was finally getting comfortable with a language that has been called one of the hardest in the world. It wasn't pronunciation that was difficult; Japanese was far easier to speak than words she learned in her sixth-grade French classes. It was the *kanji,* characters used in Japanese writing, that she was beginning to recognize more easily.

It was easier for Jessica to learn Japanese with one-on-one tutoring than it would be in a classroom. She was lucky that her school encouraged her to be creative when it came to taking a foreign language, she thought. The school accepted Mr. Nakamura's lessons for high school credit.

Right now, she'd have to be content with taking biology within her school—and at home. Her biology classes were no more traditional than her language classes. Jessica watched the biology lecture on her computer every day, which prepared her to go to school and conduct experiments with a team of students in the lab all morning.

As Jessica got out of bed she remembered how her father had been worried about the way she was taking biology—listening to the lectures at home, on the computer! But Jessica's teacher reassured her dad that students were better prepared when they came to school ready to work in teams, doing hands-on experiments in the lab with guidance from teachers, than they often were in traditional classrooms.

Even when planning Jessica's sophomore year in high school, her parents were pretty involved. They helped her choose every detail—right down to the way the school would assess her learning in all her classes, including biology. She knew she didn't want to be graded just on what her team did, so she chose two other assessments on which she would be tested during the semester. Plus, she would have to demonstrate that she understood the 10 major standards of her biology course.

Team learning at school wasn't limited to biology, after all. It was the same in geometry, too, with real problems created by the teachers that she and her fellow students had to answer. They didn't just learn about geometric shapes in a book!

At the beginning of the school year, Jessica was offered four choices for history: a traditional survey of American history, a computer-based American history course, an independent study or a seminar format. She chose the seminar because it gave her the option of interviewing community members about major events in the 20th century. Ms. Anders, Jessica knew, grew up under segregation, in Louisville, Kentucky, and Jessica planned to videotape an interview with her concerning her memories of what that era was like.

With such a robust education, Jessica plans on combining all she's learning into her ideal career: an oceanographer, conducting experiments—perhaps in the Sea of Japan.

Raise the Bar.

All students should have a balanced education that includes language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, world languages and the arts.

Why This Recommendation Is Important

Students enter learning from many different perspectives. Some students are interested in the sciences, others may be interested in the arts. Providing a balanced education is important because it is the foundation for the 21st-century learner.

Actions Needed

|| Establish ambitious, focused and cohesive education standards in all major disciplines of Connecticut public education, including language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, world languages and the arts.

|| Benchmark Connecticut's educational standards to established international standards to ensure our children will be globally competitive.

|| Obtain agreement between public schools and postsecondary institutions in Connecticut on the standards for a child to be college and career ready.

Connecticut's school systems need to measure a child's progress based on demonstrated competency, not seat time.

Why This Recommendation Is Important

Time cannot be the criterion that determines when a child progresses through the education system. The mastery of skills and knowledge is essential for students to build a foundation for college and career. Requiring mastery of content and skills ensures that all students will learn at high levels.

Actions Needed

|| Enable students to advance through school, and ultimately graduate, based on their demonstration of essential knowledge, skills and dispositions—not on the time they've spent in class.

|| Provide children with the support they need to advance at their own pace to meet educational requirements.

Connecticut school systems and higher education must agree on the standards for college and career readiness.

Why This Recommendation Is Important

Currently, there's no agreement about the skills and knowledge that students need to enter the workforce or attend college after graduation. Agreement is essential so that students, parents and teachers know what is required—and know how to help students best prepare for their future.

Actions Needed

|| Make sure high school assessments measure student progress on college/career readiness standards.

|| Use adopted readiness standards for postsecondary admissions decisions.

|| Address effective teaching of college/career readiness standards in professional development for pre-K to 12.

Make it Personal.

Student-centered approaches to education are characterized by a focus on learning and driven by a knowledge of the way children learn skills and competencies. Student-centered learning bases the foundation of the educational program on the interests of the child, the needs of the learner and an understanding of how children learn.

Students advance upon mastery.

The core element of a competency-based approach is that students progress in school when they demonstrate mastery of standards for that level. In a competency-based approach, students progress after demonstrating their ability to apply skills and content to specific tasks.

Why This Recommendation Is Important

By having students progress based on mastery of content and skills, students work at appropriately challenging learning levels. This also means that students do not end up at higher levels without the skills and knowledge to tackle that work.

Actions Needed

|| Advance students to higher-level work upon mastery—not age. Credits are earned based on demonstration of mastery, not seat time.

|| Revise state statutes to allow students to earn credits based on mastery rather than seat time.

|| Develop a variety of assessments or projects that allow students to demonstrate mastery of content and skills.

Develop competency-based pathways based on student interest and needs.

Why This Recommendation Is Important

Personalization is ubiquitous in today's world. This is true everywhere—except in education. Personalized instruction is paced to the learning needs of students and tailored to the learning preferences and specific interests of different learners. In a fully personalized learning environment, objectives, content, method and pace may all vary. Furthermore, personalized learning not only requires a shift in the design of schooling, but also depends on leveraging modern technology in support of student learning. Children learn at different rates and thus require different amounts of time to achieve the same learning objectives. Significant learning can and does occur outside of school and extends beyond the school day and year.

Actions Needed

|| Design school buildings to allow for year-round instruction and flexible instructional groupings.

|| Make the school year flexible enough to allow students various amounts of time to achieve proficiency of content and skills.

|| Accept that learning experiences take place outside of school. This means that learning and teaching can occur anytime, anywhere.

|| Make access to school resources available year-round and for an expanded period of time each day.

|| Establish flexible work schedules so teachers can work varied days in the school year and at varied times in the school day.

|| Develop a personalized culture that fosters strong and respectful relationships among children and adults. The culture should allow for complete understanding of children's cultural and social contexts, and advising them over multiple years.

|| Design curriculum and instruction that encourage children to feel responsible for their own learning and to increasingly be able to assess their own skills and needs.

|| Leverage technology to open up new avenues for child-centered learning.

Start with Early Childhood.

Make preschool available to all three- and four-year-olds to get them ready to learn.

Brain research reveals that early learning critically impacts the future development of a child. Therefore, attending to the three dimensions of executive function—working memory, inhibitory control and cognitive or mental flexibility—is key for the social and cognitive development of a child.

Reallocate state funding and alter educational policy to position programs for measurable success at raising oral language, reading and numeracy skills.

Why This Recommendation Is Important

Research shows that by the time children enter kindergarten, there is already an achievement gap between middle-class and low-income students. This discrepancy in part stems from the difference in oral literacy among different groups of children. Researchers estimate, for example, that children from professional families are exposed to 45 million words by the age of four, while children from working-class families only hear about 22 million. Children in poverty, however, are exposed to a scant 13 million.[1] Furthermore, more than two-thirds of poverty-stricken households do not possess a *single* book developmentally appropriate for a child under age five.

Actions Needed

To ensure that all children in Connecticut benefit from their educational experience, the state should:

|| Provide or reallocate sufficient funding so that all children, ages three to eight, receive appropriate early education.

|| Create a simplified, coordinated system for supporting early childhood education.

|| Support families with training for literacy and educating young children.

|| Reduce the achievement gap.

|| Establish standards to raise the quality of all learning centers, e.g., daycare, preschool and home.

1 Todd R. Risley and Betty Hart, *Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children* (Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes, 1995).

|| Designate a single agency to set standards and regulate early learning.

|| Require all early childhood service providers to assess children's reading and language skills as part of developmental screening to identify children in need of additional services.

|| Strengthen professional development for all early educators and caregivers so they can support language development.

|| Bring challenging, engaging and developmentally appropriate reading and mathematics curricula into early education and childcare settings.

Make quality preschool education universally available in Connecticut.

Why This Recommendation Is Important

The availability of preschools and the quality of the preschool experiences are critical factors. They can help reduce the achievement gap in Connecticut and ensure that all children benefit from their educational experience.

Actions Needed

|| Ensure fiscal support for high-quality programs for all three- and four-year-olds.

|| Provide challenging all-day kindergarten for all children.

|| Support local communities in developing birth-through-age-eight local councils for planning and monitoring early childhood services.

Ensure a simplified, coordinated system for supporting early childhood development and education.

Why This Recommendation Is Important

The primary purposes of early childhood education are to support social and emotional competence, and improve a child's oral language, numeracy and literacy development. Providing early childhood education as early as possible in a child's life will best prepare him/her for success later in school, the workplace and the community.

Actions Needed

|| Eliminate overlapping oversight and support of early childhood education at state and local levels.

|| Provide parents and the community with transparent and understandable information about the quality of services and programs.

|| Provide models and training to local communities on effective transitions to kindergarten.

|| Provide guidance and support to local communities in raising the quality of early childhood programs and services.

|| Provide greater capacity for coordination and support services for parents and children.

Strengthen partnerships with families to reinforce children's learning with a particular focus on language development.

Why This Recommendation Is Important

Although research shows that families play the most important role in young children's lives, responsibility for school readiness lies with the adults who care for them and the systems that support them. Supportive relationships and positive learning experiences should be provided, not just at home but also through a range of services and by a variety of adults.

Actions Needed

Childcare settings, preschools and public schools should:

|| Support family efforts to improve children's language, emerging literacy, reading and numeracy skills.

|| Capitalize on and strengthen the role of community libraries in promoting family literacy.

|| Provide continuing education to parents to support their child's language, literacy, numeracy and executive function skill development.

|| Use community leaders as conduits for helping families build children's language, literacy and numeracy skills.

Require programs, providers and professionals that serve babies and young children to assess language and reading development as part of screening processes. Identify those in need of additional services.

Why This Recommendation Is Important

Reading is the cornerstone of academic success. There is a limited window of time to prevent reading difficulties and promote reading achievement. For most children what happens (or doesn't happen) from infancy through age nine is critical. By third grade, reading struggles are strongly linked to later difficulties in school as well as to behavioral problems, depression and dysfunctional and/or negative peer relationships.[1] What's more, research indicates that 74 percent of children whose reading skills are less than sufficient by third grade have a drastically reduced likelihood of graduating from high school.[2] As a result, these children are unlikely to develop the skills essential for participating fully in a knowledge-based economy and for experiencing life success.[3]

Actions Needed

|| Require healthcare practices and early education programs to initially screen and continually assess language and reading skills.

|| Outfit school districts with a pre-K to grade three early literacy (including language), numeracy and executive function skills assessment system.

|| Modify the information-sharing limitations of privacy regulations (HIPAA) so that the state can create a database to track a child's history of development, including program enrollment.

Enhance professional education to increase adult capacity to assess and support a child's language development.

1 Gregg, N., Hoy, C., King, W.M., Moreland, C.M. & Jagota, M. (1992). "The MMPI-2 profile of individuals with learning disabilities at a rehabilitative setting." *Journal of Applied Rehabilitation Counseling*, 23, 52-59; Snow, C., Burns, M.S. & Griffin, P. (1998). "Preventing reading disabilities in young children." Washington, D.C.: National Research Council. Waldie, K., & Spreen, O. (1993). "The relationship between learning disabilities and persisting delinquency." *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 26, 417-423.

2 Fletcher, J.M., & Lyon, G.R. (1998). Reading: A research-based approach. In W.M. Evers (Ed.), "What's gone wrong in America's classrooms" (49-90). Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press.

3 Fletcher, J.M., & Lyon, G.R. (1998). Reading: A research-based approach. In W.M. Evers (Ed.), "What's gone wrong in America's classrooms" (49-90). Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press.

Why This Recommendation Is Important

Strong oral language skills are essential for young children to have in order to learn how to read. Experts recommend that greater effort be given to improving the quality of infants' and children's language environments.

Actions Needed

|| Provide early educators, care providers and healthcare professionals with training on how to support language, reading, numeracy and executive function skill development.

|| Provide a multiyear professional development plan for the workforce to comply with state law and national certification requirements.

|| Provide health, mental health and education consultation to preschool programs to enhance the skills of directors and teachers for meeting the comprehensive needs of children.

Bring challenging, language-rich, developmentally appropriate reading and mathematics curricula to early education and care settings.

Why This Recommendation Is Important

Extensive research shows that the first five years are a critical developmental period in a young child's life. The quality of a child's early environment and experiences has long-term effects on the brain, building the foundation for important outcomes, including academic achievement.

Actions Needed

The state should:

|| Provide ongoing guidance on curriculum selection and implementation in early education and care settings, as well as in pre-K to grade three classrooms.

|| Require principals and program administrators to increase their knowledge of children's language, reading, numeracy and executive function skills.

|| Develop a system of accountability for providing language-rich, challenging, developmentally appropriate and engaging reading and mathematics curricula.

|| Require school districts to provide supplemental instruction that matches the curriculum for children who are not making sufficient progress.

Retool Assessments and Accountability.

De-emphasize standardized tests. Create new methods of assessments to give students choices for how and when they're tested.

In the past century, evaluation of student learning has been primarily focused on determining the level of student achievement through traditional testing. However, research suggests that, while important, this type of assessment has little or no influence on student learning. Experts today believe that we need to rethink assessment so that it becomes a **tool for** learning rather than an **indicator of** learning.

Adopt a more equitable system of assessment to account for the fact that students not only learn in different ways, they also demonstrate their mastery of information in a variety of ways.

Why This Recommendation Is Important

Current models of assessment and accountability are usually based on paper-and-pencil testing, which offers limited educational value and typically reflects a low level of proficiency in the skills that students need to master.

Even more disheartening is that "the process of test construction, determination of content and the use of only one method—multiple-choice tests—all build in cultural biases that favor some ways of understanding and demonstrating knowledge more than others." Not surprisingly, the Partners in Education Transformation (Intel, Microsoft and Cisco, 2008) contend that "existing models of assessment typically fail to measure the skills, knowledge, attitudes and characteristics of self-directed and collaborative learning that are increasingly important for our global economy and fast-changing world."[4]

Actions Needed

Use a variety of assessment opportunities to determine student success in learning.

|| Schedule an assessment whenever an individual child is ready to be assessed—rather than having all children in the class assessed at the same time.

|| Leverage technology not only to give assessments, but to provide quicker results to students and ongoing data to teachers.

|| Incorporate standards-based grading as part of assessments. Provide information on progress, which will allow teachers to adjust instruction to respond to any weaknesses, if necessary.

|| Use performance-based assessments instead of selected-response questions in state-mandated testing to better measure depth of understanding and problem-solving skills.

|| Involve teachers in the design and scoring of assessments to increase their commitment to and understanding of state tests and ensure their teaching reflects requirements for mastery.

Make accountability transparent, tailored to different uses and able to communicate student progress.

Why This Recommendation Is Important

Today, the accountability system for schools is punitive and fails to recognize and reward success. It is primarily focused on year-to-year standardized test results and fails to consider other types of factors that impact schools and districts, such as instruction, leadership, resources and parental involvement. In addition, it is not implemented consistently across all schools and districts, and it doesn't address progress in reducing the achievement gap in the state.

Actions Needed

|| Develop a comprehensive, statewide accountability system based on clearly stated goals for transforming public education.

|| Base academic accountability on language arts, mathematics, social studies and science, and on all other disciplines considered necessary for students to learn.

4 Intel, Microsoft and Cisco Taskforce (2008). Transforming Education: Assessment and Teaching of 21st Century Skills. Retrieved February 26, 2011, from http://education2020.wikispaces.com file/view/Transformative_Assessment—A_Call_to_Action_and_Action.pdf.

- || Base school accountability on the success of students at the next level. For example, elementary school accountability should be based partially on student success in middle school.

- || Include rewards/incentives for schools in the state accountability system based on student performance and reduction in the achievement gap.

- || Align accountability systems for schools with state education goals.

Offer More Options and Choices.

Increase diversity, flexibility and autonomy in school districts to maximize resources, and better address the needs and interests of all students.

Efficient state mandates must be coordinated with local school district governance in order to close the gap between idealistic goals for education and the reality of schooling—and affect long-lasting educational change. Going forward, school districts should have the flexibility to organize to take advantage of economies of scale and allocate the majority of resources so they can deliver high-quality services to students as cost-efficiently as possible.

Review existing school districts based on: 1) the capacity to provide different options for children to meet educational standards; 2) economic, social and geographic factors.

Why This Recommendation Is Important
Local school boards are not being utilized to their fullest extent in the current system, due to the influence of local politics and a lack of alignment between local and state governing structures. In addition, the present division of local school districts into 165 separate entities with some regional arrangements is economically inefficient and fosters economic, racial and ethnic isolation.

Actions Needed
- || Make local school boards directly accountable both to the people who live in those districts and to the Commissioner of Education.

- || Create districts with sufficient authority and flexibility to implement programs and strategies designed to meet state student learning mandates.

- || Allow students and their parents to choose from a menu of options, including magnet schools, charter schools and vocational-technical schools as well as different schedules and curriculums, all within the jurisdiction of the local district.

- || Structure school districts so that they're fiscally independent and allow districts to adopt multiyear budgets.

Recommendations in Action

A Student's Story: Max, a Fifth Grader

"What did Robert E. Lee see at the Battle of Gettysburg?" Mrs. Canna asked her fifth-grade class. "On July 2, 1863, Confederate General Lee climbed to the top of a Lutheran Seminary to get a better view of the battle. His decisions there caused his first major defeat—and eventually helped the Union win the war. So what did he see—or what didn't he see? You'll each get software to help with this homework," she said, distributing DVDs to the class.

Max couldn't wait to start working on the assignment, part of the students' yearlong study of the Civil War. At home that night, he downloaded the software, which combined geography with historical information to recreate the topography of Gettysburg during the famous battle, onto his computer. He immediately realized what Lee could not see from even the high vantage point of the seminary's cupola—thousands of Union troops, just beyond the general's sight, stretched out for more than three miles on the eastern side of the battlefield. "Whoa! Mom, you've got to see this!" Max said.

Max showed his mother the reconstruction of that crucial scene. "Lee could only see a small portion of the Union troops," Max said.

"I guess Lee didn't know what he didn't know," Max's mom said. "Not to distract you from your homework, but I picked this book up for you at the library today," she said. Max opened the book on the solar system, admiring its colorful, foldout photos of the planets. He had worked on experiments with rocketry during a summer camp and wrote a story about space travel for the school newspaper, drawing pictures for the article on the iPad in his classroom. "This will help me with my next newspaper article on space," Max said.

Max had much more flexibility on reading and writing than many other students in his class because he had mastered all the standards for his age group in language arts. Like his fellow students, Max took state assessment exams when he and his teacher decided he was ready. Because he had scored so high on language arts tests and because his projects had achieved grades at the top of the scale, he was able to choose his own reading and writing assignments for the rest of the year.

But Max's scores in math weren't high enough for him to achieve mastery in that subject. At a meeting a few days before, his parents, his teacher and Max discussed his math skills. Seeing a tutor two times per week hadn't helped him master the math standards. But now he had three options to help him improve: getting extra help after school, attending a Saturday class or going to an enrichment program during the summer. They decided that the summer program would help the most. In the meantime, his parents would help him.

"Look on page 43," Max's mother said. Max opened the book to that page, which showed a chart of mathematical equations to help students figure out how long it would take to get to different planets—and how much they would weigh once they got there. Max was fascinated by the chart. He weighed 75 pounds. But he could see with some quick calculations that he would weigh a lot more—or less—depending on the different gravity of each planet. "I'd weigh almost 200 pounds on Jupiter but less than 30 pounds on Mars!" Max said.

"I'll show this to the others working on the newspaper," he said. "We're supposed to meet after school tomorrow to talk about ideas for the next issue. Maybe we could print the chart as part of another article," he said.

"Not tomorrow afternoon. You won't have time," his mother said.

"Why not?" he asked.

Max's mother smiled. "Band practice. Your trumpet playing has improved so much that the head of the music department asked if you'd be interested in joining the band. If you do, the first practice is tomorrow."

"Yes!" Max said, pumping his fist in the air.

Reform Leadership.

Realign Connecticut's educational system for success.

Currently, organization and policy making for education are based on bureaucratic assumptions of hierarchy, centralized decision making, standardization and inspection. These characteristics limit individual discretion, depress creativity and foster stasis, not change.

For local school administrators, this model has produced ever-increasing constraints. Today, less bureaucracy is needed in order for schools and districts to invent, adapt and change to local conditions, guide activity, and encourage initiative and innovation to reform the state of public education.

Clarify the state's role in governing the education system.

Why This Recommendation Is Important

In a transformed system of education, the state has an important role to play. It must define the goals for the entire system, provide the technical assistance necessary and holding schools accountable for meeting those goals. The state must also create policies that ensure the equitable distribution of human and financial resources to guarantee that all students have the opportunity to meet the goals set by the state.

Actions Needed

|| Allow the Governor to appoint the Commissioner of Education with authority to provide educational leadership and fulfill statutory responsibilities, and have the Commissioner report directly to the Governor.

|| Redirect the efforts of the State Department of Education (SDE) to meet the most immediate needs of Connecticut's school districts.

|| Replace all instructional regulatory state mandates with ones that emphasize student learning outcomes.

|| Tie state funding to incentives for meeting and exceeding child learning outcomes.

Clearly define the role and responsibility of the Superintendent of Education in statute.

Why This Recommendation Is Important

Effective school and district leadership makes a positive difference in student achievement. If there is to be effective leadership in a learner-centered education system, there can be no ambiguity about who is responsible for what. Leaders must have authority commensurate with their responsibilities.

Actions Needed

|| Make the authority of the Superintendent of Education commensurate with responsibilities.

|| Put systemic efforts in place so that the school system can lead transformation.

|| Base evaluation of school systems not only on success in schooling but also on progress in leading transformation efforts.

|| Define the role of school boards so that they are solely focused on policy issues and hiring and evaluating the Superintendent.

|| Remove statutory limits on Superintendents' contracts.

Boost Quality.

Attract, train, develop and support new teachers and principals.

Without high-quality teachers and leaders, even the best-designed curriculum or most robust assessment system will not increase learning or achievement. In fact, there is increasing evidence that of all school resources, teachers have the greatest impact on student achievement. Therefore, the transformation of Connecticut's schools hinges on preparing, retaining and developing excellent teachers and leaders.

Recruit teachers and leaders who have the knowledge, skills and dispositions to transform education.

Why This Recommendation Is Important

As children come to school with increased learning and health needs, teachers and leaders are asked to perform an expanding array of tasks. These teachers and leaders, also known as "human capital," will take on increased importance as we work to make students' learning more rigorous and relevant.

We must tap the knowledge and skills of all capable individuals who are committed to transforming students' learning. In addition, we must improve human capital in our system by making substantial changes to school and district recruitment, preparation, retention and development. This systematic approach to improving human capital will result in enhanced learning and increased achievement for children.

Actions Needed

|| Develop multiple paths to teacher, school and district leader certification to reduce barriers to becoming an educator without lowering standards or responding to supply and demand fluctuations.

|| Grant certification to teachers and school and district leaders based on demonstrated competency, not on degrees earned.

|| Actively recruit and provide incentives to attract underrepresented populations to teaching and leadership positions.

Prepare teachers and leaders through forward-thinking programs that emphasize how to teach, learn and lead in a transformed system and assign them to positions that capitalize on their strengths.

Why This Recommendation Is Important

For too long, many educator preparation programs have failed to:

|| Equip teachers and leaders with the skills they need to prepare students for the complex demands of living in the 21st century.

|| Prepare teachers to meet the needs of a shifting population of students.

|| Assign personnel to positions based on skills and competencies.

In order to transform education in Connecticut, preparation programs must be adapted to meet the changing needs of society and the demands on teachers, classrooms and schools.

Actions Needed

|| Provide significant amount of clinical experiences for prospective teachers and principals in training.

|| Focus teacher preparation on richer instructional and leadership skills as well as on meeting the needs of children with diverse backgrounds.

|| Make sure training includes how to create conditions for high-quality instruction that results in children achieving standards.

|| Structure the first year in a teaching or leadership position as an internship with strong, consistent coaching by experienced professionals committed to transformation.

|| Make professional learning opportunities for teachers and school or district leaders part of their jobs. Configure schedules to give teachers time to collaborate with peers on student performance and share effective teaching or leadership practices.

|| Ensure that the state provides districts and schools with the working conditions and resources to support a transformed educational system. In particular, working conditions and resources must serve low-income children and should be on par with those in settings that serve higher-income peers.

|| Make sure teachers and education leaders receive competitive compensation and incentives in order to attract and retain talented individuals who are sought by other sectors.

|| Create incentives for teachers and school and district leaders who successfully work in systems that serve a high percentage of low-income children.

Retain quality teachers and leaders through mentoring, ongoing learning opportunities and appropriate compensation.

Why This Recommendation Is Important

The learning curve for new teachers and district leaders is considerable. Yet, mentoring for new teachers and leaders, which could reduce this learning curve, is often haphazard and provides few supports for novices. A strong program of mentoring and ongoing support would enable beginning teachers and leaders to become high-quality instructors more rapidly.

Teacher compensation should also be reviewed. For years, teachers have been recognized and rewarded for endurance, not effectiveness. To attract and retain individuals whose skills are valued, we must offer compensation that's not only competitive but also differentiated based on demonstrated skills, competencies and results.

Actions Needed

|| Structure first-year teaching and leadership positions as internships with strong, consistent coaching by experienced teachers and leaders committed to transformation.

|| Support professional learning and collaboration opportunities for teachers and school/district leaders to share effective teaching and leadership practices.

|| Link evaluations for professional educators to incentives for high performers and consequences for low performers.

|| Dismiss teachers and leaders whose performance is consistently poor—and transition these individuals out of education for the benefit of other districts and students.

|| Base reduction-in-force decisions for teachers or leaders on performance, student achievement and professional activity—not solely on seniority.

|| Expand opportunities for educators to have access to technology-based content, resources and tools where and when they need them.

Evaluate and supervise teachers and leaders to provide accurate information about their performance.

Why This Recommendation Is Important

Transforming education to a more learner-centered process will require that all educators perform at highly competent levels. Unfortunately, the current system of evaluation calls for infrequent observations, poor feedback from administrators and the absence of consequences. To exert the greatest influence on teaching and learning, observations and evaluations should: 1) be more frequent, 2) result in higher-quality feedback and 3) entail real consequences. Teachers and leaders who perform at high levels should be recognized and rewarded; those who don't should receive sanctions.

Actions Needed

|| Create a standards-based evaluation system for teachers and leaders that includes regular reviews of performance based on standards.

|| Tie evaluations directly to growth in student learning and the demonstration of professional skills.

|| Give peer review of performance a role in the evaluation systems for teachers and school and district leaders.

Revise tenure law to include a rigorous, standards-based review process more closely tied to student learning.

Why This Recommendation Is Important

In the current system, tenure is a lifetime contract that districts can terminate only if they can prove to an arbitration panel and judge that an educator is incompetent, immoral and/or insubordinate. The contracts of educators whose performance is competent but mediocre are difficult to terminate—and those educators remain in the classroom.

Pre-tenure years must include a standards-based performance appraisal conducted by a well-trained supervisor and peer evaluator. Tenure would then be granted based on high-level performance. Renewable contracts would give districts the opportunity to remove educators whose performance does not rise above the mediocre level.

Action Needed

|| Offer educators five-year contracts, which districts may or may not renew, after they show outstanding performance in child learning.

Take advantage of technology to advance professional learning.

Why This Recommendation Is Important

The importance of using technology to support personalized learning and motivate students continues to increase with each new class of students. Therefore, special attention must be given to all teachers and leaders to ensure that they are comfortable with and skilled in using technology.

Actions Needed

|| Expand opportunities for educators to have technology-based content, resources and tools where and when they need them.

|| Use social networking to enhance career-long learning for educators within and across schools.

|| Provide all learners with online access to effective teaching and better learning options, particularly in places where they are not otherwise available.

Involve Students and Parents.

Encourage parents, caregivers and community organizations to be partners in a child's education.

It is essential that parents remain engaged in their child's education. As stated earlier in this report, families play the most important role in children's lives. Any effective program needs to focus on the relationships among family, community members and school staff as well as on understanding and respect for families' needs, class and cultural differences.

Foster a partnership for success among parents, schools and communities.

Why This Recommendation Is Important

Independent research shows that meaningful involvement of all stakeholders has a positive impact on improved student learning.

Actions Needed

|| Direct resources and programmatic efforts to help families adopt effective strategies to support student learning.

|| Develop leaders (educators and non-educators) to help focus the work and coalesce resources.

|| Build infrastructure that frames and supports family involvement efforts through a variety of outreach strategies.

|| Solicit family reactions and perspectives.

|| Create structures that encourage family involvement.

Help parents and caregivers understand how they make a difference in a child's education.

Why This Recommendation Is Important

Parental understanding that high expectations and effort make a significant difference in a child's education is essential for success.

Actions Needed

|| Promote an understanding of the effects that a family's beliefs, self-efficiency, knowledge and perceived abilities have on their children's education.

|| Engage parents as partners in their children's education.

|| Create a mechanism in each community that collectively cares for and supports children.

Work with parents and adults to support high expectations for learning.

Why This Recommendation Is Important

Effective school-family connections prepare educators and non-educators to engage in two-way partnerships that remove barriers to purposeful family involvement while simultaneously creating opportunities to encourage and maintain family support for student learning.

Actions Needed

|| Utilize community to help families foster reading skills and produce literate children by grade three.

|| Help parents understand their options for educating their children.

|| Educate parents on the importance of high expectations and effort in producing educated students.

Leverage Technology.

Use technology to transform teaching and learning.

The implementation of technology in education has the potential to be one of the most powerful, dynamic forces to transform student learning and the quality of school systems.

Provide educators and students with equal access to technology.

Why This Recommendation Is Important

The use of technology in teaching and learning can be an important factor in engaging children—and transforming education. So equity of access to technology resources should be a requirement of any school, district and state.

Actions Needed

|| Develop technological infrastructures in schools and communities to support 24/7, anywhere/anytime learning, a diversity of platforms and operating systems, and students using their own devices.

|| Ensure children and educators have broadband access to the Internet and adequate wireless connectivity both in and out of school.

|| Build knowledge and resources for evolving an infrastructure for technology-supported education with updated standards that will support robust learning.

|| Eliminate barriers in the education system that inhibit leveraging technology to improve learning.

Integrate technology throughout school districts, facilities, leadership and management.

Why This Recommendation Is Important

With adequate, state-of-the-art technology, school systems will operate more efficiently, effectively and safely.

Actions Needed

|| Provide on-demand access to learning experiences, resources, information, community systems and services 24/7.

|| Leverage online environments that offer multiple opportunities for two-way communication, feedback and collaboration with family members and community.

|| Develop plans to upgrade infrastructure to support technology-facilitated learning.

|| Use technology to keep facilities safe and manage energy utilization.

Continue the Transformation Process.

Make education transformation a fluid, continuous process.

Transformation is not a single event at a specific point in time. Rather, it is a continuous process that may be punctuated by breakthrough events. Therefore, there must be flexibility in our school systems to allow for constant creative thinking about how to respond to change and improve ways to meet outcomes.

Keep the educational systems flexible to meet changing needs and expectations.

Why This Recommendation Is Important

The pace of change in today's society will continue to reshape the understanding and skills students will need to be successful. Greater flexibility will allow school systems to respond to changing expectations and conditions, and help continuously improve student learning.

Actions Needed

At the state level:

|| Modify regulations and statutes to encourage and reward innovation in improving learning outcomes and opportunities for children.

|| Appropriate funds for R&D to support innovation in public education to reduce the achievement gaps related to poverty and globalization as well as to raise learning outcomes.

|| Waive statutes and regulations for an extended period (three-five years) based on promising proposals to foster innovation and increase child outcomes.

At the district level:

|| Develop streamlined mechanisms for teachers and administrators to propose and receive approval for innovative practices that have the potential to improve student outcomes.

|| Offer incentives to promote continuing transformation to improve student outcomes.

|| Develop an R&D fund that is a minimum of one percent of the school district budget and is governed by a group that includes the Board of Education and representatives of stakeholders including teachers, administrators and parents.

|| Upgrade technology and learning resources as needed to remain current.

Appendix

This appendix contains all the recommendations of the Educational Transformation Project. The background and narrative can be found and downloaded from the project website.

RAISE THE BAR

Guiding Principles
- All students are capable of learning at high levels.
- Students should graduate college and/or be career ready.
- Students should have knowledge and skills to compete in a global economy.

Key Issue 1: In a transformed school system, Connecticut needs to develop more robust curricular standards that are aligned with instructional and assessment systems, focused on higher-order thinking, benchmarked against globally competitive or established international standards, and aligned with the skills, knowledge and dispositions required for success in postsecondary settings.

Recommendation 1: Connecticut must establish ambitious, focused and coherent education standards in all major disciplines, language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, world languages and the arts, that are shared across the system and aligned with major assessments and instructional systems.

Recommendation 2: Connecticut must benchmark Connecticut's educational standards to globally competitive or established international standards to ensure that our children will be globally competitive.

Recommendation 3: Public school systems and postsecondary institutions in Connecticut must establish agreement on the standards for a child to be college/career ready.

Recommendation 4: High school assessments must measure child progress on college/career readiness standards.

Recommendation 5: Postsecondary admissions decisions must use the adopted readiness standards.

Recommendation 6: Professional development for pre-K-12 must address effective teaching of college/career readiness standards.

Key Issue 2: Children in Connecticut's schools must demonstrate the key knowledge, skills and dispositions to prosper as individuals in a transforming society and contribute to the future success of their communities, the state, and the nation and world.

Recommendation 7: Schooling must increase children's abilities to think flexibly, critically and creatively by consistently requiring students to complete complex, open-ended tasks.

Recommendation 8: Schooling must increase children's motivation and capacity to learn deeply by consistently providing authentic, real-world learning experiences.

Recommendation 9: Schooling must strengthen children's global literacy by dedicating a significant portion of the curriculum to learning about global cultures, geography, histories and languages. Schooling must ensure all students exposure/competence in two languages.

Recommendation 10: Schooling must increase children's capacity to learn and work across dimensions of difference by teaching them about the perspectives held by other cultures and how to appreciate multiple points of view.

Recommendation 11: Schools must strengthen children's abilities to work productively with others by teaching them inter- and intrapersonal skills, including communication, conflict resolution and problem-solving skills.

Recommendation 12: Schools must capitalize on advances in social media and technology to reach a broader portion of the child population and teach children to use these in responsible, productive and creative ways.

MAKE IT PERSONAL

Guiding Principles
- Child-centered approaches to education are characterized by a focus on learning and are driven by the knowledge of developmental trajectories, skills, interests, goals and needs of children.
- The full range of learning experiences—at all times of the day, week and year—are harnessed to provide learning opportunities and meet the educational needs and interests of all children. Use of time is flexible.
- Schools provide a variety of standards-based, applied, multi-disciplinary learning opportunities for children inside and outside of school. These opportunities may include project-based learning, internships, experiential education, career technical education, peer learning and apprenticeships.
- An effective child-centered learning environment embraces rigor in the form of high standards and multiple, valid assessments of children's mastery in regard to these expectations.
- Progress is primarily based on acquisition of competencies, rather than a children's age, hours on task or credits. The current configuration of schools, where pace and progress typically occur in grade-level lockstep, and the focus is on teaching facts and procedures will not result in the depth and breadth of knowledge necessary for success.
- With a focus on learning, as opposed to teaching, educators take on the roles of facilitators and advisors in addition to content experts.
- Schools have a personalized culture that fosters strong and respectful relationships amongst children and adults. Adults understand children's cultural and social contexts, know them well and often work with children across multiple years in advisory capacities. Children feel responsible for their own learning and are increasingly able to assess their skills and learning needs.
- Technology can open up new avenues for child-centered learning.

Source: Nellie Mae Education Foundation, Emerging Principles of Student-Centered Learning, 2010.

Key Issue 1: A student's progress is based on demonstrated competency, not seated time.

Recommendation 13: Students progress to more advanced work upon demonstration of learning by applying specific skills and content.

Recommendation 14: Children should advance through school and ultimately graduate based on their demonstration of essential knowledge, skills and dispositions, not on the time they have spent in classes.

Recommendation 15: School systems must offer children various forms of support to advance at their own pace to meet established competencies.

Recommendation 16: Time should be the variable and learning the constant. It will take different amounts of time for different students to master the skills and content.

Key Issue 2: Connecticut needs to offer children multiple routes through which children learn essential knowledge and dispositions.

Recommendation 17: Students' learning pathways should be determined by a combination of what a student needs to know and be able to do, learning style and student interests.

Recommendation 18: School systems should create multiple pathways that enable children to master essential content and skills. Therefore, school systems should be constructed and organized to offer diversity and choice in learning pathways.

Recommendation 19: Students should work on levels that are appropriately challenging.

Recommendation 20: The state, districts and others should develop and implement learning resources that use technology and embody design principles from the learning sciences.

Recommendation 21: The state, districts and others should develop and implement learning resources that exploit the flexibility and power of technology to reach all learners anytime, anywhere and with anyone.

Recommendation 22: Use advances in learning sciences and technology to enhance learning, and develop, adopt and evaluate new methodologies with the potential to inspire and enable all learners to excel.

Recommendation 23: School, district, and state policies and regulations should be conducive to technology-based teaching and learning initiatives. Structural barriers to implementation of technology-based learning should be eliminated.

Recommendation 24: Children must receive instruction in how technology can enhance the learning experience while also being wary of its potential threats. This includes being responsible, not only at school but also at home, and having lessons in digital footprints, illegal downloading and plagiarizing, and understanding what is okay to share and what should be kept private. In short, children should understand the components of being good digital citizens.

Recommendation 25: Acceptance of technology-based learning toward graduation or for CEUs must be based on assessments of whether student or teacher learned the defined outcomes. Control of inputs such as certification and minimum time (Carnegie units) and CEUs should be eliminated.

START WITH EARLY CHILDHOOD

Guiding Principles
- Responsibility for children's readiness lies not with children, but with the adults who care for them and the systems that support them.
- Families play the most important role in young children's lives.
- The first five years are a critical development period.
- All domains of development are highly interrelated.
- Each child has an individual trajectory of development within parameters.
- Dispositions for learning and executive functioning skills must be cultivated in the early years.
- The achievement gap will not be reduced significantly unless the literacy gap during the first five years is seriously addressed. The literacy (and numeracy) gap is largely due to lack of background knowledge—exposure to experiences and vocabulary development.

Recommendation 26: The state legislature should ensure a simplified, coordinated system for supporting Early Childhood Development and Education.

A) Eliminate overlapping oversight and support of early childhood education at state and local levels.

B) Provide transparent and understandable information about the quality of services and programs to parents and the community.

C) Provide models and training to local communities on effective transitions to kindergarten.

D) Provide guidance and support to local communities in raising the quality of early childhood programs and services.

Recommendation 27: The school systems should expand and strengthen partnerships with families through or with community organizations and schools to focus on children's learning with an emphasis on oral language development.

A) Early education, care settings and schools should link family engagement efforts to children's language, emergent literacy, reading and numeracy.

B) Capitalize on and strengthen the role of community libraries and other community resources in promoting family literacy practices.

C) Provide continuing education to parents to support their child's language, literacy, numeracy and executive function skills development.

D) Use community leaders as conduits for helping families build children's language, literacy and numeracy skills.

Recommendation 28: The state should require programs, care providers and medical professionals serving babies, preschoolers and school-age children to assess language and reading development as part of developmental screening to identify children in need.

A) Healthcare clinics and practices, and early education programs should implement initial screening and ongoing assessment of language and reading skills.

B) School districts must have a pre-K to grade three early literacy (including language), numeracy and executive function skills assessment system.

C) Create a statewide database to track children's history, including development and their program enrollment. The limitations of HIPAA should be modified or addressed to allow this sharing of information in a single database.

Recommendation 29: The state should strengthen professional education to increase adults' capacity to assess and support children's language development.

A) Provide early education and care providers and healthcare professionals with training focused on supporting children's language, reading, numeracy and executive function skills development. Training should require mastery of information and skills.

B) Provide multiyear early childhood workforce professional development plan to ensure compliance with state law and selected national certification programs.

C) Provide health, mental health and education consultation to preschool programs to enhance the skills of directors and teachers for meeting the comprehensive needs of children.

Recommendation 30: Bring language-rich, challenging, developmentally appropriate and engaging reading and mathematics curricula into early education and care settings, as well as pre-K to grade three classrooms.

A) The state should provide ongoing guidance on curriculum selection and use in early education and care settings, as well as pre-K to grade three classrooms.

B) The state should require principals and program administrators to understand children's language, reading, numeracy and executive function skills to strengthen their instructional leadership.

C) Accountability for language-rich, challenging, developmentally appropriate and engaging reading and mathematics curricula should be linked to licensure and ratings programs.

D) Districts should provide schools that are ready to work with children based on their knowledge, skills and dispositions as they enter school.

E) For children who are not demonstrating sufficient progress, the school district must provide supplemental instruction that matches the curriculum.

F) The district should align early learning programs and services with integrated K-12 strategies to strengthen literacy, numeracy and academics.

Recommendation 31: The state should provide or reallocate funds, and alter policy to ensure programs are delivered with sufficient intensity and measurable success in children's language, reading and numeracy.

The availability of preschools and the quality of the preschool experience is a critical factor in reducing the achievement gap and ensuring that all children can benefit from their educational experiences.

A) Ensure fiscal support for high-quality preschools for all three- and four-year-olds.

B) Provide a challenging all-day kindergarten program to all children.

C) Support local communities in developing birth-through-age-eight local councils for planning and monitoring early childhood services.

MAKE IT PERSONAL BY DESIGN

Guiding Principles
- Mastery of learning objectives and not seat time (i.e., the amount of time spent in class) should be the major criterion for success in school.
- Children learn at different rates and thus require different amounts of time to achieve the same learning objectives.
- Significant learning can and does occur outside of school and outside of the school day and year.
- To meet the needs of and be appropriate for all students and all communities, we will need to develop multiple organizational models for schools.

Key Issue 1: American education continues to reflect "assembly-line learning" in which all children are expected to learn in the same way as well as at the same time and in the same amount of time. The length of the school year and school day limit the availability of school resources and inhibit individualization of learning.

Recommendation 32: Access to school resources should be available year-round and for an expanded period of time each day.

Recommendation 33: Flexible work schedules should be established to allow different teachers to work varying numbers of days in a school year and at varying times during the day.

Recommendation 34: The design of school buildings should allow for year-round instruction and flexible instructional groupings.

Recommendation 35: The school year should be flexible enough to allow students to have varying amounts of time to achieve proficiency of basic skills and mastery of key understandings before they move to the next level of learning.

Recommendation 36: Schools should accept credits for learning experiences that take place outside of school as meeting school learning requirements.

Key Issue 2: Success in school is more likely to be measured by time spent in school rather than by the amount a student has learned.

Recommendation 37: Students in schools should be organized primarily based on skill proficiency and mastery of key understandings.

Recommendation 38: Completion of schooling should be based on skill and mastery of key understandings rather than on a predefined number of years.

Recommendation 39: The Carnegie unit, which is based on time spent in class (i.e., year or semester), should be replaced by a system that is based on mastery of understanding and proficiency of skills.

RETOOL ASSESSMENTS & ACCOUNTABILITY

Guiding Principles
- Assessment can improve learning when it is individualized and identifies a child's strengths and weaknesses.
- Assessment literacy and the effective use of data from assessments are key professional skills for teachers. Assessment results can and should inform instruction, helping teachers to identify what works, what doesn't work and what needs to be retaught differently.
- Assessment can be an effective motivator for children.
- Assessment should include children's self-assessment of their own learning progress.
- Assessment should be ongoing, and learning progress should be analyzed over time.
- Assessment of children should ensure fairness, including multiple measures that reflect a diverse student population.
- Assessment should provide as broad a view of children's skills and understanding as possible.
- Accountability in a learning system provides useful, actionable feedback regarding both the individual child's progress and the system's ability to achieve its goals of high-quality education for all children.
- Students do not all learn at the same rate and thus should have the opportunity to demonstrate mastery when they are ready, not once a year at "testing time," and should have multiple opportunities to demonstrate mastery.
- Good accountability systems are transparent, clear and tailored to different uses.
- A good accountability system communicates learning progress with equity.
- An accountability system should include a system of rewards and incentives as well as sanctions.

Key Issue 1: Assessment should be ongoing to provide continuing information about what a child has and has not mastered. With this information, a teacher can modify instruction, and a child can focus on that which has not yet been learned. However, assessment often results in a single letter or number grade, which does not provide feedback that will result in improving understanding or mastery, and extraneous factors (e.g., attendance, class participation and effort) are often included in the grade. Also, classroom assessment has traditionally consisted of selected response questions (e.g., multiple choice, true/false, etc.), which usually measure lower-level thinking. Assessment usually occurs at the end of a unit of instruction rather than throughout the instruction.

Recommendation 40: A variety of assessment opportunities should be used throughout schooling to measure the variety of ways children learn.

Recommendation 41: Formative assessment should be used for informing children of their progress on an ongoing basis during the learning process so that they can have the opportunity to reflect on and evaluate their own work, and then to manage and adjust their own learning. Formative assessment also provides teachers with the information needed to monitor and adjust their instruction as necessary and desirable.

Recommendation 42: Teachers should use performance assessment to determine children's progress in developing higher-level thinking skills and to assess their ability to transfer skills to real-life situations.

Recommendation 43: Assessment should occur whenever it is deemed that an individual child is ready rather than having all children in a class assessed at the same time.

Recommendation 44: Technology-based classroom assessments should become the norm to provide quicker, if not immediate,

results for children. This would facilitate their self-monitoring of their learning and help them to recognize and respond to their strengths and weaknesses. Technology-based assessments would also provide teachers with ongoing data, allowing for more immediate adjustments to instruction when needed.

Recommendation 45: Standards-based grading should be part of classroom assessment and reporting. Standards-based grading will provide information on child progress toward a number of learning targets that are aligned with established curriculum standards. With this information, the teacher would be able to adjust instruction to respond to weaknesses in child learning, and children would know where they need to focus their study if they are to achieve understanding and mastery.

Key Issue 2: Teachers should have training in developing effective assessments, interpreting assessment results and using technology-based assessment; however, teacher preparation programs commonly provide minimal, if any, focus on assessment.

Recommendation 46: Significant instruction in developing and interpreting both formative and summative assessments should be required in all teacher preparation programs. Success in teacher preparation courses should be determined using exemplary formative and performance-based assessments. The efficacy of instruction in assessment should be a standard for approval of teacher preparation programs.

Recommendation 47: Assessment should be a major, ongoing focus of teacher professional learning activities with extended time provided for teachers to work together to develop formative and summative assessments, establish consistency in the evaluation of assessments, interpret assessment results and use assessment results to inform instruction.

Recommendation 48: The state and districts should build the capacity of educators, education institutions and developers to use technology to improve assessment materials and processes for both formative and summative uses.

Recommendation 49: The state should offer school districts an effective and easy-to-use assessment data system that would provide teachers with timely access to assessment results, assistance in analyzing such data and opportunity to communicate the meaning of the data to children and parents. Such a data system should establish basic, uniform data elements and should allow districts to enhance the system by adding data elements.

Recommendation 50: A major portion of state-mandated testing should be performance-based assessments, which will more likely measure depth of understanding and problem-solving skills than selected response questions.

Recommendation 51: Independent research should be established to analyze the efficacy of the design of standardized tests, ensuring the validity and fairness of the tests themselves and the reliability of test scoring.

Recommendation 52: Teachers should have substantial involvement in the design and scoring of state assessments. This would increase teacher understanding of and commitment to state testing, and ensure that the testing reflects the content standards that undergird their teaching.

Recommendation 53: Parents, policy makers and the public at large should be provided with a clear understanding of what specific tests do and do not measure. This would help to alleviate the drawing of broad-brush judgments about individual children, teachers, schools and districts based on a single measure of success.

Key Issue 3: NCLB has resulted in an accountability system that is punitive and fails to recognize and reward success. It is primarily focused on year-to-year standardized test results and fails to consider other key factors that greatly impact the efficacy of schools and districts. This leads to comparisons of differing cohorts of students rather than the improvement of the same cohort of students over time.

The accountability system does not take into account other key factors that impact school and district effectiveness, such as instruction, leadership, resources, and parental involvement and support. It also does not address progress or lack of progress in reducing the achievement gap in the state, a major state goal.

Similarly, accountability in districts is often narrowly defined and lacks consistency in implementation.

Recommendation 54: In collaboration with stakeholders, the state should develop and adopt a comprehensive statewide accountability system based on clearly established goals for a transformed public education.

Recommendation 55: Academic accountability should be based on a variety of indicators that represent a balanced education, including the four core disciplines—language arts, mathematics, social studies and science.

Recommendation 56: School accountability should be based on longitudinal assessment results of learner cohorts more than on a year-to-year comparison of different cohorts. Accountability should also be based partially on success of students at the next level. Therefore, elementary school accountability should be based partially on student success at the middle school. Middle school accountability should be based partially on student success at the high school. High school accountability should be based partially on student success in college or career.

Recommendation 57: The state accountability system should include rewards for schools based on increases in student performance and reductions in the achievement gap.

Recommendation 58: School districts should develop and implement an accountability system based on district education goals that are aligned with state education goals and a state accountability system, and that include clearly defined measures of school district, school and student success.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Guiding Principles can be found on the NextEd website

Key Issues:

1. School accountability should reflect the education of the whole child and should include measures of student learning and growth. State assessment programs should not rely primarily on selected-response testing but should focus on performance-based, constructed-response assessments, which are more likely to assess higher-level thinking skills and concepts.

2. If the system is actually to improve and be accountable to students, accountability should be focused on ensuring the competence of teachers and leaders, the quality of instruction and the adequacy of resources as well as the capacity of the system to trigger improvements.

3. Determining school accountability should be based on longitudinal assessment results of learner cohorts more than year-to-year comparisons of different cohorts.

4. Accountability should be based partially on success of students at the next level. Therefore, elementary school accountability should be based partially on student success at the middle school. Middle school accountability should be based partially on student success at the high school. High school accountability should be based partially on student success in college or career.

5. Accountability should be competency based, grounded in the research that indicates what skills and knowledge students must have to be successful.

6. Accountability should include teaching and leadership as well as student outcomes.

7. Accountability should produce high levels of learning, achievement and improved outcomes for all students by encouraging high-quality instruction for every student in every classroom every day.

8. Accountability should lead to high-reliability systems that focus relentlessly on ensuring high instructional quality while reducing variability in the quality of instruction for every student. (OECD, 2011)

State

Recommendation 59: In collaboration with stakeholders, the state should develop and adopt a comprehensive statewide accountability system based on clearly established goals for a transformed public education.

Recommendation 60: The state should develop a reasonable accountability data system for pre-K through 20 (pre-K through graduate school) students that allows for flexibility at the school and district level. The system should connect different databases as necessary, such as staff, students and standards.

Recommendation 61: Accountability should incorporate progress or lack thereof in reducing the achievement gap in schools or districts.

Recommendation 62: Accountability should be based on a variety of indicators that represent a balanced education, including the four core discipline—language arts, mathematics, social studies and science.

Recommendation 63: The accountability system should include performance tasks that allow the measurement of high-level thinking skills.

District

Recommendation 64: School districts should develop and implement an accountability system based on district education goals that are aligned with state education goals and a state accountability system, and that include clearly defined measures of school district, school and student success.

Recommendation 65: An accountability system should reward schools based on increases in student performance and reductions in the achievement gap.

OFFER MORE OPTIONS

Guiding Principles

- Coherent, efficient state governance of education is needed to affect lasting educational change.

- The gap between our idealistic goals for education and the reality of schooling must be eliminated.

- The school must be the organizational unit responsible for delivering high-quality services for all students.

- District administrators should have the flexibility to allocate the majority of resources. This will result in more flexible and efficient systems of resource allocation.

- The funding system for education must be designed so that predictability and stability of funding are top priorities.

- Districts must have the flexibility to organize in order to take advantage of economies of scale. Districts must have the ability to offer regional services so that they can distribute fixed costs across an entire region.

Key Issue 1: The state's role in the governance system needs to be clarified. The state has an important role to play in a transformed system of education. The state must define the goals for the entire system, provide the technical assistance necessary and hold schools accountable for meeting those goals. The state must also create policies that ensure the equitable distribution of human and financial resources to guarantee that all students have the opportunity to meet the goals set by the state.

Recommendation 66: The Commissioner should be hired by and report directly to the Governor.

Recommendation 67: The efforts of the State Department of Education (SDE) should be redirected to meet the most immediate needs of the state and mediate between federal mandates and local schools. The primary roles of the SDE should be:

- Managing the state's relationship with the federal government

- Facilitating and supporting innovation throughout the state by creating incentives for transformation and providing research-based professional support to local districts

- Developing a broad range of valid and reliable student assessments

- Creating, collecting and managing a statewide pre-K through 20 data system that allows for valid and reliable assessment of local educational outcomes

- Creating the infrastructure to support knowledge-sharing networks among educators

- Supporting the creation of "wraparound" student services by coordinating with other state and local social service agencies

- Leveraging economies of scale to develop innovative solutions to the state's most pressing educational problems that local districts can easily access so that the economic conditions of local districts will not stand in the way of children's access to high-quality schools. Examples include online credit recovery programs, dropout prevention activities, regional SPED and ELL programs and statewide curricula.

- Creating an office of assessment and data management that can operate as an independent agency.

Recommendation 68: All instructional regulatory state mandates should be abolished and replaced by mandated student learning outcomes.

Recommendation 69: State funding mechanisms should include incentives tied to meeting and exceeding mandated student-learning outcomes.

Local School Districts in a Transformed System

Key Issue 2: District size and performance must be addressed in the current era of fiscal contraction. It is clear that school district leaders will need to continue to improve student achievement without increasing the number and amount of resources. While economists suggest there is only a tenuous relationship between resources, district/school size and student achievement (Hanushek, 2008), practical experience suggests otherwise. Economic formulas simply cannot measure all of the qualitative differences in school systems that contribute indirectly to students' academic achievement. Research in the area of special education, for example, has provided evidence that local districts can reduce some of the costs of educational services through consolidating resources across schools (McLaughlin,1996). Other research on district consolidation suggests that for most midsize school districts, individual costs may not outweigh the economic benefits of district consolidation (Duncombe & Yinger, 2001). For very small, rural (300-1,200 students) districts, however, there appear to be consistent benefits and cost savings due to economies of scale that can be created through consolidation (Duncombe & Yinger, 2001).

Recommendation 70: Connecticut should establish a minimum size for local school districts. The minimum size should be such that no district is too small to be able to provide a high-quality education to all of its students or to be able to achieve economies of scale without sacrificing quality.

Recommendation 71: Local school districts should be governed by a board of directors made up of elected representatives of district residents, with responsibilities clearly stipulated and limited by state statute, accountable to the Commissioner of Education for meeting state student learning mandates.

Recommendation 72: Local school districts should be fiscally independent in order to keep the lines of accountability clear and for citizens to have a direct connection to the budget development and approval process.

Recommendation 73: The staff of the local school districts should be led by a Superintendent of Education who is responsible for the entire educational enterprise, specifically for: Political Leadership, Management and Operations, Funding and Supervision of Instructional Leaders.

The Superintendent of Education would have expertise in leadership and management in order to meet the political, financial and instructional needs of the district. Because leading a local school district requires a combination of skills, the State Commissioner of Education should provide a broad range of licensing options for qualified candidates.

Resource Allocation in a Transformed System

Key Issue 3: Resources must be allocated equitably.

We propose a student-based funding system with equalization. Weights would be assigned according to poverty, English language learner status, special education and school level. These proposals are based on the assumption that there will be a minimum size established for local school districts. This would facilitate a more equitable distribution of resources at the local level and enable more stable, longer-term planning at the district and school level. The formula would be based on population and poverty indicators for the region as a whole. The formula would include all state education funding, including such items as priority schools and any other targeted funding.

Recommendation 74: The state should support at least 55 percent of the total cost of public education.

Recommendation 75: Local school districts must be granted taxing authority.

Recommendation 76: Parental choice of schools should be funded equitably.

REFORM LEADERSHIP

Guiding Principles can be found on the NextEd website

Recommendation 77: The role and responsibility of the Superintendent of Education should be clearly defined in state statutes. The authority of the superintendent has to be commensurate with responsibilities.

If there is to be effective leadership in the effort to transform schooling to a learner-centered system, there can be no ambiguity as to who is responsible for what. Those in leadership positions need to be empowered to meet their responsibilities.

The statutory specifications regarding the position of Superintendent of Education must include the following.

A) The Superintendent answers to the district board.

B) The board makes decisions regarding policy matters, the annual budget and the hiring, supervision and evaluation of the Superintendent and nothing else.

C) The board can contract with the Superintendent for more than three years to increase the stability of leadership.

If there is to be effective leadership in the effort to transform schooling, there must be coherence in the alignment of the authority and responsibility in a district. In addition, the board must be restricted in its activities to only those responsibilities that are related to the board's role as the representative body for the community that is served by the district. The Superintendent must have the discretion to lead and manage the district in accordance with the goals that have been set by the board for the district. Finally, effective leadership must have continuity and not be adversely affected by statutory limits. Without continuity of effective leadership, systemic district improvement is extremely difficult to achieve.

Recommendation 78: Systemic efforts need to be in place for the development of the capacity of school systems and school leaders to lead transformation efforts.

For schooling to be transformed, those who lead school systems and schools will have to lead transformation efforts while handling day-to-day issues at the same time. This is akin to renovating a house while living in it. There is little in the preparation programs for school systems and school leaders that prepare them for this experience.

Recommendation 79: The evaluation of school systems and school leaders must be based on their success in leading transformation efforts as well as on their success in maintaining the provision of schooling. Leaders will be less likely to lead transformation efforts unless their performance will be based on how well they meet this responsibility.

Recommendation 80: When principals and teachers share leadership, teachers' working relationships are stronger, and student achievement is higher. Schools and districts should support both formal and informal leadership positions through a variety of incentives and professional learning opportunities.

BOOST QUALITY

Guiding Principles can be found on the NextEd website

Key Issue 1: The Connecticut educational system needs to recruit teachers and leaders to teaching, school leadership and district leadership positions who have the knowledge, skills and dispositions to transform the educational system.

Recommendation 81: Connecticut should develop multiple paths to teacher and school and district leader certification to reduce barriers to becoming an educator without lowering standards or responding to supply and demand fluctuations. In line with a transformed system for K-12 students, the state should grant certification to teachers and school and district leaders based on demonstrated competency, not on seat time.

Recommendation 82: Connecticut should actively recruit and provide incentives to attract underrepresented populations to teaching and leadership positions. Given Connecticut's achievement gap, attracting minorities to teaching and leadership roles must be a priority.

Key Issue 2: The Connecticut educational system needs to prepare teachers and leaders through forward-thinking programs that emphasize how to teach, learn and lead in a transformed system, and assign teachers and leaders to positions that capitalize on their strengths.

Recommendation 83: The preparation of teachers and leaders should guarantee a focus on richer and deeper instructional or leadership skills, and include more experiences working in a school setting. Candidates should participate in guided apprenticeships or internships with master teachers or leaders in their first year on the job.

Recommendation 84: The preparation of teachers, school leaders and district leaders must include more robust training focused on meeting the needs of students with diverse (broadly defined) backgrounds.

Recommendation 85: The preparation of school and district leaders should include training in how to create the conditions for high-quality instruction that result in all students meeting established standards.

Recommendation 86: The preparation of teachers, school leaders and district leaders should include in-depth training in how to analyze various forms of data and how to develop a variety of assessments.

Recommendation 87: School and district leaders should think more strategically about assigning personnel to positions that capitalize on their strengths.

Recommendation 88: K-12 education leaders should develop a stronger link with higher education so that pre- and in-service professional learning is based on the knowledge and skills that educators need to perform at competent levels.

Recommendation 89: District leaders should develop systems to organize and facilitate teachers' and school leaders' efforts to support child success via this competency-based model.

Recommendation 90: Preparation programs should include extensive clinical experience as well as the knowledge and skills to develop and maintain successful organizations.

Recommendation 91: The school district should balance teacher support and accountability to ensure effective and consistent implementation of evaluation systems.

Recommendation 92: Developing school and school system leadership should be a district and state priority. The state should support exemplary leadership development programs. Preparation programs should be required to publish the number of graduates annually, the number of graduates who obtain positions and other related outcome data. The state should decertify programs that are ineffective.

Key Issue 3: Districts and schools need to retain teachers and leaders through initial mentoring and ongoing support, ongoing professional learning opportunities, opportunities to assume greater or different responsibilities over time, and compensating teachers and leaders in ways that reflect their contributions to the system as well as their growth in terms of knowledge, skills and work habits.

Recommendation 93: The first year in a teaching or leadership role should be structured as an internship with strong, consistent coaching by experienced teachers or leaders committed to transformation.

Recommendation 94: Professional learning opportunities for teachers and school or district leaders should be supported as an expected part of their jobs. School and district leaders should configure schedules to support extended blocks of time dedicated to teacher or leader collaboration. Collaboration should focus on observing and discussing effective teaching or leadership practice, and analyzing student performance with colleagues. This must include collaborative time to analyze student work and plan for instruction. The structure of the day and school year will need to change to make this possible.

Recommendation 95: The state should grant professional learning credit based on demonstrated competency, not on seat time.

Recommendation 96: Districts should develop leadership roles and opportunities to offer teachers and leaders new or different responsibilities as they progress in their careers.

Recommendation 97: The state should ensure that districts and schools possess the working conditions and resources to support a transformed educational system. The state should make a particular effort to ensure that the working conditions and resources in settings serving low-income children are equal to those in settings serving their higher-income peers.

Recommendation 98: The state and districts should compensate teachers and school and district leaders at a level that is competitive with other skilled professions in order to attract and retain individuals whose talents are sought by other sectors. This involves offering incentives for high performance.

Recommendation 99: The state and districts should create incentives for teachers and school and district leaders who successfully work in systems serving high percentages of low-income students.

Key Issue 4: Districts and schools need to evaluate and supervise teachers and leaders to provide individuals and the system with clear and accurate information about individuals' strengths and weaknesses, about how they should improve and about whether their performance merits rewards or intervention and, potentially, dismissal.

Recommendation 100: Evaluation systems for professional educators should be standards-based across all curriculum areas. This requires systemic and ongoing research and development, and regular reviews to update performance standards.

Recommendation 101: Teachers', school leaders' and district leaders' evaluations should be tied to growth in student learning and to the demonstration of professional skills, continuous professional learning to improve practice and active engagement in professional responsibilities.

Recommendation 102: Peer review of performance should play a role in evaluation systems for teachers and school and district leaders.

Recommendation 103: A rigorous evaluation system for professional educators should be linked to incentives for high-performing teachers and leaders and consequences for low-performing ones.

Recommendation 104: Districts should move to dismiss teachers and leaders whose performance is consistently poor. To the extent possible, districts should transition these individuals out of education for the benefit of other districts and their students.

Recommendation 105: When a reduction in force is required for teachers or leaders, seniority must not be the sole determinant. Reduction in force should be based on performance, student achievement and professional activity as well as on seniority.

Key Issue 5: The state needs to revise the tenure law to include a rigorous, standards-based review process that is more tightly connected to student learning.

Recommendation 106: The state should revise tenure for professional educators. After educators show outstanding performance resulting in student learning, they will receive five-year contracts that are renewable based on performance. Districts will have the option of not renewing these contracts based on judgments concerning performance.

Key Issue 6: Professional Learning and Technology: The importance of using technology to support personalized learning and to provide a motivating learning environment continues to increase with each new class of students. Therefore, special attention must be paid to guarantee that all teachers and leaders are comfortable with and skilled in the use of technology for these purposes.

Recommendation 107: Expand opportunities for educators to have access to technology-based content, resources and tools where and when they need them.

Recommendation 108: Leverage the concept of social networking technologies and platforms to enhance communities of practice that provide career-long personal learning opportunities for educators within and across schools, preservice preparation and in-service education institutions, and professional organizations.

Recommendation 109: Use technology to provide all learners with online access to effective teaching and better learning opportunities and options, especially in places where they are not otherwise available.

Recommendation 110: Provide preservice and in-service educators with technology-enhanced professional learning experiences to increase their digital literacy and enable them to create compelling assignments for children that improve learning, assessment and instructional practices.

Recommendation 111: Provide professional learning that can support using technology as part of the learning process.

INVOLVE PARENTS AND CHILDREN

Note: The term "parent" is used in this document to represent the adults in a child's life that support a child throughout his or her education.

Recommendation 112: Districts should direct resources and programmatic efforts to help families adopt effective strategies to support student learning by:

A) Developing leaders (educators and non-educators) who help focus the work and gather resources.

B) Building infrastructure that frames and supports family involvement efforts.

C) Implementing continuous cycles of recruiting and retention.

D) Gathering family reactions and perspectives.

E) Integrating a variety of outreach strategies.

Recommendation 113: Create structures, policy, leadership, procedures, processes and aligned resources that encourage family involvement.

Recommendation 114: Promote an understanding of the effect that beliefs, self-efficacy, knowledge and perceived abilities have on families to help them support their children's education.

Recommendation 115: Create in each community a mechanism and structure to care for and support children in the community. The system should be seamless from the point of view of children and families.

Recommendation 116: Give parents choices for educating their children at various stages of their education.

Recommendation 117: Make sure the community works with all families from the birth of each child in order to communicate importance of the family role in producing literate children by grade three.

Recommendation 118: Give parents opportunities for continuing education so that they understand the role of high expectations and effort in producing educated students.

LEVERAGE TECHNOLOGY

Guiding Principles can be found on the NextEd website

Recommendation 119: Technological infrastructures in schools and communities should support "anywhere, anytime" learning as well as being able to manage diversity of platforms and operating systems. This will allow students to use their own devices in school.

Recommendation 120: Ensure that children and educators have broadband access to the Internet and adequate wireless connectivity both in and out of schools.

Recommendation 121: The state should build state and district capacity (knowledge and resources) for evolving an infrastructure for learning. Capacity should be based on continually updated standards for an infrastructure that will support robust learning.

Recommendation 122: The state and local school districts should eliminate barriers in the education system that inhibit leveraging technology to improve learning, starting with our current practice of organizing child and educator learning around seat time instead of the demonstration of competencies.

Recommendation 123: Districts should provide on-demand access to learning experiences, resources, information and services 24/7. This should include linkages to other community systems.

Recommendation 124: Districts must leverage online environments that offer multiple opportunities for two-way communication, feedback and collaboration with family members and community.

Recommendation 125: Integrate technology into district leadership, management and operations that will empower people to do their jobs more efficiently and effectively.

Recommendation 126: Districts must design and implement infrastructure upgrade plans in order to have the structure to support technology-facilitated learning.

Recommendation 127: Districts should use technology to keep their facilities safe and manage energy utilization.

CONTINUE TRANSFORMATION

Guiding Principles can be found on the NextEd website

State Level
Recommendation 128: State statutes and regulations should have provisions that encourage and reward innovation based on improving learning outcomes and opportunities for children.

Recommendation 129: The state should have an R&D fund to support innovation in public education to reduce the achievement gaps related to poverty and globalization as well as to raise child outcomes. Priority for selection of initiatives should be based on areas of child need.

Recommendation 130: In the transition, until all statutes and regulations that control inputs are eliminated, there should be a streamlined mechanism to waive statutes and regulations for an extended period (three to five years) (or) based on promising proposals to increase child outcomes. In addition, the state should grant Boards of Education the authority to waive statute and regulation in order to foster innovation to improve child outcomes. District waivers should require evaluation periodically to receive renewals of waivers.

District Level
Recommendation 131: Districts should have streamlined mechanisms for teachers and administrators to propose and receive approval for innovative practices that have the potential to improve child outcomes. Approval and renewals would be linked to evaluations of practices over three to five years.

Recommendation 132: Districts should have incentives to promote continuing transformation to improve child outcomes.

Recommendation 133: Districts should have an R&D fund that is a minimum of one percent of the school district budget. The minimum R&D budget should be required in state statutes. The R&D fund would be governed by a group that includes the Board of Education and representatives of stakeholders, including teachers, administrators and parents.

Recommendation 134: Districts should have the capacity to upgrade technology and learning resources necessary to be current.

What is CAPSS?

The Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS) is an organization that represents all of the superintendents and leaders of public schools 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. In short, it is committed to making sure schools in Connecticut are all they can be for our children.

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