

Principal Perspectives on Educational Issues

Executive Summary

Connecticut Association of Schools

January 31, 2012

On Friday, January 20th, 2012, a group of Connecticut principals had the opportunity to meet with Commissioner of Education, Stefan Pryor. The principals represented K-12 public, magnet and vocational schools in both urban and suburban settings. Following the meeting with Commissioner Pryor, the assembled principals united in their collective decision to offer the Commissioner a “Principals’ Perspective” on their needs as school leaders.

This document represents the current thinking of the group. It is organized around central themes which emerged through a rich discussion; our perspectives are aligned with the Connecticut School Leadership Standards and the six principles shaping Governor Malloy’s educational agenda. While each theme in this document is referenced to a specific Connecticut School Leadership Standard, our group recognizes that the themes can often reference multiple standards to some degree.

This document resulted from collaborative thinking. It demands planning and organized action that will quickly lead to necessary educational reform. It does not stand as a legislative agenda or formal position statement of the Connecticut Association of Schools. It does, however, speak to the critical importance of school leadership. A wealth of educational research indicates that school principals are the ones who carry forth reform and have tremendous impact on student success. In their paper, “Balanced Leadership”, Waters, Marzano and McNulty (2003) describe the powerful impact school leaders have on student achievement. Research by Hattie (2009) indicates that second to teachers, principals are the most important influence in the success of students. In many ways, principals are the key to school change efforts. It is imperative, therefore, that school leaders play a central role in the development of school reform policy.

The Connecticut Association of Schools exists primarily to support the work of school leaders and is passionate about developing educational leadership in all schools. It is our hope that an advisory council of principals might be formed to work closely with the Commissioner of Education in the areas of educational leadership and school reform.

PRINCIPAL PERSPECTIVES

CENTRAL THEMES

Themes are organized around the Connecticut Standards for School Leadership

HIGH EXPECTATIONS FOR ALL

- Mandate and provide financial support for universal all-day Kindergarten
- Mandate and provide financial support for universal Pre-K with highly qualified staff and standards for learning
- Expand educational approaches, resources and accountability systems that address non-traditional students. Provide funding for alternative programming for students that are not progressing towards graduation (ex. Over-aged and under-credited students)

Leadership Standard #1- Vision, Mission and Goals

QUALITY OF PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS AND PERFORMANCE

- Mandate time and resources for teacher collaboration during the school day
- Expand job-embedded professional development activities for teachers and principals
- Improve quality of pre-service educational programs through efforts such as increasing practical experiences for teacher and administrator aspirants and establishing evaluation criteria for pre-service programs
- Expand additional alternate routes to certification at both the teacher and principal levels
- Ensure that tenure legislation for educational professionals supports quality practice
- Ensure universal access to CALI, thereby strengthening statewide the collaborative process centered on using data to inform instruction
- Continue efforts to provide a diverse pool of teacher and principal candidates
- Provide greater resources for the development of school leaders such as an executive coaches and data team facilitators

Leadership Standard #2- Teaching and Learning

RIGOROUS CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

- Develop state model curricula that incorporate 21st century skills and are based on Common Core State Standards
- Mandate district development of standards-based assessment criteria and eliminate the need for legislation referencing Carnegie units
- Enhance collaboration between secondary schools and higher education institutions to ensure college-career readiness

Leadership Standard #2- Teaching and Learning

EFFECTIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

- Allocate resources to build skills of school leaders in monitoring and improving instruction
- Support the redesign of the job of school principal to allow for greater instructional leadership
- Provide greater autonomy for principals, particularly in the areas of hiring of staff and allocation of resources
- Continue and expand state training regarding the role of local Boards of Education

Leadership Standard #6- The Education System

EQUITY IN THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS

- Provide resources to ensure equal access to instructional technology
- Ensure that all students have learning experiences in integrated environments
- Revamp the funding structure to provide resources sufficient to address student needs (Explore regionalization and consortia strategies)
- Provide resources that support the concept of learning “anytime and anywhere”
- Provide resources that enable all Connecticut students to learn 21st century skills

Leadership Standard #5- Ethics and Integrity

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT

- Expand resources to meet the needs of families (i.e. medical services, social services, expanded learning opportunities, ELL and GED classes; extended school year)
- Support the engagement of parents in the educational process
- Support additional collaboration between community social service agencies and community schools

Leadership Standard #4- Families and Stakeholders

STUDENT WELL-BEING

- Provide additional resources to support personalization of learning (smaller class sizes, advisory programs)
- Provide additional resources to support positive school climate

Leadership Standard #3- Organizational Systems and Safety

POLICY ENGAGEMENT

- Engage practitioners in the development of educational policy
- Provide greater clarity on the integration of the numerous initiatives now mandated within the context of an overarching state plan for educational improvement
- Establish a CAS Principals Advisory Committee to the Commissioner of Education

Leadership Standard #6- The Education System

