

APPENDIX D
State Department of Education
Hartford Improvement Plan: 48 Recommendations

A. Accountability for Improved Student Achievement

Employees at every level of the Hartford Public Schools and observers from every possible perspective reach a strong consensus that a higher and more consistent level of accountability is the single most important step in the process of improving student performance. This means new and stronger mechanisms for holding everyone more accountable for high levels of achievement in each school and, more specifically, holding district-level and support personnel accountable for providing teachers and administrators with the materials and resources they need, and holding parents and students accountable for arriving at school each day ready and willing to learn. These new levels of accountability require new forms of consequences for failure and new vehicles for recognizing and rewarding success.

It is therefore recommended that:

1. The Hartford Board of Education develop a set of policies and procedures that, through a new system of accreditation and probation, recognize high-performing schools and outline clear consequences for schools that are failing to make progress in improving student achievement.
2. Roles and responsibilities of the Board of Education, the Superintendent and the principals, and the School Governance Teams be further clarified to assure that the Board of Education focuses on policy and on monitoring overall systemwide improvement; the Superintendent and principals focus on implementing policy, hiring, supervising and evaluating staff; and School Governance Teams focus on mobilizing support and monitoring progress at the school level.
3. Every building principal make the improvement of student learning the primary focus of all school activity.
4. Policies and procedures for significantly increasing attendance and decreasing dropouts and truancy be updated and implemented.
5. There be systemwide adoption of updated personnel evaluation policies and procedures, with appropriate training by September 1997.
6. A "warranty of essential skills" policy be adopted by the Hartford Board of Education wherein any student can return, at no charge, for necessary remedial work, and wherein any employer or institution of higher education can refer a former Hartford Public Schools student, also at no charge, for necessary remedial work.
7. School and district Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) and Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT) data, as well as other test attendance, dropout and graduate follow-up data, be analyzed annually and serve as the basis for school improvement efforts.

B. Curricular Expectations

The critical ingredient for assuring that all students have the opportunity to learn is a common, coherent and accepted set of grade-level and course expectations. Teachers throughout the system need clear and consistent direction on what should be taught and the materials needed to teach it. In too many cases there is no such clear curricular direction within the Hartford Public Schools. The current draft of the district's Academic Area Outcomes is a first step in establishing common curricular expectations, but much remains to be done before Hartford's teachers have the necessary curriculum documents to ensure that all students have the same opportunity to learn what is valued. Similarly, inadequate attention has been paid to the provision of high quality, meaningful professional development.

It is therefore recommended that:

8. Hartford's Academic Area Outcomes document be revised by June 1997 to reflect a clear statement of key grade-level outcomes in each curriculum area, and be published and broadly disseminated to teachers, parents and the community as the district's statement of expectations for students.
9. K-12 curriculum guides be developed for each subject area, aligned with CMT and CAPT objectives, articulated K-12, and based on model guides in use in other Connecticut districts.
10. All staff members receive copies of the appropriate curriculum guides and awareness training on their content and use prior to the opening of the 1997-98 school year.
11. A small group of business and education experts be assembled to report quickly on increasing the availability and use of technology to enhance instruction, and to develop a comprehensive three-year plan to significantly increase instructional use of computers, calculators and other technological equipment.
12. A comprehensive three-year plan for ongoing, targeted professional development should be developed and implemented to strengthen teachers' and administrators' capacity to implement the updated curriculum. This plan should include, but not be limited to:
 - awareness sessions on new curriculum expectations;
 - instructional strategies for better meeting the needs of all students;
 - techniques for incorporating technology into instruction; and
 - mechanisms for significantly increasing professional interaction among teachers.

C. Initiatives Designed to Raise Expectations:

In any community, a school system's high schools are recognized as the flagships of the enterprise. This is not because they do more than any other level of schooling, nor because they are more effective, but because they represent the culmination of all the work done in elementary and middle schools. In

addition, our bottom-line, product-oriented workplace understandably judges an entire system's health on the basis of its high school graduates. But it is rare for a school system to have effective high schools unless students enter from high quality middle schools that truly prepare students for a meaningful and rigorous high school experience. Similarly, the ultimate strength of any school system depends heavily on the effectiveness of the foundation - especially the reading foundation - established in its elementary schools. Competency and confidence in reading is the single most critical skill to success in school and in life. That is why expectations for student success and accomplishment must be raised throughout the system.

It is therefore recommended that:

13. A plan be developed to require algebra for graduation beginning with the high school graduating class of 2001 - currently in the 8th grader.
14. All high school students - as early as 9th grade - be strongly encouraged to take the PSATs and the SATs, and that appropriate preparation be provided within and beyond regular coursework;
15. A significant number of Advanced Placement courses - with increasing enrollments - be added to the curriculum at all three high schools over the next three years.
16. The full implementation of the three career academies, as well as Connecticut's Eight Career Clusters, be completed during the 1997-98 school year at all three high schools.
17. Changes be instituted to make each of Hartford's schools more student-centered, caring and more personal communities through teams, clusters, houses, and/or keeping teachers and students together for more than one year, and to ensure that every student has an adult partner or mentor, whether a teacher, a coach, a nurse, a corporate mentor, or a big brother or sister.
18. Character development programs that emphasize personal responsibility for learning and behavior, and responsibility to others be initiated in grades 5 through 8.
19. Peer assistance programs be broadly established to help address teen pregnancy, and tobacco, drug and alcohol abuse in grades 7 through 12.
20. Alternative education programs be provided for middle and high school students unable or unwilling to be successful in the mainstream program.
21. Each elementary school be required to develop a unique program or schoolwide theme - open to all children in the city - as programs/schools of choice. Such programs should be designed to increase student motivation and parent involvement and be similar to the successful models of East Harlem and New Haven.
22. Reading achievement be made the primary mission of Kindergarten through grade 4 classes in every elementary school, supported by necessary instructional support and an "army" of retired teachers recruited to read with first and second graders.
23. The Hartford Board of Education establish a formal and ongoing program of student recognition for outstanding academic, artistic and athletic

accomplishments and demonstrations of community service and citizenship.

D. Special Education, Bilingual Education and Compensatory Education

Nowhere in the system are the fragmentation of effort and inefficiencies derived from turf more apparent than in the day-to-day operation of special education, bilingual education and the Title I program. Clearly, state and federal regulations have contributed to this fragmentation. However, each program tends to be an entity unto itself, and in far too few cases do these programs systematically support the core academic expectations that must apply to all students. In addition, in terms of time and effort, the regulatory load of administering and operating these programs at the school level often detracts from accomplishing the core mission of the school.

It is therefore recommended that:

24. Efforts begin immediately to reduce the number of students receiving special, separate or pull-out services, or out-of-district placement by providing more effective accommodated instruction in regular classrooms and by expanding within school program alternatives.
25. Immediate action be taken, at the school and central office levels, to reduce the fragmentation of effort that results from separate planning, delivery, and evaluation of these categorical programs and to assure that the academic goals of these programs be identical to those of the mainstream program.
26. Title I personnel, working collaboratively with others, assume responsibility for developing of systemwide "Summer Learning Kits" to ensure that learning does not take a vacation during the summer.
27. Significant increases in summer school programming and enrollment be made to provide remedial and enrichment experiences throughout the summer.

E. Early Childhood and School Readiness

Nearly every report and review of America's public schools arrives at the same conclusion: the single most cost-effective, long-term, high-impact improvement is the provision of preschool and all-day kindergarten experiences for all young children - particularly children who grow up in poverty. We know that Head Start and similar experiences pay rich dividends, and we know that students who start school behind rarely catch up. Teachers are nearly unanimous in their frustrations dealing effectively with children who arrive unprepared for school and unready to learn.

It is therefore recommended that:

28. All revenue sources be reviewed so that more resources can be allocated to the expansion of preschool programs with the goal of providing, either privately or publicly, programs for every three- and four-year-old in Hartford.
29. Data collection mechanisms be established and implemented to annually and accurately report on the number of three- and four-year old children served and not served by early childhood/preschool programs.
30. Structured and regular opportunities be established to better connect preschool providers with Hartford's Kindergarten and first grade teachers.
31. Materials for parents of young children detailing practical strategies for preparing their children for school be developed or assembled and widely distributed throughout the community.
32. A community-based collaboration of hospitals, corporate sponsors and community-based organizations be initiated to provide an appropriate "care package" of books, information and toys for new parents, followed up by home visits by school social workers to homes with one-, two- and three-year-old children.

While these recommendations represent important actions to improve early childhood programs, this initiative is clearly one that requires significant new resources. These resources, for Hartford and the rest of the state, will be requested from the Governor and the General Assembly in the coming months.

F. Parent and Community Involvement

Parents are our children's first and most important teachers. The quality of any given school system is directly related to the support expressed, concerns, and involvement of parents. We have heard from school personnel about the difficulties of fostering parent involvement, and from parents about the barriers to their involvement they feel they face, including their sense that they are not welcome in their children's schools. In addition, the greater Hartford community is a largely untapped resource for volunteer assistance.

It is therefore recommended that:

33. The Hartford Board of Education adopt and implement a strong policy statement regarding parent involvement within the Hartford Public Schools that addresses making schools more inviting to parents, making it easier for parents to get access to schools and school personnel, and opening the schools more widely to the community.
34. School plans be developed to increase teacher-to-parent communication, including no less than monthly written or oral reports from the school.
35. A single Coordinating Council for Parents that serves as an umbrella for the diverse parent groups in the city be established and staffed.
36. Parent representation on each of the School Based Governance Teams be increased.
37. Parent training, with a significant outreach component, be provided through adult education programs.

38. Adult basic education and high school completion programs run in elementary schools during the school year day and as part of summer parent/student program continue to expand.

G. Collective Bargaining Agreements

One of the commonly expressed concerns about the Hartford Public Schools is the perception that collective bargaining agreements include provisions that interfere with efforts to best serve students and improve student achievement. In fact, some of the harshest criticism of the Hartford Public Schools regards the role and perceived power of the various unions. Contract provisions, union policies, and management practices and/or inaction must all be scrutinized with the goal of better serving students.

It is therefore recommended that:

39. Separate "conversations" between the Hartford Board of Education and representatives of each of the district's bargaining units be conducted. The purpose of these discussions would be to identify contract language, policies or practices that are deemed to interfere with maximizing student achievement and to mutually agree, wherever possible, to adjust such language, policies or practices in the cooperative spirit of truly putting students first. Mediators could be used, if necessary, to facilitate these conversations.

H. Financial Management, Facilities, and Long-Range Planning

For too long, crisis management and the lack of continuity among top-level district management has resulted in a serious neglect of critical long-range planning efforts, including those for facilities, budgets and other noninstructional programs. This is particularly serious in terms of the maintenance of existing facilities, the purchase of technology, and long-term space needs based on enrollment projections. In addition, school buildings are a unique community resource that are underutilized.

It is therefore recommended that:

40. A joint committee of school and city officials be charged with developing a comprehensive, long-range enrollment projection and facilities report that provides detailed maintenance, construction, renovation and bonding needs for the next ten years.
41. A detailed three-year plan for the enhanced use of technology for non-instructional purposes be developed, funded and implemented so that such functions as reporting, record keeping, scheduling, transcript maintenance, and purchasing can be conducted far more efficiently.

42. The Hartford Public Schools and the Hartford city government complete the implementation of the joint financial management systems already initiated.
43. The issues of school safety and cleanliness, community use of schools, family resource centers, and school-based health clinics be high priorities of all facilities planning efforts.
44. Grants and other resources be sought to provide after-school and summer tutoring, enrichment and recreation programs throughout the city, using high school and college students and the help of community-based organizations, and housed in the classrooms, gyms, libraries and computer labs that are vacant when school is not in session; and
45. A cost-benefit analysis of transferring noninstructional functions and responsibilities to the City or to a nonprofit private concern be completed.
46. The Hartford Public Schools secure outside expertise to conduct a comprehensive budget analysis to identify cost savings that could be reallocated to instructional supplies, materials, and equipment.

V. Coordinating Corporate, University and Regional Partnerships

The challenge faced by the Hartford Public Schools is not one of attracting the support and generous assistance of the Greater Hartford corporate and university communities, but rather one of focusing and coordinating this support to have the greatest impact on student achievement. What is clear is that both the corporate and the university communities are ready, willing and able to continue their human and financial support in the form of grants, tutoring programs, training efforts and more. What is equally clear is that this support is spread very unevenly across the district and is not consistently focused on clearly identified student needs.

It is therefore recommended that:

47. A unit be established within the Central Office and charged with providing coordination and leadership that strengthens partnership programs. Responsibilities should include the following:

- ensuring that successful corporate tutoring programs be extended to every elementary school in the city;
- creating stronger collaborations with the city's cultural community, including The Hartford Stage, The Hartford Symphony, The Hartford Ballet, the Wadsworth Atheneum, Real Art Ways, The Old State House, etc.;
- deploying the people and products of the Hartford Urban Education Network and similar groups;
- providing internships for students;
- encouraging and coordinating the donation of material and equipment, including computers;

- soliciting additional support from the corporate, university and other communities; and
- being responsible for interdistrict cooperative programs, magnet schools, and other regional efforts that help to reduce racial, ethnic and economic isolation, including the completion of current plans for the four regional magnet schools.

W. A New Education Fund

Unlike New Haven and Bridgeport, Hartford has no private philanthropic fund dedicated solely to public K-12 education and designed to support specific projects and meet specific needs within the school community. It is time for the generosity of the city's private and corporate citizens to have a formal mechanism - outside of normal governmental channels - to provide targeted assistance to the Hartford Public Schools.

It is therefore recommended that:

48. The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving and the Hartford Public Schools explore the creation of a Hartford Public Education Fund, possibly operating out of the HFPG, to provide an external source of funding for innovative initiatives.