

# NEWS

Connecticut State Department of Education

Dr. Mark K. McQuillan  
Commissioner

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## ADVANCING SCHOOL REFORM IN AN ERA OF FISCAL CRISIS CONNECTICUT BEGINS THREE INITIATIVES

(HARTFORD, CONN) The Connecticut Department of Education and several school districts around the state are engaged in comprehensive educational reform—despite the scarcity of state and local funding—that will keep Connecticut students at the forefront of academic achievement.

The Department is focused on three new initiatives that will improve student achievement in the state:

1. Connecticut is in the process of completing and is submitting its application for \$175 million in federal **Race to the Top funding** that will fund several statewide programs and local district initiatives over the next four years.
2. Connecticut has joined forces with four other New England states as a member of the **New England Secondary School Consortium** (NESSC), an ambitious initiative that is promoting high school innovation, best practices, and forward-thinking educational policy across the region.
3. Connecticut will take part in the national **Common Core State Standards Initiative**, which will raise academic standards and help Connecticut students to successfully compete with students from other states and from other countries.

*(Informational materials provide further details on these initiatives.)*

“We have an obligation to Connecticut’s students to provide the best possible educational experience that will prepare them to compete in the world economy. Although we are struggling with state and local fiscal crises, we also cannot afford to defer our efforts to reform and improve our educational system,” said state education Commissioner Mark K. McQuillan. “What has become clear to us is that other states and other nations have done more to move their reform agendas and that Connecticut can no longer rest on its laurels when it comes to student achievement.”

“These three initiatives, which are interrelated, will go a long way toward advancing our state’s efforts to improve our schools. I would like to express my appreciation to the Nellie Mae Education Foundation for its financial support to underwrite Connecticut’s Race to the Top application and the work of the New England Secondary School Consortium, which is bringing the New England states together for the purpose of reforming our secondary schools,” said McQuillan.

“We’re thrilled that Connecticut has joined the Consortium, and we’re certain its contributions will improve our efforts to make sure we have high-performing high schools across New England that attend to the learning needs of *all* students,” said Mary Sylvia Harrison, Vice President of Programs at the Nellie Mae Education Foundation. “Additionally, we’re proud to support the state’s efforts to secure Race to the Top funding so that more Connecticut students can acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to be civically engaged, economically self-sufficient lifelong learners.”

“The New England Secondary School Consortium is trying to do something that never been done before: bring five states together, both strategically and operationally, to improve the high school learning experience for every student,” said David Ruff, executive director of the Great Schools Partnership, the organization that is acting as the lead coordinator of the Consortium. Although each of our five states has different programs and

approaches, we are nevertheless all driving toward the same goal: making our high schools stronger so they can prepare every student for the enormous challenges they will face in adult life. We see Connecticut as a vital ally in our regional partnership, a true leader whose thoughtful secondary school improvement plan, Race to the Top application, and involvement in the Common Core State Standards Initiative show a strong, unwavering commitment to enhancing educational opportunities and improving life outcomes for its students.”

The Commissioner also thanked Department staff and leaders from several organizations that helped to bring Connecticut’s Race to the Top statewide plan together. He said that Connecticut could not have completed its plan and developed the application without the active involvement of the Connecticut Association of Schools, the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents, the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education, the RESC Alliance, the Connecticut Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers – Connecticut, and many community, foundation and business leaders. He also pointed out that support from the Nellie Mae Education Foundation and the New Venture Fund has been vital to the quality of the Connecticut Plan and the state’s application.

### **Information on Connecticut’s Three Education Initiatives:**

and will submit its application for \$175 million in federal Race to the Top (RTTT) funding to finance a statewide plan of education reform over the next four years. Half of the funding (approximately \$87.5 million) will go to school districts that commit to participating in the state plan. Districts will use their portion of the grant to implement the state plan locally. The plans must address the following four themes:

1. adopting standards and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace and to compete in the global economy;
2. building data systems that measure student growth and success, and inform teachers and principals about how they can improve instruction;
3. recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals, especially where they are needed most; and
4. turning around our lowest-achieving schools.

The other half of the funding will be devoted mostly to statewide initiatives, including professional development for teachers and administrators, the expansion of the longitudinal data system, vertical scale assessment data, developing models for supporting, supervising and evaluating teachers and principals, secondary school reform, and several other initiatives.

**COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS INITIATIVE:** The Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association, in partnership with Achieve, Inc., ACT, and the College Board, have initiated a **collaborative, state-led process to develop and adopt common state learning standards**. This [project](#) presents an opportunity for Connecticut to accelerate education reform toward the ultimate goal of graduating every student from high school ready for college, work, and success in the global economy. The Common Core State Standards Initiative is research and evidence based, and will be aligned with college and work-ready expectations, including rigorous, internationally benchmarked content and skill-based standards. Each state will adopt the [common standards](#) through a process that respects unique state contexts. The first standards being developed are English-language arts and mathematics in grades K-12. The Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents has formed a committee of superintendents to begin work on this initiative and to advise the Commissioner on how this can be best implemented in Connecticut school districts statewide.

**NEW ENGLAND SECONDARY SCHOOL CONSORTIUM:** Connecticut has signed on to become a member of the New England Secondary School Consortium (NESSC), a groundbreaking multistate initiative encompassing five states: Connecticut, Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont. Created to support and advance innovative approaches to secondary schooling, the Consortium brings together commissioners of education, policy makers, the business leaders, and state, regional, and national organizations and leaders to advance the common mission—and achieve the shared educational goals—of the member states. In addition to designing, planning, and implementing a variety of school-improvement strategies intended to bring greater coherence, alignment, and common purpose to the promotion of best practices, school innovation, and forward-thinking educational policy across the New England region, the Consortium is working to **adopt rigorous 21<sup>st</sup> century learning standards**, establish **more accurate and relevant student assessments**, and create **data systems that will promote comparability of student achievement and educational outcomes across state lines**.