



Responding to the Call

Partnering to Support Education Reform in Connecticut



CREC
Capitol Region Education Council



Responding to the Call

The Capitol Region Education Council (CREC) is poised to *respond to the call* for boldness and real reform outlined by Governor Dannel Malloy and Commissioner of Education Stefan Pryor in the recently released document *2012: The Year for Education Reform: The Time Has Come for Change in Connecticut's Schools*.

"Today begins an effort not only to create a new model and new standards for achievement and accountability, but to change the entire culture of our educational system. This is a unified, results-oriented strategy that will raise the bar for everyone involved – from students to teachers to the State Department of Education. I believe this plan has the potential to dramatically improve the way our students, our schools, and our state perform for many years to come."

Lieutenant Governor Nancy Wyman
February 6, 2012

Governor Malloy and Commissioner Pryor outlined six key principles that will guide our reform efforts in the state. The proposed plan involves comprehensive reform, and as such, it will require action that is comprehensive and well coordinated in six targeted areas:

- Enhance Families' Access to Early Childhood Education
- State Support and Intervention in Low-Performing School
- Expand Availability of High-Quality School Models
- Removing Red Tape and Other Barriers to Success
- Develop the Very Best Teachers and Principals
- Deliver More Resources to Districts That Embrace Reform

"In order to lift the performance of Connecticut's schools, we need to elevate the education profession in our state. Elevating the profession means doing a far better job of preparing, attracting, developing, evaluating, coaching, recognizing, rewarding, and advancing the quality of teachers and leaders in our school system."

Commissioner of Education Stefan Pryor
February 7, 2012

CREC is prepared to work with the Governor, Commissioner Pryor and various partners and stakeholders throughout the state to meet the goals outlined in the six key principles of reform. To that end, this document outlines CREC's ability to support the implementation of bold reform throughout the State of Connecticut.

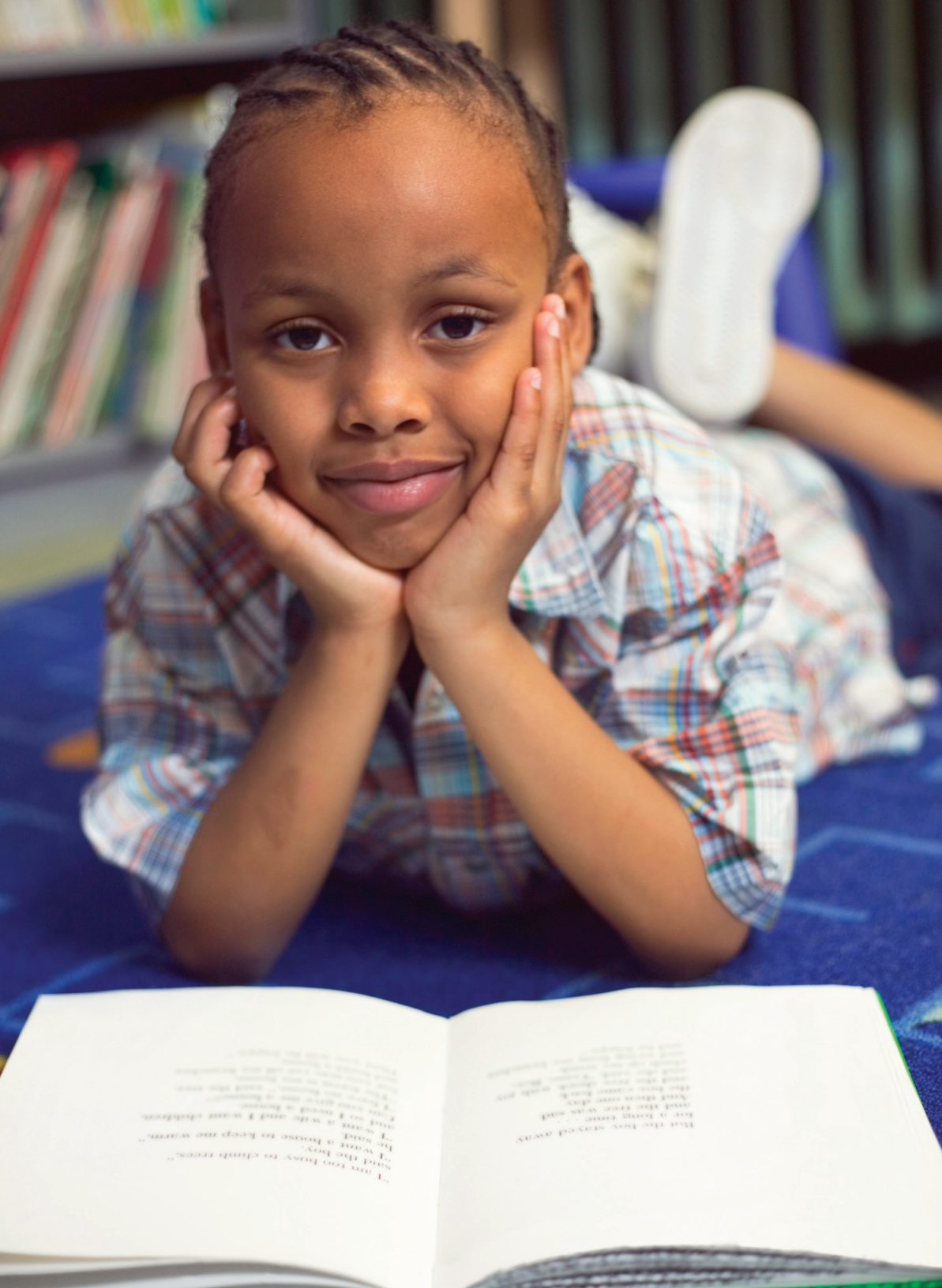


Table of Contents

Principle 1. Enhance Families' Access to Early Childhood Education	3
Principle 2. State Support and Intervention in Low-Performing Schools	4
Principle 3. Expand Availability of High-Quality School Models	5
Principle 4. Removing Red Tape and Other Barriers to Success.....	6
Principle 5. Develop the Very Best Teachers and Principals	7
Principle 6. Deliver More Resources to Districts That Embrace Reform	8
Additional Reforms.....	9
Contact Information	10



Principle 1: Enhance Families' Access to Early Childhood Education

“Connecticut must ensure that our kids arrive at school ready to succeed.”

The Capitol Region Education Council (CREC) is a leader in early childhood programs and services. CREC provides full day preschool and kindergarten experiences in all of its seven elementary magnet schools. Data shows that these programs have led to the significant reduction of and, in some cases, the elimination of the achievement gap between student groups in later elementary grades. The success and quality of these schools is proof of the capacity of our early childhood trainers, providers, and support systems.

- **CREC Lab Schools** - CREC's early childhood programs can serve as lab settings for the development of other quality, theme-based early childhood programs throughout the state.
- **Early Childhood Intervention Services** - CREC trainers and providers support early intervention services for children ages birth to five and their families in homes and community or school based settings.
- **Early Childhood Health and Wellness** - CREC nursing staff can provide certified early childhood consultants to assist with health and wellness procedures in early childhood programs.
- **Early Childhood SRBI Audit** - CREC can examine and evaluate preschool and kindergarten programs based on the five domains of evidence: Evidence Based Practices and Protocols, Screening, Assessment and Progress Monitoring, Collaborative Problem Solving and Parent and Family Partnerships.
- **Early Childhood Rating Instruments** - CREC developed the Early Childhood Scientifically Research Based Intervention (SRBI) Audit, the Preschool Program Rating Scale and the Preschool Assessment Framework (PAF) Walkthrough Data Collection System. CREC staff are certified raters for the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) and trained raters for the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS).
- **Preschool Curriculum Framework** - CREC provides both training and coaching on the PAF and Preschool Curriculum Framework (PCF) through Training Wheels and Cycles of Intentional Teaching.
- **Language Acquisition and Family Literacy Skills** - Certified by The Hanen Centre, CREC staff can provide workshops on a variety child development topics related to language acquisition and family literacy skills.
- **Strategic Planning and Community Surveying** - CREC can conduct early childhood surveys and assist with the development of strategic plans related to early childhood initiatives such as full day kindergarten or universal preschool.



Principle 2: Support and Intervention in Low-Performing Schools

“Many schools in Connecticut face challenges that contribute to lower achievement among their students.”

CREC is recognized for supporting districts in achieving dramatic school improvement goals. CREC established an Office of School Transformation in 2010 to provide schools and districts advanced support for school improvement in seven research-based transformational areas: Vision, Instructional Core, Human Capital, Infrastructure, School Climate, Parent and Community Engagement, and Ongoing Evaluation.

CREC’s experienced and capable turnaround professionals are available to support Category Three Schools and schools in the Commissioner’s Network with the development of turnaround plans and through targeted technical assistance. CREC can assist the State Department of Education with the development of an Operations and Instructional Audit as well as school and district Program Evaluations.

- **Office of School Transformation** - CREC provides a turnaround team to partner with schools and districts to advance school improvement by targeting three levels of foundational development: increasing the efficacy of systems, practices, and relationships; increasing the capacity of district and school leadership and staff; and increasing the sustainability of outcomes. CREC’s involvement ranges from complete management and operations of “network” schools, to technical assistance and staff development in priority schools or districts.
- **Additional Learning Time** - CREC staff are trained using the *Assessment of After School Program Practices Tool* developed by the *National Institute on Out-of-School Time* at Wellesley College. Using this tool and practical experience from CREC’s Magnet Schools, CREC professionals assist schools to offer additional high-quality learning time, including extended school day and/or school year programming.
- **Community Schools Approach** - CREC provides school, family, and community partnership (SFCP) professional development training and coaching to school districts using the *National Network of Partnership Schools* model from Johns Hopkins University. The model uses a “Starting Points Assessment” to collect data from schools, parents and the community to establish plans that align with school improvement and extend strategies beyond the school walls with links to health and social service providers.
- **Positive School Climate** - CREC has led the response to state legislation involving school climate. CREC has partnered with the National School Climate Center to provide the nationally recognized Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI) to districts; training schools to develop and implement school-wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS); training school climate coordinators; and providing technical assistance for the development of school climate policy and procedures. CREC also leads the state’s “Welcoming Schools” model, including training school districts to use the Welcoming Walkthrough Tool Kit, offering statewide training for trainers, and working directly with schools using the Welcoming School Rating Instrument.



Principle 3: Expand Availability of High-Quality School Models

“The Governor’s proposal introduces measures to attract, expand, replicate, and emulate effective school models that can offer more and better options to our students.”

The Capitol Region Education Council operates 15 high achieving, award-winning magnet schools. CREC Magnet Schools educate a student body that is more racially diverse than the student population statewide and educates a higher percentage of economically disadvantaged students as compared to the state as a whole. While the state struggles with the achievement gap between white and black and Hispanic students, and between poor and non-poor students, CREC magnet schools have demonstrated significant improvements for all student subgroups on both the CMT and CAPT.

- **CREC Schools** - CREC’s success with developing and managing innovative, high quality, interdistrict educational programs is evident in the data and documented student achievement outcomes. CREC schools can serve as models within the state as high achieving, exciting school environments with students who are college and career ready upon graduation. In addition, CREC experts are available to analyze and assess special education program efficiency and effectiveness and to provide recommendations to address special education challenges. CREC staff have expertise to provide direct services and consultation for students with autism, hearing impairment, low incidence disabilities and social, emotional and behavioral challenges in public schools. CREC’s trained practitioners can also assist with program design and development as well as professional development to meet the needs of students with disabilities.
- **Professional Development Laboratory** - CREC’s Professional Development Laboratory (PDL) supports the CREC network of teachers, administrators, curriculum specialists, and magnet school leaders by providing centralized, coordinated, and easily accessible resources that improve skills and expand areas of expertise. The PDL serves as the bridge between training needs and the delivery of outstanding performance in service to the children and families of the Capitol region. The Laboratory was designed as a pilot to investigate ways to utilize local resources and replicate best practices within and across school districts.
- **Blended Solutions Professional Development** - CREC’s *Blended Solutions* project is an approach to professional development that enhances staff learning experiences and provides a consistent message about best practice as described in the Common Core of Teaching. The blending of targeted job-embedded professional development, hands-on learning (site visits), virtual experiences (videos), and supplemental materials (online resources), provides depth and breadth of experience for individual teachers, while replicating best practices in schools and districts.

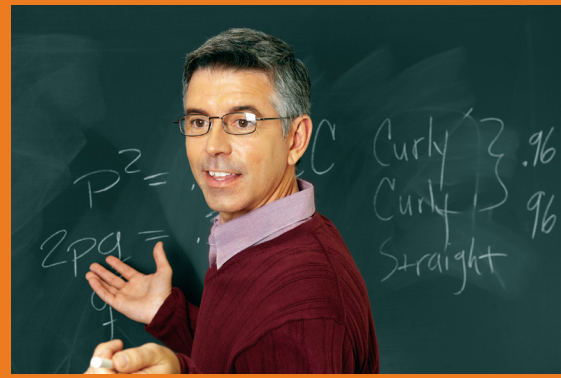


CREC is the largest and most dynamic Regional Educational Service Center (RESA) in the northeast. For more than 45 years, CREC has helped school districts meet their needs through high quality, cost effective programs and regionalized services.

Principle 4: Removing Red Tape and Other Barriers to Success

“Our state’s school districts should be focused on raising student achievement and preparing our students for success in college and career.”

- **Improving Efficiency** - CREC’s Executive Service consultants can assist school districts and the State Department of Education in examining processes that will improve efficiency. Our executive services include a wide range of management consulting and business advisory services to public schools districts, town governments, public service agencies and other nonprofit organizations throughout Connecticut. CREC’s nationally certified facilitators are available to assist school districts effectively and efficiently conduct strategic planning sessions and facilitating strategic improvement planning.
- **Data Reporting Requirements** - CREC’s consultants can help collect and organize assessment data, using various technology resources, to make it easier to analyze and use to make informed instructional decisions. CREC Technology Services helps districts overcome their struggles to comply with state requirements for data collection, analysis and reporting. CREC offers services to help LEAs collect, manage and make the best use of their data. CREC deploys, trains, hosts and provides support for systems, including PowerSchool, Munis, ProTraxx, Performance Tracker, and Naviance. CREC’s research and analysis team are also available to help with larger research projects, and create data rich final reports that are tailored to the stakeholders’ needs.
- **Data Analysis and Research** - CREC’s consultants can help collect and organize assessment data, using various technology resources, to make it easier to analyze and use to make informed instructional decisions. CREC Technology Services helps districts overcome their struggles to comply with state requirements for data collection, analysis and reporting.
- **Program Evaluation** - CREC staff are trained in survey design and validation methodologies. CREC can create a custom surveys for districts, administer the survey to the desired audience, collect and analyze the results, and prepare a final professional report. CREC staff can also compile data from multiple sources, including focus groups and surveys, to help districts measure the effectiveness and outcomes of a program and to make strategic resources allocations based on the results.



CREC believes that hiring, supporting, and retaining the best teachers is the first and most important step towards achieving dramatic school improvement. CREC is committed to helping schools and districts to ensure that each classroom in Connecticut has an effective teacher. CREC can assist the state in hiring a well qualified workforce, as well as supporting and continually enhancing that work force, and preparing personnel for long and successful careers.

With a long history of providing high quality professional development for teachers and principals, CREC is prepared to support the State Department of Education in establishing a process for auditing districts' professional development plans in order to ensure all teachers have access to exceptional support and growth opportunities.

Principle 5: Develop the Very Best Teachers and Principals

"Excellent schools begin with great school leaders and teachers."

- **Preparing and Certifying the Best** - CREC collaborates with institutions of higher education and alternative programs to produce unique high quality preparation and certification opportunities for post-secondary students, including the Advanced Alternative Route to Certification (AARC) for Special Education Cross Endorsement, Speech and Language Pathology Assistant Certification, Paraprofessional Certification, Advanced Alternative Route to Certification for Educational Leaders, and the Assistive Technology (AT) Consortium. CREC also provides internships and practicum opportunities within programs specializing in students with autism, hearing impairment and social, emotional and behavior challenges, and for nursing staff in a school based medical environment.
- **Attracting and Hiring the Best** - CREC chairs and is the fiscal manager of the RESC Minority Teacher Recruiting (RESC MTR) Alliance. The alliance assists school districts to recruit, hire, develop, support and retain a diverse teaching and administrative workforce. The Alliance offers scholarships for alternative routes to teacher certification, operates a "Pathways to Teaching" career path program for high school through college age students, offers Praxis 1 preparation courses, and provides workshops for human resource personnel to assist with hiring teachers of color.
- **Evaluating the Best** - CREC helps school districts create evaluation documents and processes that provide administrators with the tools needed to help their teaching staff glean the most from the supervision process. Trained evaluators also provide an extra set of "expert eyes" when needed.
- **Supporting the Best** - CREC's professional development staff offer an extensive range of training opportunities to support teachers in achieving their personal and collective best. Opportunities include: targeted lesson planning and job-embedded lesson study for improved lesson preparation; classroom video production for self-reflection and peer review; school-based coaching for instructional strategies and raising student achievement; and facilitation of professional learning communities to analyze data and select appropriate intervention and support strategies. CREC is also prepared to establish a training academy for teachers to achieve their Distinguished Educator Certification.
- **Retaining the Best** - CREC equips schools and staff for the 21st century by working with teachers, workforce development bureaus and employers through strategic partnerships to offer authentic learning experiences both in and out of school. Current initiatives in this area include the development of open curriculum, the transformation of schools to offer 24/7 learning while cutting operational expenses and the development of assured experiences that demonstrate student mastery of applied skills.



CREC's mission over the past 40 years has been to provide quality programs to the region at affordable rates. CREC has a long history of facilitating regional efficiencies, offering regionalized professional development, grant procurement, after school programs, staffing services, and other programs and services to improve quality and cost effectiveness for districts.

Principle 6: Deliver More Resources to Districts That Embrace Reform

"Maintaining a commitment to education even in some of the state's toughest fiscal times."

- **Performance Alliance Between Districts and the State** - With a long history of running successful magnet schools and providing quality professional development, CREC's highly trained and experienced practitioners and consultants can assist school districts in implementing reforms that will achieve and sustain student results. With experience running successful early childhood programs and elementary schools, CREC has the capacity and knowledge to strengthen the foundational reading programs of Alliance Districts so that all students are capable readers by Grade 3. As described in principle 2, CREC's staff also have the experience and expertise to support districts in investigating extended learning opportunities, establishing wrap-around services and community schools, and addressing other requirements developed by the State Department of Education.
- **Competitive Funding** - The goal of CREC's Grants and Development Office is to meet the needs of school districts and other non-profit organizations to secure funding to support educational programs. CREC's skilled grant writers and managers have years of experience in securing funding for a wide variety of programs, including interdistrict grants, preschool program grants, developmental program grants, innovative curriculum grants, and much more. CREC's Grants and Development Office can support districts in applying for competitive funding that is offered through the state, the federal government, as well as private funders.
- **Taxpayer Savings Through Regional Efficiencies** - CREC has dedicated resources to assist districts in developing regional efficiencies for "non-instructional" services. We facilitate bidding and procurement for regional groups of school districts, helping them save money by working together. Our school transportation division is constantly looking at ways to bring contiguous school districts together to reduce transportation costs. Through cooperative purchasing, we've secured competitive pricing on commodities for schools statewide, including everything from school supplies to athletic fields.



As a dynamic and ever-changing educational service agency, CREC is constantly changing and adapting to anticipate and meet the needs of our school districts. CREC's schools, professional development, and regional programs and services have a reputation for innovation and excellence. CREC has the human capacity and the experience to support the State Department of Education with the additional reforms that will enable Connecticut to lead the region, country, and world in educational competitiveness and student outcomes.

Additional Reforms

“There are additional steps the state can take to return Connecticut to a position of leadership in achieving academic excellence.”

- **Common Core and International Standards** - CREC has responded to local demand and national trends by building substantial capacity for supporting the implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). CREC's Curriculum and Assessment Consortium is a regional partnership of districts working to create rigorous, teacher-designed curriculum and performance assessments aligned to the CCSS. CREC is prepared to assist in the development of model state curriculum and benchmark assessments, and to support school districts with the short and long-term implementation of the CCSS. CREC is also the first district in Connecticut to pilot the Cambridge Board Exams. CREC has invested in developing local awareness about international standards and practices, including developing collaborative relationships with the National Center for Education and the Economy and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, bringing international experts and practitioners to the state of Connecticut, and participating in international conferences and summits.
- **Parent Information and Involvement Pilot** - CREC's Magnet Schools have implemented detailed family involvement programs with a focus on improving relationships and facilitating student achievement. These programs can serve as models for the state's parent information and involvement pilot. CREC also has a history of providing family literacy professional development to teachers, community providers, librarians and family resource center staff through the *Raising Readers* program. These professionals, in turn, help parents of students in many of the state's lowest performing schools by offering parent reading clubs.
- **Personalized Learning Grants** - CREC has experience developing and piloting high school Student Success Plans (SSP) and has been selected as a model implementation site by the state of Connecticut and is managing the SSP trainer of trainers program for the state under higher education reform. CREC can provide consultation services to districts participation in the personalized learning plan pilot program, including training staff and providing guidance for developing appropriate paperwork and systems.
- **Third-Grade Reading** - In 2011, CREC's elementary magnet schools closed the achievement gap in literacy on the third grade CMT. CREC has the experience and capacity to support schools and districts to develop comprehensive plans for reading development in kindergarten through grade three. CREC also offers a five-part reading foundation series aligned to Connecticut's Foundations in Reading certification exam. The series addresses specific early literacy skills that are related to good reading instruction and provides specific, practical reading information to teachers that complements recent college course work and/or updates veteran teaching staff. Job-embedded coaching for early literacy and lesson study is also available through our experienced literacy specialists.



Contact Information

CREC has served as a “strategic bridge” between the State Department of Education (SDE) and LEAs, helping to bridge the gap between the leadership and monitoring functions of the SDE and the direct service responsibilities of school districts. CREC’s capacity extends well beyond the six principles outlined in the Governor’s reform package.

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