



## Theory of Action (TOA) Strategic Implementation Approach 2011-2016

### Hartford Public Schools' Theory of Action is reflected within our Mission, Vision and Core Beliefs

#### **Mission:**

Hartford's system of schools exists to provide all students with access to participation in a global economy through attainment of Academic Standards of the State of Connecticut and readiness for post-secondary education.

#### **Vision:**

The Hartford Public Schools is the State Capital's Portfolio District of Excellence!

#### **Five Core Beliefs:**

- We believe all students can learn at or above grade level.
- We believe that the achievement gap must and can be eliminated, by all students reaching their learning potential.
- We believe schools have an enormous impact on students' lives.
- We believe that all parents must be empowered to play an active role in their students' education.
- We believe that community collaboration is fundamental to achieving and sustaining excellence.

### As a portfolio district, Hartford Public Schools advances student achievement through a managed performance empowerment model

As one of 16 Portfolio School Districts partnered with the Center on Reinventing Public Education at the University of Washington, Hartford Public Schools has adopted a portfolio strategy that consists of 7 components:

1. High-Level Options and Choices for All Families
2. School Autonomy
3. Student-Based Funding
4. Talent Management Approach
5. Theme-Based Partnerships
6. Performance-Based Accountability for Schools
7. Extensive Public Engagement

## Our Strategic Operating Plan's three major goals direct our work for 2011-2016

- I. **Third Grade Promise:** All students who enter a Hartford Public School at grade Pre-K or K will read at or above grade level by the end of third grade.
- II. **Middle Years Redesign:** All middle grades students will demonstrate sustained performance gains that will prepare them for the rigor of a college-ready high school curriculum.
- III. **College Readiness:** All students earning a Hartford Public School diploma will demonstrate college readiness.

## As a team, we are committed to the following success factors

1. Stakeholder buy-in
2. Goals linked to the budget and operational plan
3. Professional development
4. Effective communications both internally and externally
5. Effective use of data
6. Enthusiasm

## Managed Performance Empowerment

**Managed Performance Empowerment is central to Hartford Public Schools' Theory of Action (TOA). The Hartford Public Schools District Policy 0100 reads in part, "The District will employ a balanced theory of action for reform governance linked to the organizational structure of an all-choice system of schools."**

*A balanced theory of action will advantage the strengths and minimize the weaknesses of the Managed Instruction and Performance Empowerment theories of change. Using this strategy, the District will define its relationship with each school on the basis of performance.*

- *Relatively high performing and/or significantly improving schools will be given considerable programmatic autonomy and freedom from bureaucratic operating constraints.*
- *Chronically low performing schools that fail to improve will be subject to district intervention, redesign, closure or replacement with higher performing school models.*
- *Schools in the mid-range will be provided with 'defined autonomy' relative to program and operations to build their capacity for improvement.*

*Using a diverse provider strategy, Hartford Public Schools will evolve over time to a total system of choice schools. Two choice models will be employed: inter-district choice schools will provide regional opportunities for the integration of city and suburban students and intra-district choice schools will provide preference to students in their neighborhood with remaining seats available to other Hartford schools. Students will be equitably funded according to their needs and these funds will follow the child to their school of choice. A number of effective programmatic choices would be optimized through K-12 feeder patterns. Within the portfolio, parents would have choices within transportation zones from a greater number of schools available through external providers or public/private partnerships.*

## The Superintendent's TOA-Aligned Management Directives

The Superintendent of Schools, as Chief Executive, has organized centralized functions around seven leadership teams that work in partnership with school-based staff in a continuous improvement framework to deliver achievement results for all students based on state and national standards of excellence.

- **The Office of Academics** will establish district-wide content and performance standards supporting a core curriculum, theme-based courses, and research-based instructional strategies while maintaining a comprehensive system of student assessment and intervention/support.
- **The Office of Pre K – 12 Education** will develop the capacity of school leaders through effective supervision and evaluation in order to continuously improve learning outcomes for every student in alignment with the framework of a portfolio district.
- **The Office of Learning Support Services** will ensure the academic success and social and emotional wellness of all students by utilizing evidence-based practices, data analysis, advocacy, and effective communication with all stakeholders.
- **The Office of Talent Management** will ensure that each school is managed by an effective leader and that each leader has the support to develop and retain highly effective teachers from recruitment to induction and ultimately through their career path development.
- **The Office of Institutional Advancement** will build the capacity of schools and the district to close the achievement gap by increasing financial resources, establishing strategic partnerships, promoting research-based practices and communicating Hartford Public Schools' successes both internally and externally.
- **The Office of Finance** will create an environment and systems that enhance the use of financial and performance information in decision making that best serves students and ensures a high level of public accountability.
- **The Office of Operations** will provide high-quality, healthy and safe learning environments before, during and after the instructional day while consistently adapting to the evolution of our schools.

The Superintendent's executive team consists of a Chief of Staff, an Assistant Superintendent of PK-12 Education, an Assistant Superintendent of Learning Support Services, a Chief Academic Officer, a Chief Talent Officer, a Chief Financial Officer, a Chief Operating Officer, a Chief Institutional Advancement Officer and a Chief Labor Officer. These officers employ a data-driven, continuous improvement approach and engage school leaders in district decision-making.

## School-Based Empowerment and Innovation

The Superintendent's leadership team is made up of the seven centralized teams, each led by a Cabinet Member, and individual school leaders. Using a diverse provider approach, "school based leaders" include Principals, Charter Executives, and other Board-adopted governance partners charged with leading a school.

School-based leaders are the most knowledgeable about the learning needs of their students and thus are provided the flexibility to make informed site-based decisions with their School Governance Councils comprised of parents, principals, teachers, students, support staff, community organizations and partners. Therefore, under our empowerment model, school-based leaders earn increased autonomy in academic and operational practices within the context of a shared district accountability system. Autonomy is earned based on a set of rigorous measurement standards for school and principal performance. It is our belief that through this empowerment model the district will encourage innovation at all levels as a fundamental educational practice. Innovation is further encouraged through our diverse provider approach, which creates a portfolio of school options that represent a variety of themes, pedagogical approaches and governance models including neighborhood schools, magnet schools, charter schools, and partnership schools.

### Principal Autonomy Structure

**Autonomy:** Decisions made at the school level, fully meeting federal and state law, district policies and negotiated contracts when applicable.

<b>School Budget</b>	Schools engage in annual budget planning. The district employs a school-based budget process where money <i>follows the child</i> .
<b>Staffing</b>	Staffing decisions are made by the school-based team. The district engages a talent recruitment approach to assist schools in finding new talent within and outside of the district.
<b>Capacity Building</b>	Schools annually plan and execute a capacity building program aligned with the priorities of their school accountability plan. Schools are responsible for the capacity of their staff to meet the educational needs and goals of their students. The district provides centralized professional development on the district curriculum, as well as training in mandated areas such as special education.
<b>Specialized Curriculum</b>	Schools may create unique courses and curriculum elements that prepare students for grade advancement and college.
<b>Partnerships</b>	Schools are encouraged to seek partnerships that align with their theme, design and grade levels to advance the educational experiences of their students.

**Defined Autonomy:** Decisions are shared with supervisors in order to ensure alignment with centralized decisions aimed at maximizing district resources. Principals will be allowed independent decision-making when it does not negatively impact other schools, resources, or a district defined strategic approach and is based on best practice.

<b>Core Curriculum</b>	Schools that identify a research-based, standards-aligned alternative to the district curriculum may vary portions of the curriculum.
<b>Tiered Interventions</b>	The district will provide an SRBI tiered intervention framework to schools that can be fully adopted or modified with additional research based strategies.
<b>School Schedule</b>	Schools may propose unique instructional schedules that can be supported by their budgets.
<b>Fund Raising</b>	Major fund raising events are coordinated with the district to maintain a well-coordinated strategic approach to develop working relationships with funders and donors.

**Centralized Decisions:** Decisions are made by district executives and are applicable across all schools.

<b>Accountability System</b>	Common student performance standards and assessments will be set for all schools. The district will maintain an accountability system that evaluates schools on student growth, school climate and improvement based on state standards.
<b>Special Education Services</b>	The district will provide a continuum of special education services within and beyond the district that all schools will contribute to.
<b>Choice Process</b>	The district defines its choice process to ensure equitable access to seats across the district regardless of provider, i.e. neighborhood, magnet, charter affiliated, management entity and partnerships.
<b>Transportation Schedule</b>	The district sets an annual transportation budget and schedule.

**\*Schools performing below district expectations have limited autonomy and are supported by their supervisor.**

The Hartford Public Schools provides Principal autonomy within a leadership framework that encourages high performing school leaders to contribute to the growth of the district by:

1. Assuming leadership positions that contribute to the growth of emerging and struggling leaders
2. Participating in district level strategic decision-making, and
3. Providing informal or formal collegial coaching support

These are most evident in the following opportunities: serving as an Executive Principal who supervises two or more Principals in addition to leading a school; serving as the host Principal for a Principal-in-Residence; chairing or serving on a Strategic Operating Plan work team or committee; providing informal or formal coaching support to a novice or struggling Principal; or serving as a School Quality Officer.

## A Framework for Continuous Improvement

### Reflections

Our commitment to Hartford Public School’s Theory of Action and the advancement of our mission, vision and strategic operating plan assumes that we will reflect on our work, continuously improve, and document our outcomes to ensure that our core beliefs are driving our collective values and actions. As we seek to improve student achievement, we ask ourselves the following reflection questions:

- What evidence do we have that leadership and teaching practice is changing as a result of our improvement strategy work?
- How do we translate high capacity at the Central Office and principal level to the teacher level?
- How do we ensure within a Management Performance Empowerment Theory of Action that our individual innovation work is driven by shared core values and commitments and contributes to a cohesive community called Hartford Public Schools?

For more information, please contact

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