

Superintendent Report
Region One Schools
October 2020

We are still in school!

The COVID-19 cases continue to remain low in our six towns and fortunately, we have completed the month of September without closing. Teachers and students have had time to get to know each other and are thriving in their classrooms. Everyone continues to say how thankful they are to be back in school and reports are extremely positive about student and staff compliance with safety guidelines. It is important to note, however; that the time required to adjust to the new learning environment that includes in-person and distance learners and a hybrid schedule at the high school has had an impact on the pace of instruction in all of our schools. While the live-streamed classrooms are managed as well as can be, it is a challenge to move at the same pace as when students are all together in one classroom. Similarly, when students are divided into two groups as they are at the High School, more time is needed to meet learning expectations. Finally, we agree with the advice that comes from the CSDE staff and those who work in the area of mental health; that we have to ensure that our staff and students are emotionally secure in order to be sure that they are ready to teach and learn. Toward that end, we are continuing with social emotional learning for students and staff. We thank all of our Boards of Education and parents for understanding these challenges and for all of the support that has been provided thus far. We will continue to improve as we become accustomed to the “new normal” and our focus will remain on doing what is best for our students and staff.

COVID-19 Data Monitoring

We have been monitoring the spread of COVID-19 from a both a State and local perspective since last spring. I look at the ct.gov website several times per week. Additionally, I receive a report from EdAdvance twice per week that provides data by each town. I was sharing that report with all board members every Friday; however; the report generated a lot of questions that I could not answer without the help of the Torrington Area Health District. Their staff indicated that, due to the small size of our town populations, the algorithm being used to interpret the data distorted percentages and created concerns that were unwarranted. Additionally, they felt that my questions were distracting them from their tasks of triaging calls regarding actual COVID-19 cases and contact tracing. They assured me that if community spread becomes an issue in any of our towns (outside of our schools), they will let me know immediately. Given the issues with the report and the importance of having a good relationship with the Torrington Area Health District, it seemed prudent to stop sending it to everyone.

From a local perspective, Tina and I receive information about the number of people tested in each school as the testing occurs and I meet with all of the nurses and our Medical Advisor every other week to check in with them about the efficacy of existing health protocols. Parents have been extremely careful about keeping their children at home and the staff has been careful as well. Thus, we are on top of the situation in our schools and are ready to respond if we have a positive case in the future.

Enrollment Update

October “Black-Line” Report

We have completed the enrollment report that is due to the Department of Education this month. The table below shows enrollment figures for this year compared to those from last year:

School	Number of Students October 2019*	Number of Students October 2020**
Cornwall Consolidated School	78	93
Housatonic Valley Regional High School	342	305
Kent Center School	192	191
Lee H. Kellogg School	70	69
North Canaan Elementary School	248	247
Salisbury Central School	276	305
Sharon Center School	103	109
Total	1309	1319

*Reported numbers do not include 35 out-of-district students who are enrolled in the Pre-K-8 schools and 48 out-of-district students enrolled at HVRHS.

** Reported numbers do not include 38 out-of-district students who are enrolled in the Pre-K-8 schools and 15 out-of-district students enrolled at HVRHS.

This data table indicates that while Region One experienced a significant influx of students from outside of the Region this summer, the total enrollment has actually decreased or only slightly increased for most schools. The districts of Cornwall and Salisbury have seen the greatest gains. The negative to flat growth in the Pre-K-9 schools can be explained by large graduating eighth grade classes at the end of last year and a rise in homeschooled students this year (see table below).

Homeschooling

As of October 1, 59 resident students are currently not enrolled in a Region One school and are being homeschooled. Last year 30 students were homeschooled. The breakout by district is noted in the table below:

School	Number of Homeschooled Students 2019	Number of Homeschooled Students 2020
Cornwall Consolidated School	0	5
Housatonic Valley Regional High School	9	14
Kent Center School	2	8
Lee H. Kellogg School	9	11
North Canaan Elementary School	8	9
Salisbury Central School	2	6
Sharon Center School	0	6
Total	30	59

DeBlasio et Al Class Action Lawsuit

All school districts in Connecticut have been named in the DeBlasio et Al class action lawsuit, filed in New York State this summer. The plaintiffs are parents of students with IEPs, led by the [Brain Injury Rights](#) group, an advocacy group located in New York City. This group alleges that all students in the U.S., who were receiving special education services in the spring during the COVID-19 school closure period, experienced the denial of a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). Region One schools are insured by CIRMA against this type of situation. CIRMA has sent a [letter](#) explaining the suit and indicated that they have appointed the law firm of FordHarrison, LLP to represent their defense. Johanna Zelman, the FordHarrison attorney assigned to this case, has been in touch with me as has Alyce Alfano from Shipman & Goodwin, who is working in conjunction with FordHarrison on behalf of its Connecticut clients. The case is currently under review by a judge in New York State, who has questioned several procedural aspects with regard to how the case has been filed. There is no action necessary from Region One other than to provide FordHarrison with information if and when they need it in the future. Johanna Zelman feels that the case has no merit and will likely fall apart as they move through the process. Additionally, Carl Gross and Martha Schwaikert have stated that all Region One students received services during the school closure last spring and that Region One schools would likely not be vulnerable to a FAPE denial.

Faculty Association - Amendment to the Memorandum of Agreement

Per the [MOA of 2020-2021](#), the administrators and I met with faculty association presidents on Wednesday, September 30 to discuss item #14, which refers to instructional guidelines when students are

live streaming into classrooms during the “Green Phase” (when students are expected to be attending school in-person). Discussion with the teachers during the meeting indicated that effective management of the dual classroom environment requires considerably more time for planning and for providing feedback to students and parents who have opted to be distance learners. Additionally, now that distance learning is an option, parents are requesting permission to allow students who are ill to participate as distance learners while they are home. I am working with Boards of Education representatives, administrators and faculty association presidents to draft an amendment to the MOA that addresses these issues by:

- Providing a clause that allows for additional paid time for teachers to plan for and provide feedback to distance learners based on the number of distance learners in each classroom/discipline; and
- Setting parameters for when and how students can join classrooms when they are at home due to illness.

All three parties are currently working on terms and language. The amendment will be provided for signature by each Board of Education upon the conclusion of the negotiation process.

CoronaVirus Relief Fund Grant

The CoronaVirus Relief Fund Grant is a federal grant that provides funds for personnel and non-personnel-related expenses incurred as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Amounts awarded to each school are based on the results from a CSDE survey that was issued in August where schools were asked to submit budgets for items/personnel required to successfully operate schools in this new environment. The CSDE issued a second round of surveys in late August to allow for the reallocation of funds to those schools that were opening with hybrid plans (mostly high schools). All awarded funds have to be expended by December 30, 2020 and, at the moment, the funds must be spent in the categories noted for each school. CSDE has indicated that it may allow schools to make adjustments to those categories in early October. Scott and Jill will discuss the grant details for each school in their report.

Teacher Evaluation

The CSDE is requiring that all school districts resume teacher evaluation during the 2020-2021 school year. However, it has allowed for flexibility in the current evaluation guidelines to include an emphasis on student engagement and social emotional learning as well as student achievement. Additionally, teacher feedback will be provided in the form of a narrative report as opposed to the rating scale that has been used in the past several years. Amy Tepper and Patrick Flynn, who have been working with Region One schools for the past several years in the area of teacher evaluation, have been the architects of the flexibilities provided by the State. Amy met with the administrators and me on September 30 to review the CSDE teacher evaluation parameters and to discuss goal setting for teachers in Region One.

Title IX Update

Martha Schwaikert and I have worked with Craig Meuser to create documentation that is aligned with each step of the Title IX complaint process, We will be communicating the changes to the process and how to gain access to the documents during the month of October.

Connecticut Ranks Third in the Nation with Regard to Chances for Student Success

Governor Ned Lamont and State Education Commissioner Miguel Cardona have announced that Connecticut’s K-12 schools have been ranked as the third best in the nation by *Education Week* in the annual education of its “[Quality Counts 2020: Grading the States](#)” report. Connecticut received a grade of B with an overall score of 84.1 out of 100 points. The nation as a whole received a grade of C.

A state's overall grade is the average of its scores on the three separate indices tracked by the report, which are school finance, chance-for-success, and K-12 achievement. Connecticut's grades and rank in each category are as follows:

- **Chance-for-Success:** Connecticut earned a B+ and ranks third, while the nation as a whole earned a C+.
- **School Finance:** Connecticut earned a B+ and ranks fifth, while the nation as a whole earned a C.
- **K-12 Achievement Index:** Connecticut received a grade of C and ranks fifth. The nation as a whole also earned a C.

Education Week is an independent, nonprofit news organization dedicated to providing K-12 leaders in the U.S. with objective reporting on the news, trends, and events that shape the rapidly changing education landscape.

Details of Connecticut's ratings for each indicator can be found by clicking on [this link](#).

Preparing for Post-COVID-19 Student Re-Engagement - Research from the Hanover Group

A few years ago, EdAdvance invested in a partnership with Hanover Research on behalf of the RESC member districts. Their idea was to enlist Hanover to investigate issues or topics that surface from superintendents in the two area groups that EdAdvance supports. The [linked report](#) reviews “*academic literature and practical resources to synthesize best practices for fostering and enhancing student engagement and student achievement during remote learning and classroom re-entry.*” You will find that Region One schools have adopted an number of the practices cited to support student success during this time of the COVID-19 pandemic.