



Hartford Public Schools

Program Name:	Weighted Student Funding
Implemented:	2008-2009 School Year
Program Type:	District-Wide
Legal Authorization:	School Board Policy

School Empowerment Benchmarks		
1.	School budgets based on students not staffing	yes
2.	Charge schools actual versus average salaries	yes
3.	School choice and open-enrollment policies	yes
4.	Principal autonomy over budgets	yes
5.	Principal autonomy over hiring	yes
6.	Principal training and school-level management support	yes
7.	Published transparent school-level budgets	yes
8.	Published transparent school-level outcomes	yes
9.	Explicit accountability goals	yes
10.	Collective bargaining relief—flat contracts, etc.	yes
Hartford met 10 out of 10 school empowerment benchmarks.		



I. Program Overview

The Hartford Public School District has 22,000 students and approximately 42 schools. The district's student demographics include 52 percent Hispanic students, 41 percent Black and 6 percent White with 90 percent of the students qualifying for free or reduced lunch and 17 percent English language learners.

In 2008 the Hartford school board approved a new three-year strategic plan to improve outcomes for every student in the district.¹ The district's strategic plan outlines two complementary pillars established by the Board of Education: a "managed performance empowerment" (MPE) approach that defines the district's relationship with each school on the basis of its performance and development of an "all choice" system of schools that creates and sustains a larger number of high-performing schools.

1. The MPE approach assumes that schools must have both autonomy and accountability to promote higher performance. It rewards effective teaching and leadership by creating a direct relationship between a school's academic performance and its operational autonomy. High-performing schools make all key staffing decisions and decide how the school's resources should be allocated. They are entitled to this level of autonomy as long as they are achieving results in terms of student achievement. Schools whose students do not achieve proficiency in testing are subject to increasing levels of intervention from the central office. If no improvement occurs, the school is redesigned and replaced with a higher performing school model. The exchange of

autonomy for accountability is an essential idea in this theory of change. If school leaders are to be responsible for results, they must have a full opportunity to manage the inputs and processes that determine those results.

2. An "all choice system" means that all families have a greater opportunity to decide where their children attend school. It rests, in part, on the recognition that the act of making an educational choice helps inspire commitment among students and families. Choice also recognizes diversity in learning interests, needs and values. Encouraging students to pursue their interests is an important way to tap learning potential. Small schools specializing in subject matter like law and government, engineering, nursing and global communication are an important component of new school development because the opportunity to choose and pursue a particular course of study often engages and motivates students in ways that more generalized programs do not.

Given the wide range of performance of Hartford public schools, the district defines each school's level of autonomy based on student achievement.

- High-performing and significantly improving schools earn autonomy.
- Low-performing schools are subject to district intervention or redesign or replacement.
- New and redesigned schools are granted autonomy conditioned upon continuous improvement of student achievement.

The school board's overall goal is for Hartford public schools to evolve over time to a total system of high-performing schools driven by student and parental choice.

Hartford's reform agenda includes the introduction of a student-based budgeting (SBB) methodology known as "weighted student funding" (WSF). This program enables schools to fund students based on their educational needs. Weighted student funding creates equity in the allocation of available resources through a uniform system in which each student is funded by an appropriate grade-level allocation with the funding adjusted on the basis of his/her educational needs. These resources then follow the child to the school their parent chooses.

Specifically, WSF will increase funding at 25 historically under-funded schools based on the students that attend those schools. Prior to 2008, 50 percent of Hartford's schools were spending \$4,000 to \$7,000 per pupil while the other 50 percent were spending anywhere from \$7,000 to \$18,000 per pupil. This was a potential gap of \$14,000 per student.

In addition, before student-based budgeting, Hartford public schools budgeted for most teachers in terms of positions rather than how much they actually cost. As a result, for example, two schools' enrollment levels give them each 100 teachers, but if the teachers at one school have average salaries of \$70,000 and teachers at the other school have average salaries of \$60,000, then the district will have provided \$1 million less resources to the school with lower average teacher salaries.

The main goals of weighted student funding for Hartford public schools include:

- WSF will equitably allocate funding to each student based on his or her educational needs by utilizing the weighted student funding formula. WSF

will directly link the budget to student achievement.

- School leaders and members of the community know best what their schools need for their students to achieve. WSF will provide greater opportunity to schools and communities to make the best choices for their students and their success.
- WSF will be transparent and eliminate many complex staffing ratios and provide funding through a simplified allocation. Instead of hiding the difficult choices inherent in budgeting, the new formula brings those choices out into the open for all to see and evaluate.

WSF will be phased in over a three-year period beginning in FY08-09. This will provide schools the opportunity to plan for any major shifts in funding. Each year schools will be allocated one-third of their gain or loss from the formula implementation until equity is achieved.

Hartford Public School District publishes very detailed school-level budgets that report the student populations at each school as well as the funds generated by each group of students. The school level budgets also include the school's performance data.

In the 2009-2010 budget 70 percent of available resources will be allocated to schools and classrooms to support instruction. This ratio, in which central office and central services are limited to 30 percent of the budget, is reflective of the national average for public school districts and contrasts to less than one-half of resources spent in schools and classrooms by the Hartford Public School District in 2006-07. The district achieved this goal with a 20 percent reduction of central office expenses

including the reduction of over 40 current district-level positions.

II. Student-Based Budgeting Formula

In Hartford public school, the student-based budgeting approach is called “weighted student funding.” This approach means that:

- Funding follows each student to the school that he/she attends;
- Each student receives funding based on his/her educational needs;
- Schools have greater flexibility on how to allocate their funding, with greater responsibility for dollars and greater accountability for results;
- Key decisions are based on clear criteria linked to the school improvement plan and the MPE approach.
- Schools are required to focus their funds on strategies to improve student achievement aligning with the school and district improvement plans.

Student-based budgeting makes spending flexible to allow for real budget planning. In the past schools were given line item allocations determined by the central office for staff and programs in their schools.

Using the WSF formula, dollars are allocated to schools through two basic categories:

- Grade weights, based on student grade levels;
- Needs weights, based on student needs.

The district provides every student with a base weight determined by grade level; Grades 9–12 are funded at a slightly higher level than grades K–5 for several reasons:

older students tend to have higher costs for non-personnel (such as more costly science materials), they often take electives that break into smaller classes and their schools often require more administrative personnel. This approach is consistent with the district’s historic funding practices and with practices in other cities.

All students receive WSF funding through grade-level weights. Schools with nontraditional grade configurations will receive their base weight funding in more than one category. For example, a K-8 school will receive the K-5 weight for the K-5 grades and a 6-8 weight for the 6-8 grades. A sixth grader carries the same weight whether at a 6-8, a K-8 or a 6-12 school.

The grade weights and funding are as follows:

- Kindergarten is weighted at 0.85 or \$5,430 per pupil
- Grades 1 to 3 are weighted at 1.20 or \$7,666 per pupil
- Grades 4 to 6 are weighted at 1.0 or \$6,388 per pupil
- Grades 7 to 8 are weighted at 1.10 or \$7,027 per pupil
- Grades 9 to 12 are weighted at 1.30 or \$8,304 per pupil

In addition, starting in the 2008-09 school year, students are eligible for needs-based weights for the following characteristics:

- Academic intervention, based on poverty for schools beginning before fourth grade and achievement for schools beginning in fourth grade or later.
- English language learner status
- Special education

The district believes that the best way to identify students with greater need is to look at their past achievement. Therefore, to the extent possible, Hartford relies on student achievement data—results on Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) and Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT) exams to identify students eligible for additional funding.

Since the regular first testing occurs in third grade, the district uses test data only for schools starting after that grade (i.e., in fourth grade or later). For schools beginning before fourth grade, the district uses poverty as a proxy for low achievement. Particularly in the elementary grades, there is a very tight correlation between poverty and achievement. More than 90 percent of low-scoring students are also low-income in Hartford.

Achievement Weight (Poverty Proxy)

- Students enrolled before grade four who qualify for the free or reduced price lunch program qualify for an “achievement weight by poverty proxy.” This is also the criteria for Title I eligibility.

The poverty weight and corresponding funding is as follows:

- 0.10 or \$639 per pupil

At schools beginning in fourth grade or later, students receive additional weights based on their achievement. There are two funding levels—a higher achievement weight for students “well below standards,” and a lower one for students who are below grade level, but closer to proficiency (“below standards”). Scores are based on the last test result before the student enters his or her current school. Additional funding will be provided to those students designated as “gifted and talented.”

The achievement weights and corresponding funding are as follows:

- Well below standards is 0.10 or \$639 per pupil
- Below standards is 0.05 or \$320 per pupil
- Gifted and talented is 0.10 or \$639 per pupil

Eligibility for English language learner funding is determined through a preliminary assessment with a home language survey. The ELL weight and corresponding funding are as follows:

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- 0.30 or \$1,917 per pupil

Special education is weighted based on the level of service for each special education child. There is a range of weights from children who are 100 percent mainstreamed in the general education classroom at .57 (\$3,641) weight to students who must be in a self-contained class with no more than five other students at 4.21 weight (\$26,901).²

Beginning in 2009-2010 schools will begin to bear the cost of their staffing decisions through the budgeting of actual staff salaries. This means that fiscal year 2008-2009 hiring decisions will either provide savings or higher cost for the 2009-2010 fiscal year resources. With the greater control over budgets that the new approach creates, schools will have both new opportunities and new responsibilities. Schools can choose how to combine their investments in different types of teachers, services and supports to improve student achievement.

III. Autonomy

In 2009-2010 schools will receive 70 percent of the district’s operating budget

at the school level and principals will have discretion over staffing decisions. A new collective bargaining contract for 2008-2011 allows flexibility for longer school days or years and scheduling, such as block scheduling.

IV. School-Level Management Support

In the district's strategic plan the school board acknowledges that effective principal leadership is one of the most significant factors that promote student achievement. The district is making a strong commitment to principal leadership training through more intensive professional development and principal mentors to help new school leaders. The district will also measure principals' performance on the district's "school leader rubric" and require each principal to be in the effective range by the principal's third year. Principals can receive bonuses up to 25 percent of their contracts for raising student achievement at their individual schools.

V. School Site Councils

All autonomous schools will establish "school governance councils" (SGCs). The SGCs will annually approve a school budget aligned to the school's accountability plan. These decision-making bodies will be made up of parents, school staff and community members. The district will provide training for parents, students and school leadership at autonomous schools to ensure the understanding of the role of SGCs.

VI. School Choice Component

Hartford public schools provide an "all choice" system of schools. Students will be equitably funded according to their needs and these funds will follow the student to his school of choice.

The district employs two choice models:

1. Inter-district choice schools will provide regional opportunities for the integration of city and suburban students.
2. Intra-district choice schools will provide preference to students of their neighborhood with remaining seats available to other Hartford students. Parents would have the option of a greater number of schools within transportation zones. Within the portfolio of choices available there will be a number of external providers or public and private school partnerships.

Hartford public schools have identified five criteria used by families in deciding which school to attend:

1. A school's track record of high academic achievement
2. Proximity to home
3. School design (school theme, course offerings)
4. Historical and traditional ties to the school, principal and teachers
5. Other personal family reasons

The Hartford school choice program operates under the assumption that while families and students make school choices based on what is personally most important to them, it is understood that all families want high-quality, high-achieving schools that will prepare their children for future success. Therefore, the district's directive is clear: Hartford must create new high-

performing schools with a focus on state standards and college readiness. Using a diverse provider strategy, Hartford will offer parents new choices among higher quality schools.

In 2008, Hartford added 11 new schools for parents to choose from including the Culinary Arts Academy, the Academy of Engineering and Green Technology, the Achievement First Hartford Academy, the Global Communications Academy, the Academy for Latino Studies, the Law and Government Academy, the Hartford Montessori Elementary School, the Nursing Academy, the Breakthrough II Magnet School and the Core Knowledge Academy at Milner Elementary School and the CommPACT School at M.D. Fox Elementary.³ In 2009-2010 the district will add nine additional new schools for students to choose from.

VII. Accountability

As a component of the 2008 strategic plan, the Board of Education has adopted a “managed performance empowerment” approach based on beliefs about the conditions that best promote learning. Under this theory high-performing schools have the autonomy to make curricular, budget and other operational decisions while lower-performing schools are under the direction of a central office-based intervention team. Schools that consistently perform at very low levels are redesigned. School performance is determined using a measure called the “overall school index” (OSI). This metric includes all grades and content areas measured by state assessments. A school’s OSI is calculated annually and used to place the school on the district

performance matrix.

- OSI of 70 or above = Goal
- OSI 60-69 = High Proficient
- OSI 50-59 = Proficient
- OSI 40-49 = Below Proficient
- OSI below 40 = Substantially Below Proficient

In order to determine a school’s level of autonomy, the current year OSI and the change in OSI from the previous year are used. In addition to the OSI the district annually sets nine targets in key performance areas focused on closing the achievement gap between Hartford and the state of Connecticut. These targets are set annually and designed to demonstrate how Hartford schools will close the achievement gap by making incremental gains over the span of a child’s school experience. The nine key performance targets are:

- Grade 3 Reading
- Grade 4 Mathematics
- Grade 5 Writing
- Grade 7 Math
- Grade 8 Science
- Grade 10 Reading and Writing
- Graduation Rate (using National Governors Association method)
- Post-Secondary Enrollment: (at two- and four-year institutions)
- Improvement of School Performance (OSI)

Both the OSI and performance targets are used by the district data team and Board of Education to measure progress toward improving schools and closing the achievement gap.

The district’s specific achievement targets include:

1. All schools below an OSI of 70 will demonstrate an increase of 12 points over three years.
2. The percent of students meeting district performance targets will increase by 4 percent annually, in order to close the achievement gap.
3. Eighty percent of Hartford's public schools will be in the autonomous range of the school accountability matrix by the end of 2012.

The district also uses a performance pay system to increase accountability and improve student achievement. In 2008 the Hartford Board of Education unanimously ratified two new collective bargaining agreements with the Hartford Federation of Teachers (HFT) and the Hartford Principals and Supervisors Association (HPSA) including merit-based incentives that set national precedent and are seen signifying strong teacher and administrator support for the continuing Hartford's school-reform movement.⁴

Each school has the option to participate in a merit-based bonus when an increase to the overall school index (OSI) is achieved. The OSI incentive system is implemented when 75 percent of teachers at each school support the merit system. The teachers are eligible for a \$2,500 bonus based on increases in assessment and overall school ranking. In addition, Hartford is piloting a "teacher advancement program" (TAP) that includes rewarding teachers on an individual basis for "adding value" to student achievement. In addition, principals are eligible for bonuses of up to 25 percent of their contracts for demonstrating an annual increase against the overall school index.

VIII. Performance Outcomes

Hartford schools significantly raised scores on both the 2008 Connecticut Mastery Test and the 2008 Connecticut Academic Performance Test this year—the first increase since 2001, according to preliminary results released to the district by the State Department of Education.⁵

In fact, Hartford's schools had the largest gains in student achievement of any city in the state on the Connecticut Mastery Tests for 2007-08—over three times the state average rate of growth. Sixteen Hartford schools significantly improved performance while five of the lowest-performing schools were redesigned and replaced by higher-performing school models. Four other schools of choice were offered to parents for the first time.

A total of 16 schools improved meaningfully over last year, while four schools moved down in achievement for an unprecedented net gain of 12 schools that surpassed expectations. Most encouraging was the fact that eight schools moved from the "intervention" to "proficient" categories in the district's accountability plan.

CMTs are state-mandated, standardized tests that measure student achievement in reading, mathematics and writing in grades three through eight. CMTs in fifth and eighth-grade science were administered this year for the first time. This year's CMT results showed more Hartford students scoring at or above proficient in 13 of the 18 categories tested and in three of the four subject areas that are considered key indicators of learning: third-grade reading, fourth-grade math, fifth-grade writing and seventh-grade math. Among Hartford's

performance targets, third-grade reading rose 3.2 percentage points. In fourth-grade mathematics, the rate of students at or above proficient jumped from 42.5 percent to an even 50 percent. Students in seventh-grade math, meanwhile, registered a similar surge, from 47.4 percent at or above proficient to 52.6 percent.

The CAPT is another state-mandated assessment of reading, mathematics, writing and science for all 10th-grade students enrolled in Connecticut public high schools. District-wide CAPT results improved in every category. The rate of students scoring at or above proficient in mathematics rose from 43.4 percent to 46.7 percent.

In reading, 52.2 percent of 10th-graders were at or above proficient, as opposed to 49.8 percent in 2007. Writing proficiency, meanwhile, grew from 56.6 percent to 65.9 percent and, in science, the level of students at or above proficient increased to 46.9 percent from 45.3 percent.

Test results are incorporated into the district's school improvement matrix, which tracks the progress of each school. The updated 2007-2008 matrix shows 22 schools in the higher levels of autonomy compared to 15 last year. Fifteen schools, meanwhile, are slated for replacement or intervention. Two elementary schools, Mark Twain and Barnard-Brown, have closed.

The Mark Twain building is set to house a Montessori school and the Achievement First Hartford Academy. The Barnard-Brown building, meanwhile, is being renovated to become the permanent home of the Capital Preparatory Magnet School.

VIII. Lessons Learned

1. Hartford demonstrates the value of a clear accountability matrix that evaluates each school and sets the level of autonomy for each school based on student performance. Low-performing schools face intensive intervention from central office teams and eventual closure if performance does not improve.
2. Hartford has employed an aggressive strategy of closing low-performing schools and redirecting resources to higher quality new schools.
3. Hartford has embraced a strategy to provide many different niche schools with secondary schools that offer content-specific curriculum such as engineering or nursing.
4. Hartford has made school choice one of two pillars of their strategic plan. Every family will have a choice of a high quality school.
5. Most significantly, the Hartford school board has taken personal accountability for the performance of Hartford schools and set very specific criteria for performance. The school board has defined the conditions under which they will reward high performers and close low performers.

Resources

Guide to Student-Based Budgeting 2008-2009, Hartford Public Schools, <http://www.hartfordschools.org/documents/RevisedSBBGuide.pdf>.

Hartford Public Schools' Recommended Operating Budget FY 2009-2010, Hartford Public Schools, March 3, 2009, <http://www.hartfordschools.org/pdf/2009-10-Recommended-Budget-Final.pdf>.

Hartford Public Schools, Three Year Strategic Operating Plan, <http://www.hartfordschools.org/learn-about-hps/documents/HartfordPlan021709FINAL.pdf>

5. *Hartfrod CMT and CAPT Scores Rise*, *Hartford Public Schools*, Press Release, July 15, 2008.

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Endnotes

1. *Hartford Public Schools, Three Year Strategic Operating Plan*, <http://www.hartfordschools.org/learn-about-hps/documents/HartfordPlan021709FINAL.pdf>
2. For detailed special education weights see: *Guide to Student-Based Budgeting 2008-2009*, Hartford Public Schools, <http://www.hartfordschools.org/documents/RevisedSBBGuide.pdf>.
3. *New Era Begins for Hartford Public Schools*, Hartford Public Schools, Press Release, August 25, 2008.
4. *Commitment to Hartford School Reform Deepens with Breakthrough Ratification of Two Collective Bargaining Agreements*, Hartford Public Schools, Press Release, February 19, 2008.