

The New Three R's of Education

01.28.2021

Stonington Public Schools

Overview

Everyone is familiar with the old three R's of education - reading, writing, and arithmetic. These three R's are often used to represent back to basics austerity. The pandemic has created a new set of the three R's- Relief, Recovery, and Rebuild¹. We are at a critical crossroads. Now is the time to invest in rebuilding the educational experience for all Stonington students. Before the board starts making difficult decisions that will affect a generation of students, it's essential to understand where we were, what has happened, and what we need to do to Rebuild.

Goals

1. Understanding Where We Were 2010 - 2018
2. Shaking the Etch A Sketch
3. The Three A's
4. The New Three R's
5. The Need to Rebuild

The Way We Were

Before 2010, Stonington Public Schools were stagnant in the sweet spot of good but not great student achievement. The board of education continually compared our student achievement metrics with neighboring districts and pushed for improvement. School leadership and the BOE collaboratively developed the plan and the funding to reach these goals. These breakthroughs included:

- Both elementary schools reach the highest level of achievement on the state's new accountability report and earn Schools of Distinction.
- Deans Mill was recognized as an outstanding elementary school of the year for the 2016-2017 school year.
- Both middle schools reach level two status and their School Performance Index (SPI) and score among the top scores of area middle schools.

¹ "COVID-19 and student performance, equity, and U.S." 10 Sep. 2020, <https://www.epi.org/publication/the-consequences-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-for-education-performance-and-equity-in-the-united-states-what-can-we-learn-from-pre-pandemic-research-to-inform-recovery-and-rebuilding/>. Accessed 12 Jan. 2021.

- SHS makes gains in SPI and school day SAT scores, including a 40 point gain in both math and ELA school day SAT scores for High Needs Students
- SHS class of 2017 has the highest persistence rate of all the area high schools, with 96 percent of students returning for their sophomore year of college.
- The District Performance Index rises consistently to the top of the area schools.
- In 2018, all of the schools in the district met the state's achievement gap goals.

How We Did It

School leadership and the BOE achieved these results by strengthening all three legs of the instructional triangle: The What, The How, and The Who.

The What

- Established a standard reading curriculum K-5 and ensured the fidelity of instructional delivery. (Wonders)
- Established a standard math curriculum K-8 and ensured the fidelity of instructional delivery. (Eureka)
- Established a Group of curriculum specialists to update, write, and review curriculum in all content areas at all levels. Developed a plan to review and update the curriculum on a routine schedule.

The How

- Utilized teacher leaders in both Math and ELA content areas K-8 (2015)
- Funded and upgraded these to ELA and Math coaches to improve the quality and consistency of instruction of all teachers K-8 (2016)

The Who

- Changed the hiring process dramatically to anticipate needs sooner. The shift to being the first in the marketplace when hiring new teachers improved new hires' quality.
- Focused on hiring more highly qualified teachers in math and science. Made teacher transfers to increase openings in math and science.
- Establishing content area compartmentalization at the upper elementary grades allowed teachers to focus on just ELA or math instruction, which dramatically improved student achievement.

Shaking the Etch A Sketch

Any significant changes in school construction and district realignment almost always result in a temporary dip in student achievement. The district made dramatic changes in four schools simultaneously, confident that the short term dip would be worth the long term gains.



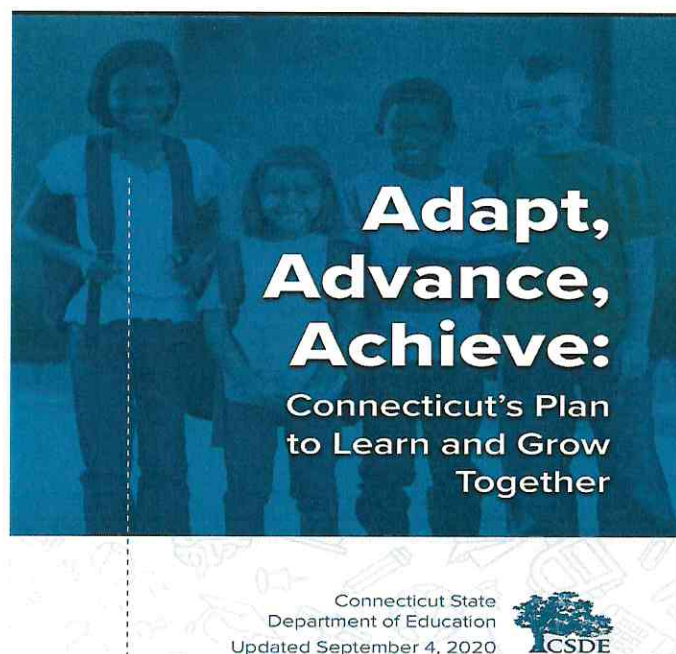
New Elementary Schools

The construction of the two new elementary schools and the realignment to K-5 significantly changed for teachers and students. A substantial number of teachers changed positions and grade levels.

Consolidating Middle Schools

The consolidation of the two middle schools also resulted in significant personnel changes, including hiring three new highly qualified math teachers.

The Three A's



In March 2020, the pandemic caused the complete shutdown of the school district for two weeks. In that short amount of time, the curriculum specialists designed the pivot to full distance learning. As the pandemic continued to wax and wane throughout the summer, the State Department of Education issued its guidance for returning to school in the fall of 2020 - Adapt, Advance, Achieve. Leadership spent the summer preparing the plans to return to school safely while attempting to maximize the opportunity to learn for students.

The New Three R's

Relief

Relief is the immediate response to COVID-19 to put the school system on a solid footing to provide effective remote instruction and supports at scale as the crisis continues to play out.² Every department of SPS was involved with this effort. As part of the Relief phase, we accomplished -

- Meals provided by SPS Food services
- One-to-one device provided to all students and support staff
- Internet for all families
- Plan to meet the Covid-19 required safety measures
- New technology programs provided to support distance learning

² "COVID-19 and student performance, equity, and U.S." 10 Sep. 2020, <https://www.epi.org/publication/the-consequences-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-for-education-performance-and-equity-in-the-united-states-what-can-we-learn-from-pre-pandemic-research-to-inform-relief-recovery-and-rebuilding/>. Accessed 12 Jan. 2021.

- Curriculum prioritized and adjusted for the remainder of the year.

Recovery

Recovery represents our efforts so far in the 2020-2021 school year to compensate for the time and opportunity to learn for all students. These efforts include:

- Curriculum
 - Triage curriculum
 - Provide grade-level content
 - Use of effective and intentional teaching strategies
- Academic Supports
 - 4-day in-school option
 - Executive Functioning Coach (SHS)
 - Bear Academy (SHS)
- Trauma sensitive practices
 - Home visits
 - Second Step Curriculum (SEL) for K-8
- Technology training for teachers and support staff
- Technology programs extended to help with targeting needs
- Continued professional development for teachers and support staff to ensure the quality of online/hybrid instruction
- Devices for support staff
- Support students and staff social and emotional needs

Rebuild

The Rebuild phase is the most critical work the BOE has ever faced. The funding decisions this year will impact a generation of SPS students affected by the pandemic. We must "Lay the foundations for a shift toward an education system that understands the complexity of education, including a design that works equally for all students, and reflects the value we

place on education as a society. Rebuilding after the pandemic will require substantial amounts of resources.”³ The Board of Education and the SPS leadership team invested significant time, effort, and resources to start the breakthrough from good to great student achievement. These outstanding achievements underscore how much we have to lose if we do not invest today for the future. The Rebuild phase must include:

- Increase Instructional Time
 - Extended schedules
 - Summer School (focusing on re-engaging learners through experiences)
 - Continue blended learning at SHS
- Increase High Impact Supports
 - Instructional Coaches
 - Interventionists in Math and ELA
- Teacher and Staff Training
 - Retain highly qualified teachers and staff
 - Embedded professional development
 - Reinstate teaching position cut in the past two budget years
- Embrace a whole-child approach to education
 - Build relationships
 - Personalized learning
 - SEL
 - Student Engagement
 - Parent and Family Engagement
- Community Connections
 - Reconnecting with community partnerships that unable to occur during the pandemic
 - Collaborate with local programs to enrich educational experiences

³ "COVID-19 and student performance, equity, and U.S." 10 Sep. 2020, <https://www.epi.org/publication/the-consequences-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-for-education-performance-and-equity-in-the-united-states-what-can-we-learn-from-pre-pandemic-research-to-inform-recovery-and-rebuilding/>. Accessed 12 Jan. 2021.