

**CONNECTICUT STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
Hartford**

**Legislation and Policy Development Committee Meeting
March 4, 2015**

**Minutes
(Approved 4/6/2015)**

Pursuant to notice filed with the Secretary of the State, the Board of Education Legislation and Policy Development Committee met in Room 117, State Office Building, 165 Capitol Avenue, Hartford, Connecticut on March 4, 2015.

I. Call to Order

Committee Chair Theresa Hopkins-Staten called the meeting to order at 8:37 a.m. Also present were committee members Robert Trefry, Erin Benham, Maria Mojica and Terry Jones.*

Also present for all or part of the meeting were the following Department of Education staff members: Assistant to the Commissioner for Board Matters Pamela Charland, Bureau Chief John Frassinelli, Interim Chief Performance Officer Ajit Gopalakrishnan, Bureau Chief Mark Linabury, Regional School Choice & Sheff Office Division Director Glen Peterson, Dir. of Community Affairs, RSCO Office, Jim Polites, Education Staff Assistant Sergio Rodriguez, Chief Operating Officer Charlene Russell-Tucker, Associate Education Consultant Kari Sullivan and Paralegal Mark Shepherd. In addition, members of the Center for Children’s Advocacy, Executive Director Martha Stone, Kathryn Meyer and Leon Smith were in attendance.

II. Approval of Meeting Minutes

On a motion made by Ms. Benham and seconded by Ms. Mojica, the Committee unanimously approved the February 4, 2015 Legislation and Policy Development Committee meeting minutes.

III. Center for Children’s Advocacy Presentation

Committee Chair Hopkins-Staten recognized and welcomed members of the Center for Children’s Advocacy in attendance at the meeting, noting their commitment to legislative initiatives and possible future collaborative efforts with the State Department of Education. Chief Operating Officer Russell-Tucker concurred, explaining to committee members the current coordination efforts between the Department and the Center for Children’s Advocacy and that it benefits the education outcomes of our students.

On behalf of the Center for Children’s Advocacy, Executive Director Martha Stone began with an outline of her organization’s current initiative, “Second Chance Platform for Kids” which she connected ideologically to Governor Malloy’s recent call for a “Second Chance society” for non-violent offenders in Connecticut. As discussed, the Center would emphasize the availability of preemptive intervention, “second chances” and alternatives for Connecticut’s school children at greatest risk for chronic absenteeism, school discipline and missed educational opportunities. She illustrated the “Second Chance” concept for children as a critical component of any approach to drafting or implementing education policy.

*Mr. Jones arrived at 8:47 a.m.

Ms. Stone referred committee members to the printed material prepared by her team for the presentation and then introduced Kathryn Meyer, Director of the Center’s Educational Success Project, who reviewed the Center’s data regarding:

- Second Chance for Kids;
- Disproportionality; and
- Proposed Legislation.

Disproportionality. Ms. Meyer noted that the Center’s data conclusively identifies children of color, particularly boys, as disproportionately represented in cases of school discipline up to and including suspension, prior even to age 7.

Of the “offenses” recorded by the Center committed by children in this category, 38% could be categorized as nonaggressive, i.e. insubordination, outbursts and otherwise nonthreatening behaviors. Ms. Meyer also noted that at present, parents who are employed at low-skilled, low-paying jobs, are often called to come in to school and do not have the option to take time off during school hours, travel to school and respond to these incidents. Consequently, these events may directly lead to a suspension of the student.

Proposed Legislation. Ms. Meyer referred committee members to the appropriate section of the printed package. The proposed bills prohibiting out-of-school suspension and expulsion of children under 8 are numbers S.B. 781, H.B. 6520, while H.B. 6267 establishes a task force to examine the issue from a public health perspective. All are presently before the state legislature.

Ms. Stone then introduced Leon Smith, Director of the Center’s, Alternative Schools Project, who reviewed the Center’s data regarding:

- Alternative Education;
- Disproportionality; and
- Proposed Legislation.

Disproportionality. Mr. Smith also noted that the available data identifying high school age students affected by out-of-school suspensions and expulsions and who would best benefit from a revised alternative education policy are predominantly male students of color.

Alternative Education. A crucial component lacking in school district expulsion policy, Mr. Smith emphasized, is a statewide legislative alternative education requirement ensuring that these students have access to the same core educational opportunities as any other Connecticut students. He reminded members of the present hourly instructional standard noting its inadequacy.

Proposed Legislation. Mr. Smith also referred committee members to the appropriate section of the printed package. The proposed bills requiring alternative education opportunities for expelled students are numbers H.B. 6615 and H.B. 6531, both presently before the state legislature.

Ms. Stone then referenced the "Raise the Age" standard enacted by the legislature in 2007 to extend juvenile jurisdiction to young offenders 16-17 years of age rather than direct their cases to the adult courts and correction system. This background information was used to introduce and discuss the Center's "Raise the Grade" initiatives and to review some of the Center's data findings and legislative initiatives with committee members. As presented, the state would commit itself to "Raise the Grade" goals and standards for students as it has for youthful offenders.

Discussion ensued during and after the Center for Children's Advocacy's presentation and members commented and asked questions. Ms. Hopkins-Staten asked Ms. Meyer for more information about subject children's behavioral issues. Mr. Trefry suggested that committee members have an opportunity to review materials before providing input. Ms. Hopkins-Staten agreed and noted that the guests may be invited back at a future meeting. Ms. Hopkins-Staten asked Mr. Smith to elaborate on how the state's alternative education programs presently operate and commented on the re-enrollment procedure. The Center's representatives responded to all questions posed to them.

Chief Operating Officer Russell-Tucker then noted and itemized for committee members the recent parallel efforts underway by the Department that address some of the same issues raised during the Center's presentation.

Ms. Hopkins-Staten thanked the guest attendees for their individual presentations and the Center for Children's Advocacy for its work.

IV. Committee Membership Update

At this time, Committee Chair Hopkins-Staten advised members and attendees that Joseph Vrabley would no longer serve as a member of this committee as of March 4, 2015. She went

on to acknowledge and express gratitude for his commitment and contributions during his tenure with the committee on behalf of the Board and fellow committee members. She noted that he would be missed.

V. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 9:28 a.m.

Prepared by:

Mark Shepherd, Paralegal