

**CONNECTICUT STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
Hartford**

Accountability and Support Committee

Monday, April 4, 2016

**State Office Building, 165 Capitol Avenue, Room 307A
Hartford**

Draft Minutes

Committee

Members Present: Dr. Estela López, Chairperson
William P. Davenport
Robert J. Trefry (via telephone)

Committee

Members Absent: Erin Benham
Malia Sieve

Other Board

Members Present: Theresa Hopkins-Staten
Joseph J. Vrabely

Staff Present:

Pamela Charland
Shondel Edwards
Ajit Gopalakrishnan
Mark Linabury
Desi Nesmith
Charlene Russell-Tucker

I. Call to Order

Pursuant to notice filed with the Secretary of the State, Chairperson López called meeting to order at 2.10 p.m.

Dr. López and Mrs. Theresa Hopkins-Staten welcomed the Waterbury Public School System staff and thanked them for providing Board members with a progress report on Waterbury schools.

II. Waterbury Turnaround Updates

Mr. Desi Nesmith, Chief Turnaround Officer, presented updates on the Waterbury school district. He stated that chronic absenteeism has remained the same or has decreased in twelve of the nineteen schools. Mr. Nesmith noted that in a few short months, the principal of Crosby High School was able to mobilize the leadership team and school governance council, and make chronic absenteeism a community-wide issue.

Waterbury Superintendent of Schools Kathleen Ouellette stated that Crosby High School is appreciative of being in the Commissioner's Network, and spoke in support of the academy structure in place. She described specific supports in place at Crosby, including staffing, project-based learning, New Tech Network Integration, one-on-one technology, as well as GEAR-UP.

Dr. Ouellette reported that Waterbury outpaces only 2.5% of its special education population, a much lower rate than other districts. Data show success in this area, she noted. Superintendent Ouellette said the school system is pleased that Walsh School has been elevated from a "turnaround status" to a "focus status."

Mr. Paul Whyte, Instructional Leadership Director of Waterbury School District, described efforts at Crosby School to target resources directly toward the students, he explained the benefits of project-based learning and the sustainability of this effort.

Mr. Darren Schwartz, Chief Academic Officer of Waterbury School District, stated that programs in arts and physical education were added to the afternoon summer school program to ensure that those students who are required to attend summer school do not miss out on enrichment activities.

Dr. López questioned what strategies have been effective.

Dr. Ouellette attributed success to a cohesive leadership team at the schools (teachers and leaders), and staff members embracing change across the school system. The rigor of instruction has increased, and weekly communication with leaders of bargaining units takes place, she added.

Superintendent Ouellette discussed data included in the Alliance Grant four-year summary, including a decrease in suspensions and expulsions. Mr. Schwartz explained that the new director of special education and pupil personnel has provided professional development in student discipline (e.g., what constitutes an expulsion, mandatory expulsion, impact of being out of school on the student, and other techniques that can be employed in lieu of expulsion). He noted that as of last week, there were 156 expulsions, compared with 364 in the prior year at this time.

Mrs. Hopkins-Staten was interested in the way the police respond to calls from the school and the impact that may have on a child. Waterbury staff responded that school resource officers are well-trained, understand the issues in the Waterbury district, and provide mediations and other interventions to avoid unnecessary arrests, which have declined.

Mr. Ajit Gopalakrishnan, Chief Performance Officer, clarified that new legislation was enacted to include in the definition of school-based arrests only those incidents that happened at school or at a school-sponsored event.

Mr. Vrabely and Mrs. Hopkins-Staten asked about the status of minority teacher recruitment, promotion and retention, noting the benefits of a diverse teaching force to students and teachers.

Superintendent Ouellette shared that in her four-and-a-half years as Superintendent, she has hired fifteen minority leaders, nine of whom have remained in the school system. The Waterbury staff acknowledged its low hiring rate of minority teachers, and assured the Board that they are reviewing hiring practices and ways to improve.

Superintendent Ouellette shared information on the high school and elementary curriculum, as well as the graduation rates for Waterbury schools; she provided results and strategies aligned with the newly released next generation accountability system.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:24 p.m.

Respectfully submitted

Shondel Edwards