

**Connecticut State Board of Education
Hartford**

To: State Board of Education
From: Charlene M. Russell-Tucker
Date: February 11, 2026
Subject: State Board of Education Conversion Report

Executive Summary

Pursuant to Public Act 24-81 Section 121, the State Education Resource Center (SERC) has prepared a report on the conversion of the State Board of Education (SBOE) to an Advisory Board.

In 2024, the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) contracted with SERC to carry out the responsibilities established in Section 121 for PA 24-81 and make recommendations to the Commissioner to develop a plan to:

(1) convert the State Board of Education from being the department head, as defined in section 4-5 of the general statutes, of the Department of Education to an advisory board within the department, and

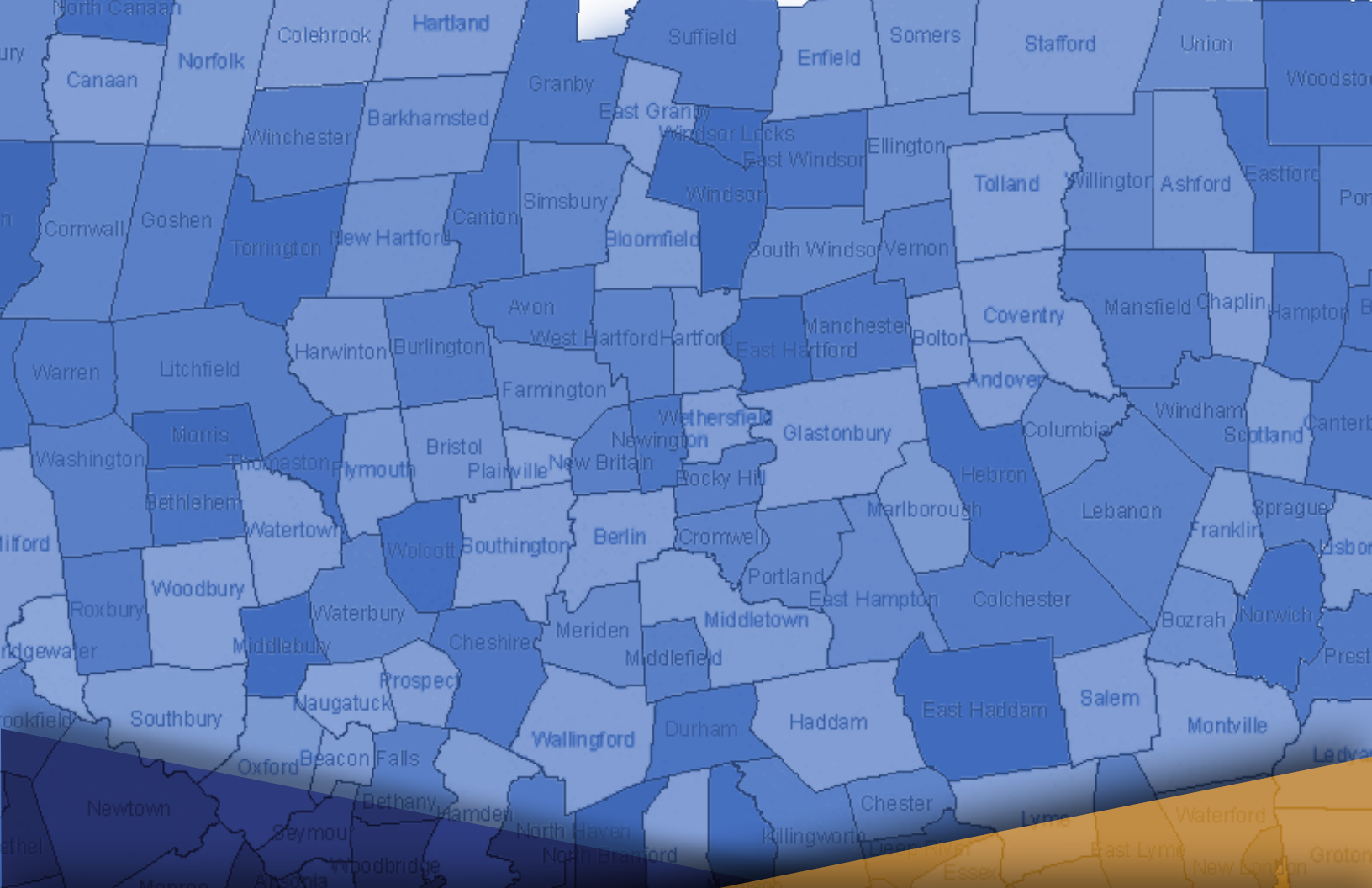
(2) empower the Commissioner of Education to become the department head for the Department of Education.

Enclosed with this memo is the report which includes 5 specific recommendations.

- 1) Leverage Current Board Expertise
- 2) Establish a timeline for transition and implementation
- 3) Revise Statutes and SBOE Bylaws
- 4) Develop Communications Strategy
- 5) Monitor and Evaluate Post-Implementation

We look forward to engaging in conversations with the legislature throughout the upcoming session regarding potential future legislative action and will provide updates to the board.

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BOARD CONVERSION REPORT

DECEMBER 2025

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About the State Education Resource Center (SERC)

■ Our mission:

SERC provides resources, professional development, and a centralized library to educators, families, and community members in collaboration with the Connecticut State Department of Education and other partners.

■ Our vision:

Equity. Excellence. Education

At SERC, our mission and vision are grounded in a deep and unwavering commitment to equity and social justice. We believe every student deserves access to educational opportunities that honor and reflect their unique identities, abilities, and experiences. Regardless of a student's race, ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, or background, we are dedicated to providing programs and services that empower, uplift, and inspire.

Through our resources, professional development offerings, and centralized library—core components of our legislative responsibility—we work to dismantle systemic barriers and foster environments built on compassion, accountability, and transformative change.

Our team members, in collaboration with the Connecticut State Department of Education and partners in school districts and community organizations, support educators, service providers, and families in strengthening their capacity to meet the diverse needs of all students.

The Team

This report was developed by a multidisciplinary team combining expertise in research, analysis, and project management. The team worked collaboratively throughout all stages of the project, from data collection and evaluation to writing and review, to ensure a comprehensive final report. We would like to acknowledge the contributions of the project team, as their combined efforts and expertise were essential to the completion of this report.

■ State Education Resource (SERC) Team

Dr. Ingrid M. Canady	Executive Director
Marjorie Davis	Associate Director
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Emma Velasquez	Project Specialist
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The Charge

During the State of Connecticut's 2024 General Assembly session, the legislature enacted Public Act No. 24-81, An Act Concerning Allocations of Federal American Rescue Plan Act Funds and Provisions Related to General Government, Human Services, Education and the Biennium Ending June 30, 2025. Section 121 of this Act (effective from passage) directs the Commissioner of Education to develop a plan to:

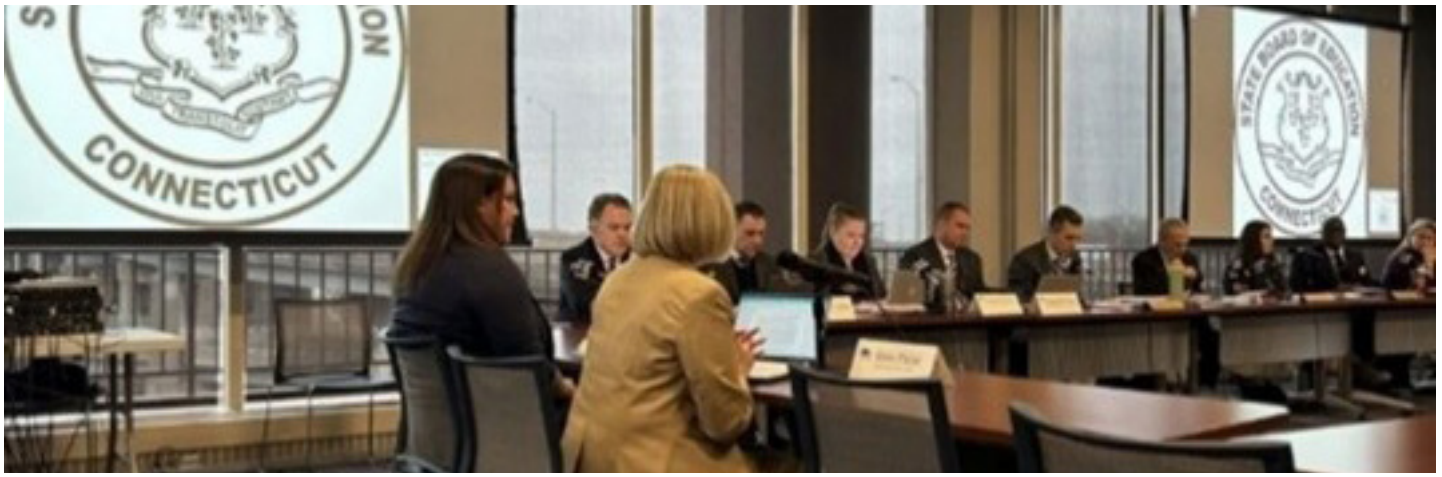
1. Convert the State Board of Education from serving as the department head, as defined in section 4-5 of the Connecticut General Statutes, to an advisory board within the Department of Education; and
2. Empower the Commissioner of Education to serve as the department head for the Department of Education.

Pursuant to this legislative mandate, the Commissioner must submit the completed plan, along with any recommendations for related legislation, to the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to education no later than January 1, 2026, in accordance with section 11-4a of the Connecticut General Statutes.

To support the development of this plan, SERC was charged by the Commissioner of Education with conducting targeted research and analysis. Specifically, SERC was tasked to:

1. Research which states have a Commissioner (or equivalent position) serving as the head of the state education agency, with a State Board of Education functioning in an advisory capacity;
2. Examine the statutory structures, governance models, and implementation processes in those states to identify best practices and potential implications for Connecticut;
3. Analyze the potential benefits, challenges, and transitional considerations associated with converting the State Board of Education to an advisory body; and
4. Provide a report summarizing findings, models, and recommendations to inform the Commissioner's plan and subsequent legislative proposal.

Through this charge, SERC's role was to provide objective research and recommendations to assist the Commissioner in developing a thoughtful, data-informed approach to meeting the requirements set forth in Public Act No. 24-81.



House Bill No. 5523

Public Act No. 24-81



Introduction

This report provides a comprehensive analysis of Connecticut's legislative mandate under Public Act No. 24-81, which requires transitioning the State Board of Education (SBOE) from a governing body to an advisory board and designating the Commissioner of Education as the department head. The analysis examines governance models in other states, statutory implications, and the benefits and challenges of this structural change.

Key objectives include clarifying roles, streamlining decision-making, and aligning Connecticut's education governance with best practices nationwide. Research highlights that states with a single executive leader supported by an advisory board demonstrate greater efficiency, accountability, and strategic focus. However, challenges such as reduced public oversight and legislative resistance must be addressed.

Significant findings indicate that Connecticut's current governance structure creates overlapping responsibilities and fragmented authority. Converting the SBOE into an advisory role would consolidate leadership under the Commissioner, improve responsiveness, and enhance coordination across agencies. However, this shift requires statutory revisions and careful planning to maintain stakeholder engagement and transparency.

Recommendations for implementation include:

- Leverage current SBOE expertise to support transition planning.
- Establish a clear timeline for implementation with stakeholder input.
- Revise statutes (e.g., Conn. Gen. Stat. §§ 4-5, 10-3a) and SBOE bylaws to reflect new roles.
- Develop communication strategies to ensure transparency and public trust.
- Monitor and evaluate the advisory model post-implementation for effectiveness.

Executive Summary

During Connecticut's 2024 General Assembly regular session, the legislature passed Public Act No. 24-81 titled, An Act Concerning Allocations of Federal American Rescue Plan Act Funds and Provisions Related to General Government, Human Services, Education and the Biennium Ending June 30, 2025.

Section 121 of the Public Act states, "The Commissioner of Education shall develop a plan to (1) convert the State Board of Education from being the department head, as defined in section 4-5 of the general statutes, of the Department of Education to an advisory board within the department, and (2) empower the Commissioner of Education to become the department head for the Department of Education. Not later than January 1, 2026, the commissioner shall submit such plan and any recommendations for legislation to the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to education in accordance with the provisions of section 11-4a of the general statutes" (pp. 196-197).

This report outlines the legislative charge, Connecticut's State Board of Education (SBOE) and State Department of Education (CSDE) policy authority, and the governance structures that shape educational oversight by state boards of education at the national level. The report additionally identifies which states have a single head as the leading body (Commissioner or equivalent), with the SBOE in an advisory capacity.

Specifically, the report focuses on the following questions to establish a comprehensive rationale to develop a plan for Connecticut's State Board of Education shift from the department's head to an advisory board:

- What states have a single head as the leading body?
- What states have the SBOE in an advisory capacity?
- What is the advisory board's role in those states that have them?
- What is the makeup of the advisory boards, and how are they appointed?
- What are the benefits and challenges to this governance model change?

The structure, leading body, roles, responsibilities, and membership composition of State Boards of Education (SBOEs) across all U.S. states were researched and compiled as part of this analysis (see "50 States" tab in CSDE Board Conversion Analysis spreadsheet).

Purpose of the Board of Education: National Perspective

The National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) presents the following description regarding boards of education at the national level: State boards of education are different in every state and have diverse policy authority. Some are established by the state constitution while others by statute. Some of their members are elected; some are appointed. In many states, the state board selects the state education chief. In others, it is the governor. In 45 states, the state board adopts learning standards that all students are expected to achieve. In 31 states, state boards have primary authority over state summative assessments. In addition, most SBOEs have the following authority:

- Establishing high school graduation requirements;
- Determining qualifications for professional education personnel;
- Establishing state accountability and assessment programs; and
- Establishing standards for accreditation of local school districts and preparation programs for teachers and administrators.

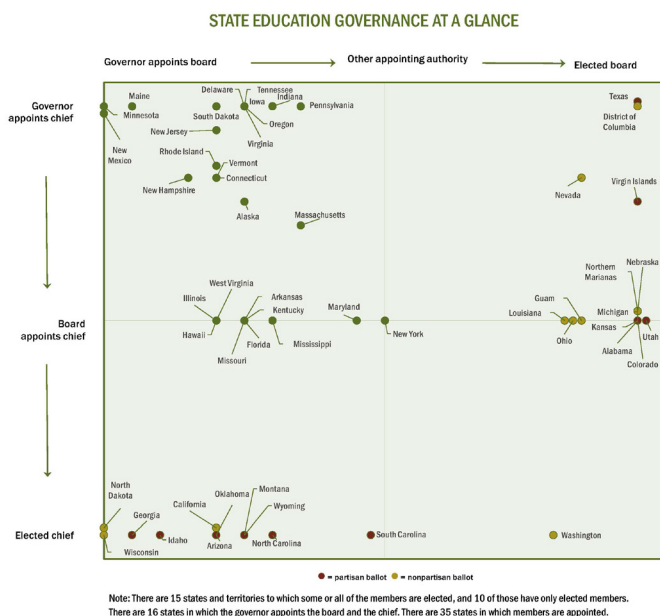


Figure 1. State Education Governance at a Glance. Retrieved from <https://www.nasbe.org>

Regardless of their level of authority, all boards and board members have three important powers: (1) authority for adopting and revising policies that promote educational excellence and equity, (2) convening experts and stakeholders to serve as a bridge between policymakers and citizens, and (3) the power to raise questions as the citizens' voice in education. State boards leverage these combined powers to act boldly with and for students, educators, and families (retrieved from <https://www.nasbe.org/about-state-boards-of-education/>).

Purpose of the Board of Education: Connecticut's Board

In Connecticut, the Board of Education members operate under the Statutory charge outlined in Section 10-4 of the Connecticut General Statutes which assigns to the Board responsibility for "... general supervision and control of the educational interests of the state, which interests shall include preschool, elementary and secondary education, special education, vocational education and adult education..." Section 1 of Public Act 97-290 amended the definition of "educational interests of the state" by including the following language: "In order to reduce racial, ethnic and economic isolation, each school district shall provide educational opportunities for its students to interact with students and teachers from other racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds..." The Board establishes education policy, prepares legislative proposals, sets academic standards for teachers and students, administers a \$2.45 billion annual general fund budget and provides leadership and support services to Connecticut's 149 local and 17 regional school districts (<https://portal.ct.gov/sde/board/state-board-of-education>).

Connecticut State Department of Education

- **Mission**

The Connecticut State Board of Education will provide leadership that promotes an educational system supporting all learners in reaching their full potential.

- **Statutory Responsibility**

Under Sec. 10-3a of the Conn. Gen. Statutes, the CSDE is the administrative arm of the SBOE, which is responsible for implementing the educational interests of the state from preschool through grade 12.

Under Sec. 10-4(a) of the Conn. Gen. Statutes, the SBOE provides leadership and promotes the improvement of education in the state. Connecticut's 13-member SBOE is responsible for "general supervision and control of the educational interests of the state, which interests shall include preschool, elementary and secondary education, special education, vocational education and adult education." Sec. 10-4(a) further defines the educational interests of the state as including "... the concern of the state that (1) each child shall have for the period prescribed in the general statutes equal opportunity to receive a suitable program of educational experiences. . ." The Governor, subject to the approval of the General Assembly, appoints SBOE members to four-year terms.

The SBOE also protects the educational interests of the state by serving school districts and teacher preparation programs at Connecticut's public and private higher education institutions. Among the Department's many partners are parent and teacher groups, the six regional educational service centers, nonpublic schools, public and independent colleges and universities, the Connecticut Departments of Children and Families, Developmental Services, Social Services, Public Health, Labor, Corrections, and SERC.

Specific functions carried out by the CSDE include leadership and communication with the state's school districts, charter schools, and regional educational service centers; research, planning, evaluation, educational technology (including telecommunications); the publishing of guides to curriculum development and other technical assistance materials; the presentation of workshops and other professional development for educators and leaders; teacher and administrator certification; oversight of teacher preparation programs; data collection and analysis; and the administration of annual standardized assessments.

As part of The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, the CSDE has implemented an accountability system that uses a set of 12 indicators to show how well schools are preparing students for success in college, careers, and life. The system moves beyond test scores and graduation rates and instead provides a holistic, multifactor perspective of district and school performance, and incorporates student growth over time (CSDE, 2025).

● **Current Commissioner Roles and Responsibilities**

Under Connecticut General Statutes, the Commissioner of Education serves as the chief administrative officer of the Department of Education and as Secretary to the State Board of Education. Appointed by the Governor upon the recommendation of the State Board of Education for a term coterminous with the Governor, the Commissioner is responsible for administering, coordinating, and supervising all activities of the Department in accordance with state statutes and the policies established by the Board.

The Commissioner's statutory duties are broad in scope and encompass both administrative leadership and policy implementation across the state's public education system. Key responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

- **Administrative Leadership:** Administers the operations of the Department of Education, organizes its bureaus and divisions, and ensures the effective execution of Board policies and legislative mandates (Sec. 10-3a).
- **Secretary to the State Board of Education:** Records and certifies the acts of the Board, maintains official records and documents, prepares routine business for Board consideration, and carries out additional duties as prescribed by the Board (Sec. 10-3a-5).
- **Student Engagement:** Appoints and oversees the State Student Advisory Council on Education, ensuring that its membership reflects gender, racial, ethnic, and geographic diversity, and includes students with disabilities (Sec. 10-2a).
- **Program Oversight and Specialized Appointments:**
 - Designates staff to support local and regional boards of education on matters related to dyslexia and gifted and talented education (Secs. 10-3d, 10-3e).
 - Employs curriculum coordinators to assist districts in implementing state-mandated courses of study (Sec. 10-3f).
 - Coordinates, in partnership with the Department of Social Services, the Family Resource Center Program to deliver comprehensive educational and family support services (Sec. 10-4o).
- **Grant Administration:** Establishes and administers competitive grant programs, including those supporting telecommunications infrastructure for schools (Sec. 10-

4h) and curriculum development and training in alliance districts (Sec. 10-4q).

- Policy Development and Advisory Roles:
 - Develops and updates state standards for remote learning (completed in 2022).
 - Appoints members to the Digital Citizenship, Internet Safety, and Media Literacy Advisory Council.
 - Identifies and reports on teacher shortages statewide.
 - Reports to the General Assembly on the progress of the statewide public school information system and other legislative mandates.

These responsibilities reflect the Commissioner's role as both the administrative head of the Department and a policy advisor to the State Board of Education and the legislature. A comprehensive listing of the Commissioner's statutory duties and authorities can be found in Chapter 163 of the Connecticut General Statutes (Education: State Board and Department of Education), available at: https://cga.ct.gov/current/pub/chap_163.htm#sec_10-3a

● **Current State Board of Education Roles and Responsibilities**

Based on Article IV: Functions of the Board from the Connecticut State Board of Education Bylaws (2021), the primary role of the Board is to oversee and uphold the educational interests of the state. This includes ensuring equitable access to quality education across preschool, elementary, secondary, special, vocational, and adult education. The Board is legally charged with making sure every child in the state has a fair opportunity to receive a suitable educational experience, that school districts are appropriately funded, and that efforts are made to reduce racial, ethnic, and economic isolation in schools.

The Board holds significant policy-making authority under the current model. It establishes educational policies and directs the Connecticut State Department of Education, which operates under the Commissioner's leadership. Although the Department carries out administrative functions, the Board retains decision-making powers on key matters, often with the Commissioner's advice. This includes adopting policies, handling budget recommendations and changes, and overseeing strategic planning through a five-year comprehensive education plan and annual progress reports.

Board members also participate in the following standing committees: the Academic Standards and Assessment Committee; the Accountability and Support Committee; the Finance, Audit, and Budget Committee; and the Legislation and Policy Development Committee. Currently, all standing committees except the Academic Standards and Assessment Committee have an appointed Chair. Each committee provides direction to the Commissioner to carry out appropriate actions.

Additionally, the Board has important personnel and oversight responsibilities. It recommends the appointment of the Commissioner of Education to the Governor, appoints and removes senior administrative officers (e.g., the Deputy Commissioner, Chief Officers), and selects the Director of Internal Audit. The Board is also involved in legislative advocacy, litigation-related matters, and public engagement through responding to

communications and complaints related to education policy. Under the current model, Board members are Governor-appointed. There are two officers who preside over the Board: Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson.

- **Chairperson Responsibilities**

The Governor selects one of the Board members to serve as Chairperson to preside over the Board. The Chairperson has the authority to: schedule case hearings, appoint a member or non-member hearing officer to hear these case hearings, speak publicly for the Board, call special meetings, postpone meetings, form ad hoc committees, designate alternate committee members for the purpose of establishing a quorum, and vote on and discuss pending questions (the same right as all board members).

- **Vice-Chairperson Responsibilities**

The Vice-Chairperson acts and assumes Chairperson responsibilities in the absence of the Chairperson. The Vice-Chairperson is elected by the Board no later than the third meeting following the biennial organizational meeting.

The Analysis

In most states, educational leadership power is shared between a State Board of Education, which holds policymaking authority, and a Commissioner or Superintendent of Education, who implements those policies and manages operations. However, a small number of states do not follow this norm, granting nearly complete governance and executive control to the Commissioner, with the State Board serving in an advisory capacity or, in some cases, not existing at all.

From the collected data, SERC focused explicitly on those states with a single head as the leading body (i.e., Commissioner, Superintendent, Secretary; See Table 1). The table below identifies the states where this governance model is in place.

Table 1.

Starts with a single Head as the Leading Body for Education Governance

State	Is the commissioner (or Equivalent) the Department Head?	State Board Advisory Only?	Role of the Advisory	Notes
Maine	Yes	Yes	Advisory capacity to the Commissioner of Education in matters concerning state education laws and makes education policy recommendations to the legislative and executive branches of state government.	The Commissioner leads the Department of Education. The State Board advises on policy, certification, and standards, but does not govern.
New Mexico	Yes	Yes	The Public Education Commission provides advice and oversight on policy matters (such as charter school authorization), offers recommendations, and serves in an advisory capacity to both the secretary and the legislature.	The Secretary (Commissioner equivalent) is a cabinet-level official. The Public Education Commission primarily oversees charter schools and has a limited advisory role.

Starts with a single Head as the Leading Body for Education Governance

State	Is the commissioner (or Equivalent) the Department Head?	State Board Advisory Only?	Role of the Advisory	Notes
North Dakota	Yes	Yes	The State Board has authority only over district boundary matters – not general education policy.	The Superintendent is elected by statewide vote, serving as an independent constitutional officer, not appointed by the Governor.
Wisconsin	Yes	N/A	N/A	The elected Superintendent is the constitutional head of education. Wisconsin has no State Board of Education, placing all statewide leadership in the Superintendent's office.

The subsequent sections will provide a detailed description of the public education governance models in these states

Maine Public Education Governance Overview

● Historical Timeline

Maine's current public education governance model was established in 1949. This model remained unchanged until 2007, when legislation was passed to include two student members on the State Board of Education. The student members are non-voting.

● Commissioner of Education

The Commissioner of Education in Maine is appointed by the Governor and serves without a fixed term limit. According to state law, "the commissioner shall serve at the pleasure of the Governor" (Maine Revised Statutes Annotated, Title 20-A, § 251, n.d.).

The Commissioner of Education leads the Maine Department of Education and is responsible for implementing the educational policies set by the Governor and State Legislature. The Commissioner is advised by the State Board of Education and represents the executive leadership of public education in Maine.

● Recent Commissioners

As this model has been in place since 1949, a list of Commissioners over the past few decades is shown below for conciseness. A complete list can be found at the Maine State Archives website (<https://www.maine.gov/sos/archives/archives-services/archives-collections>).

- Pender Makin: 2019–present
- Robert Hasson: 2017–2019
- Deborah Plowman: 2016 (temporary; largely ceremonial role)
 - Bill Beardsley served as the Deputy Commissioner and shared duties with the Governor's office
- Bill Beardsley: 2015–2016 (acting commissioner; limited by six-month cap on temporary roles)
- Stephen Bowen: 2011–2013 (resigned to take another job)

Maine's Advisory Board: State Board of Education

● Structure

The Maine State Board of Education is composed of 11 members, including two non-voting student members. All members, including students, are appointed by the Governor. Regular board members serve staggered five-year terms, while student members serve two-year terms.

Leadership within the board consists of a Chair and Vice Chair, who are elected annually by fellow board members. The remaining members serve as general board members without additional formal titles.

● Responsibilities

The Board meets monthly to conduct official business. In its advisory capacity, the Board serves as a resource to state legislators by offering data, insights, and policy guidance on education-related bills. It also proposes legislation and adopts rules to implement laws passed by the Maine State Legislature.

The Board plays a direct role in the appointment process for the Commissioner of Education. Members interview candidates and submit a formal appraisal of each candidate's strengths and weaknesses to the Governor, who takes their input into consideration before making an appointment (Maine Revised Statutes Annotated, Title 20-A, §251).

Board members also serve on the following committees:

- Career and Technical Education Committee
- Certification and Higher Education Committee
- Legislative Action Committee
- School Construction Committee
- Student Transfers Ad Hoc Committee
- Student Voices Committee
- Student Membership Committee

In addition to serving on internal committees, Board members also serve on a range of external boards, commissions, and other state bodies.

● Reporting Hierarchy

The reporting structure for public education in Maine is shown in Figure 2 below.

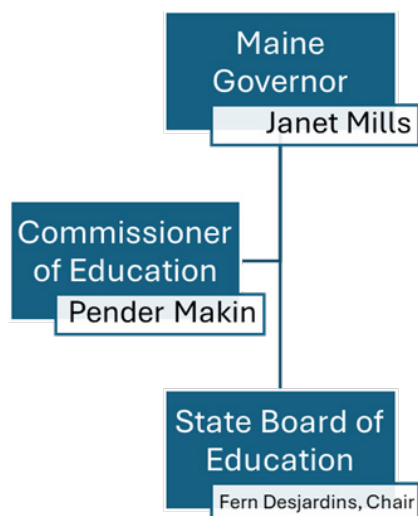


Figure 2: Public education reporting structure in Maine.

● National Recognition

Fern Desjardins, Chair of the Maine State Board of Education, also serves on the Board of Directors for the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE). She was elected Secretary-Treasurer of NASBE in 2021 and was honored with the NASBE Distinguished Service Award in 2023 for her contributions to public education governance.

New Mexico Public Education Governance Overview

● Historical Timeline

New Mexico's public education governance has undergone changes since the early 20th century. The earliest historical record of a single individual leading public education in New Mexico was in 1905, when Hiram Hadley was appointed Territorial Superintendent of Education. From 1986 to 2003, the governance model included an elected State Board of Education and an elected Secretary of Education (Lopez, 2024).

In 2003, however, voters approved a constitutional amendment that created the Public Education Department (PED) and shifted leadership to a cabinet-level, governor-appointed Secretary of Public Education. Veronica García became the first person to serve in this role (Chacón, 2023).

Secretary of Public Education

● Appointment & Term

The Secretary of Public Education in New Mexico is appointed by the Governor and serves without a specified term limit.

● Strengths and Challenges of the Model

Support for this model includes increased efficiency and responsiveness to state needs due to reduced "gridlock" as well as reduced delays in decision-making. Prior to the current model, New Mexico had a State Board of Education that held greater authority over policymaking; but according to sources, the ten-member board experienced difficulty reaching consensus on educational decisions (Chacón, 2023; New Mexico Public Education Department, 2025). Further support for the current advisory model highlights broader statewide engagement with Tribes, Pueblos, and Nations in New Mexico, as it is not constrained by geographic district locations that may lack representation from Indigenous groups.

Critics of this model point to instability caused by high turnover, both due to changes aligned with gubernatorial terms and frequent departures overall. They highlight that since 2019, under the current governor, Michelle Lujan Grisham, there have been six different secretaries. This frequent turnover appears to have started with Karen Trujillo (see below):

- Mariana Padilla: 2024–present
- Arsenio Romero: 2023–2024 (resigned; the governor asked him to choose between

the role and the New Mexico State University position)

- Jacquelyn Archuleta-Staehlin: 2023 (resigned after 8 days)
- Kurt Steinhaus: 2021–2023 (retired)
- Ryan Stewart: 2019–2021 (resigned for family health reasons)
- Karen Trujillo: 2019 (fired after 6 months)
- Christopher Ruszkowski: 2017–2019
- Hanna Skandera: 2010–2017
- Veronica García: 2003–2010

Newspaper articles also point to criticism over some of the appointed secretaries due to their prior professional experience and training for the position. For example, Jacqueline Archuleta-Staehlin's experience was as a lawyer, and disability rights advocates in New Mexico spoke out about her reputation of representing school districts against students with disabilities and their families (Guzmán, 2023).

New Mexico's Advisory Board: The Public Education Commission (PEC)

● Structure

The Public Education Commission (PEC) serves as the official advisory body to the New Mexico PED. It is composed of 10 elected members serving staggered four-year terms, although as of the latest update, there is currently one vacancy. There are no term limits for commissioners. Leadership within the PEC includes a Chair, Vice Chair, and Secretary, while the remaining members serve under the title of commissioners.

● Responsibilities

Commissioners in New Mexico are actively involved in several core areas of governance and oversight, including:

- Attending monthly PEC meetings, as well as participating in special meetings and community engagement efforts
- Authorizing charter schools across the state
- Submitting budget requests
- Advising the PED on education policy

The PEC also plays a role in the hiring process for the PED Division Director. This includes:

- Reviewing resumes
- Conducting candidate interviews
- Serving on the hiring committee
- Before finalizing staffing decisions, the PED consults with the PEC to incorporate its recommendations.

● Constitutional Authority

From the New Mexico Constitution (2025, Art. XII, §6), the PEC:

- Advises the PED on policy matters
- Works with PED to develop a 5-year strategic plan for K-12 education
 - The strategic plan must be updated at least biennially
- Solicits input from local school boards, school districts, and the general public
- Submits recommendations to the Secretary of Education and legislature
- Recommends conduct/process guidelines and training curricula for local school boards

● Reporting Hierarchy

The reporting structure for the PEC is shown in Figure 3. Of note, the Secretary of Public Education is head of the PED:

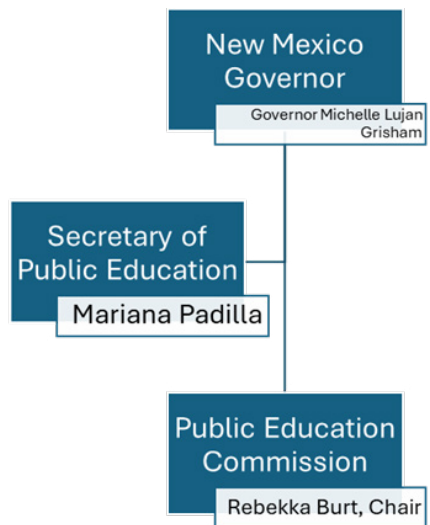


Figure 3: Public education reporting structure in New Mexico.

● Legislative & Reform Efforts in New Mexico

In 2024, Senate Joint Resolution 9 (SJR9) proposed eliminating the position of Secretary of Public Education in New Mexico. This legislation, as well as House Joint Resolution 4 (HJR4), ultimately did not move forward (Lopez, 2024; New Mexico Legislature, 2024; New Mexico Legislature, 2025). According to news reports, debate about this appears to be ongoing.

North Dakota Public Education Governance Overview

● Historical Timeline

North Dakota's public education governance system has been in place since 1863, when the position of State Superintendent of Public Instruction was first established. Over the years, this model has remained relatively unchanged, with only minor structural modifications, and has consistently maintained both a statewide elected superintendent and an advisory board responsible for providing broader support for education policy.

State Superintendent of Public Instruction

The State Superintendent of Public Instruction serves as the chief executive officer of the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction. This is an elected position, and the superintendent serves a four-year term with no term limits. The superintendent leads education initiatives, implements state policy, and serves as the Executive Director and Secretary of the State Board of Public School Education.

● Recent State Superintendents

North Dakota has had stable leadership in recent decades:

- Wayne Sanstead: 1984–2012
- Kirsten Baesler: 2012–present

Wayne Sanstead was recognized for his long-standing service in education with the NDHSAA Distinguished Service Award in 2017 (North Dakota High School Activities Association, 2017). The continuity of state superintendents in North Dakota suggests a period of stable leadership, although more recent elections have raised questions about candidate qualifications (see the Strengths & Challenges of the Model section on page 24).

North Dakota's Advisory Board: State Board of Public School Education

● Structure

The State Board of Public School Education serves as the primary advisory body to the State Superintendent. It is composed of seven members, with the State Superintendent serving as one of the members. Aside from the State Superintendent, who is elected, the six board members are appointed by the Governor. Members serve staggered six-year terms. The State Superintendent serves as the executive director and secretary of the State Board of Public School Education. Additional Board leadership includes a Chair and a Vice Chair; the remaining members are referred to as board members without additional titles.

● Responsibilities

Under North Dakota Century Code Title 15.1, Chapter 15.1-01, the State Board of Public School Education is tasked with several administrative and oversight functions:

- Support to County Committees:
 - Assisting with procedures, data, maps, forms, and materials
 - Appointing county committee members if local superintendents fail to do so
 - Oversight of Regional Education Associations
- Curriculum Flexibility:
 - Establishing and certifying a North Dakota learning continuum to allow district-approved mastery frameworks

- Recommending waivers for instructional time based on performance frameworks
- Rulemaking Authority:
 - May adopt rules in accordance with state administrative law (Chapter 28-32)

Meetings are held monthly, except for July, August, and December, when the Board does not convene.

- **Reporting Hierarchy**

The reporting hierarchy for educational governance is illustrated in Figure 4 below. Of note, Kirsten Baesler was nominated for the role of assistant secretary for elementary and secondary education at the U.S. Department of Education in February 2025. She plans to remain in her position until the U.S. Senate confirms her federal appointment (North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, 2025).

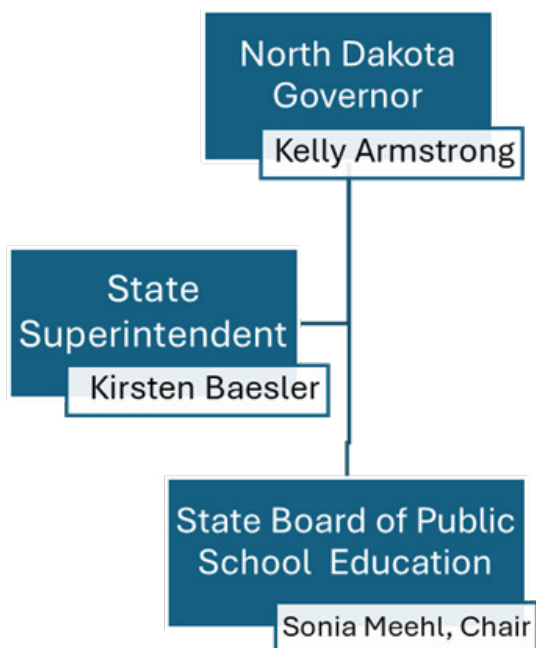


Figure 4: Public education reporting structure in North Dakota.

- **Strengths and Challenges of the Model**

One of the primary strengths of North Dakota’s education governance model is the stability in leadership. The long tenures of recent state superintendents (e.g., Wayne Sanstead’s nearly three decades of service) reflect a high degree of continuity. However, a challenge includes concerns over candidate qualifications. Because the State Superintendent is an elected position, Baesler’s running mate in the 2024 election sought office as the state superintendent despite lacking experience in public education (Stanford, 2024).

Wisconsin's Public Education Governance Overview

● Historical Timeline

Wisconsin established the position of State Superintendent of Public Instruction in 1849. Since its inception, the role has overseen public education across the state. The superintendent serves a four-year term with no term limits. Wisconsin is unique in that it has never had a state board of education. Instead, oversight of public education is entrusted to the elected State Superintendent of Public Instruction, as established by the Wisconsin Constitution and state law. The Department of Public Instruction (DPI), which is led by the superintendent, serves as the state agency responsible for advancing public education (and supporting libraries) throughout Wisconsin. While it does not have a state board of education, Wisconsin was included in this report because it does have a single individual who leads public education as well as several advisory committees.

● State Superintendent of Public Instruction

In Wisconsin, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction is an elected, nonpartisan official responsible for overseeing the state's public education system. The Superintendent serves as the head of the Department of Public Instruction (DPI), and is tasked with supervising public schools, setting educational policies, administering state and federal education funds, and licensing educators. The superintendent also appoints advisory councils and maintains a Cabinet of assistant superintendents and executive directors to help shape education policy and programs in the state (Wisconsin Constitution, Article X, Section 1; Wisconsin Statutes § 15.37).

● Recent Superintendents

Over the past two decades, Wisconsin has had leadership from four State Superintendents:

- Elizabeth Burmaster: 2001–2009
- Tony Evers: 2009–2019
- Carolyn Stanford Taylor: 2019–2021
- Jill Underly: 2021–Present

Wisconsin's Advisory Committees

● Structure

The Wisconsin DPI utilizes 25 advisory councils and committees to guide and inform policy decisions. These groups do not hold formal decision-making power but serve in an advisory capacity. A full list of the advisory committees can be found at <https://dpi.wi.gov/statesupt/councils-and-committees>.

Some of the advisory councils have been written into Wisconsin legislation, such as the Blind and Visual Impairment Education Advisory Council and the Deaf and Hard of

Hearing Advisory Council. All of the committees and councils have defined functions that are described on the DPI Councils and Committees website. The number of members within each council varies.

● **Reporting Hierarchy**

The Wisconsin DPI underwent structural reorganization beginning in 2024, resulting in the following layered system depicted in Figure 5. It is unclear whether the advisory councils are within a department, bureau, section, or unit of the DPI, or whether these councils are a parallel entity alongside the DPI itself.

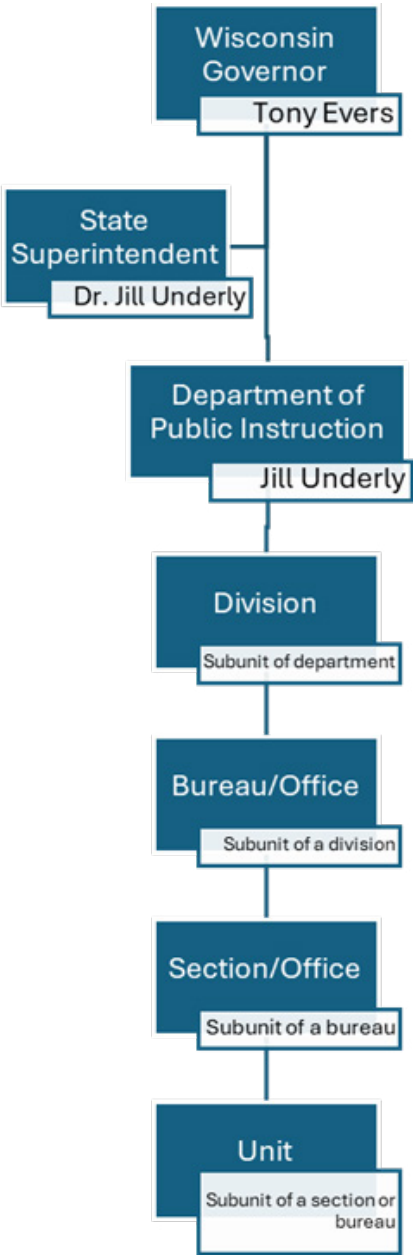


Figure 5: Public Education Reporting Structure in Wisconsin.

New Mexico: An Example of Transitioning to an Advisory Board

Following a comprehensive analysis and comparison of various state education governance structures, New Mexico appears to be the most comparable example to Connecticut, particularly in the context of transitioning from an empowered State Board of Education to an advisory board model. Prior to 2003, New Mexico's State Board of Education had constitutional authority over education policy, similar to the current structure in Connecticut. As stated previously, a shift occurred in 2003 when the state reorganized its governance system. This change replaced the State Board with a single leader (the Secretary of Education) appointed by the Governor. Simultaneously, an advisory body known as the Public Education Commission (PEC) was established to provide guidance, which mirrors the type of change now under consideration in Connecticut.

This transition in New Mexico is particularly relevant because it represents a clear example of how a state adjusted to a system where centralized authority resides with an appointed Secretary, supported by an advisory commission. This closely reflects Connecticut's proposed shift away from a governing board toward an advisory structure, making New Mexico a helpful national case study for understanding both the implications and potential outcomes of such a conversion.

New Mexico's Transition to a Single Leading Body

When the people of New Mexico voted to shift away from a State Board of Education and instead implement a cabinet-level Secretary with a PEC in an advisory capacity in 2002, the state constitution was amended, and the PEC became tasked with serving as a conduit for citizen input on public education policy to the Secretary of Public Education and the legislature. This amendment was proposed as a Senate Joint Resolution. To smooth the transition, the existing State Board of Education members (who were elected under the old structure) initially served as the PEC until their terms expired, and the same geographic boundaries were used for PEC districts until new lines were drawn by law (NM Const. Art. XII § 6).

Connecticut's Technical Education and Career System (CTECS): A Local Example of Transitioning to an Advisory Board Structure

In July 2017, Substitute House Bill No. 7271 (Public Act No. 17-237) established the Connecticut Technical Education and Career System (CTECS) as an independent agency and changed its board from a governing board to an advisory board. This legislative change redefined the board's role to focus on guidance, consultation, and policy input to the Superintendent rather than direct management and operational oversight. The legislation supporting CTECS' transition to an independent agency is ongoing; however, the CTECS example demonstrates how state legislation can be effectively used to realign a board's authority, supporting more centralized leadership. It provides a useful, already established model for how similar statutory adjustments could be made to transition an existing board toward an advisory capacity while maintaining stakeholder engagement.

Uniqueness of Connecticut

Connecticut is in a distinctive and unique position as it considers transforming the State Board of Education from its current centralized leadership to an advisory entity within the Department of Education. The General Assembly has historically enacted legislation that has already created an overlapping leadership and implementation structure between the State Board of Education and the Commissioner of Education. Current statutes give the Commissioner of Education implementation powers that extend beyond their legislative roles and responsibilities.

Under Conn. Gen. Stat. §10-3a requires the State Board of Education to recommend a candidate for Commissioner of Education to the Governor. The Governor then makes the appointment in accordance with Conn. Gen. Stat. §§4-5 through 4-7, which require the advice and consent of the General Assembly. This process was established through Public Act No. 07-114, which took effect in October 2007 and amended §10-3a to add the General Assembly's confirmation requirement.

While state statute establishes an organizational relationship between the Commissioner of Education and the SBOE, the day-to-day operation of this relationship differs in several important ways. By law, the Commissioner serves as the Secretary of the SBOE and is required to report to the Board. In practice, however, the Commissioner also serves as a member of the Governor's cabinet and therefore reports directly to the Governor.

Further complicating this structure is the broader statutory landscape in which these entities operate. A review of Connecticut statutes shows that:

- "Commissioner of Education" is referenced in 389 statutes;
- "Department of Education" in 532 statutes; and
- "State Board of Education" in 506 statutes.

These extensive and overlapping references illustrate a fractured governance system wherein authority and responsibility are distributed across numerous statutory provisions. This dispersion contributes to ambiguity regarding lines of accountability, overlapping

duties among the Commissioner, the Department, and the Board, and challenges in coordinating education policy and operations under a unified framework.

An additional factor is that over time, the dynamic between the SBOE and the Commissioner has evolved into one that is largely consultative rather than directive. While the Board maintains its statutory oversight and policy-setting responsibilities, its current role centers on providing guidance, feedback, and approval on key policy matters rather than issuing operational directives to the Commissioner. Understanding this distinction between statutory design and operational reality is crucial context to consider when contemplating any potential changes.

Needed Changes to Legislation

There are gaps in current state legislation that need to be revised as part of the plan to make this conversion. Although the Commissioner of Education is explicitly excluded from the duties of “department head” listed under Section 4-8 of the General Statutes, there are several areas where her existing responsibilities mirror the duties outlined in Section 4-8. Specifically, the Commissioner already performs several functions that Section 4-8 reserves for department heads. For example:

1. Executive coordination and policy leadership: As a member of the Governor’s cabinet, the Commissioner acts as the Governor’s executive officer for educational policy and planning, consistent with Section 4-8(a)(2), which tasks department heads with carrying out the purposes of their departments under the Governor’s direction.
2. Comprehensive planning and program coordination: The Commissioner is responsible for overseeing statewide education policy, strategic planning, and coordination among local and regional boards of education. These functions are consistent with Section 4-8(a)(3), which requires department heads to conduct comprehensive planning and coordinate departmental activities.

An additional point to consider is that Section 4-5 states the following: “As used in sections 4-6 and 4-7, ‘department head’ also means the Commissioner of Education.” This language makes clear that the Commissioner is included in the definition of “department head” only for purposes of Sections 4-6 and 4-7, and therefore not for Section 4-8. However, these examples show that, while the Commissioner is formally excluded from Section 4-8’s department head provisions, she is already fulfilling many of those same responsibilities in practice. This discrepancy highlights the need to update legislative language in Sections 4-5 through 4-7 and 10-3a to better align the Commissioner’s statutory status with her functional role.

For example, the language in Section 4-5 would need to be revised as follows (red text in brackets indicates language that should be removed; blue text indicates language that should be added):

Sec. 4-5. “Department head” defined. As used in sections 4-6, 4-7 and 4-8, the term “department head” means the Secretary of the Office of Policy and Management, Commissioner of Administrative Services, Commissioner of Revenue Services, Banking Commissioner, Commissioner of Children and Families, Commissioner of Consumer

Protection, Commissioner of Correction, Commissioner of Economic and Community Development, State Board of Education, Commissioner of Emergency Services and Public Protection, Commissioner of Energy and Environmental Protection, Commissioner of Agriculture, Commissioner of Public Health, Insurance Commissioner, Labor Commissioner, Commissioner of Mental Health and Addiction Services, Commissioner of Social Services, Commissioner of Developmental Services, Commissioner of Motor Vehicles, Commissioner of Transportation, Commissioner of Veterans Affairs, Commissioner of Housing, Commissioner of Aging and Disability Services, Commissioner of Early Childhood, Commissioner of Health Strategy, executive director of the Office of Military Affairs, executive director of the Technical Education and Career System, Chief Workforce Officer, [and] Commissioner of Higher Education, and the Commissioner of Education. [As used in sections 4-6 and 4-7, "department head" also means the Commissioner of Education.]

As a second example, the language in 10-3a would also need to be revised as follows:

Sec. 10-3a. Department of Education. Commissioner. Organization of bureaus, divisions and other units. Regulations. Advisory boards. (a) There shall be a Department of Education which shall serve as the administrative arm of the State Board of Education. The department shall be under the direction of the Commissioner of Education, [whose appointment shall be recommended to] who shall be appointed by the Governor [by the State Board of Education] for a term of four years to be coterminous with the term of the Governor...The Commissioner of Education shall be the [administrative officer] department head of the department and shall administer, coordinate and supervise the activities of the department [in accordance with the policies established by the board].

Possibilities for Connecticut's Conversion

For Connecticut to transition from a governing SBOE to an advisory board model, the structural and functional dynamics of educational leadership in the state would need to undergo several changes. Under this model, the Commissioner of Education would most likely report directly to the Governor and assume full authority over education in the state. The SBOE, in turn, would operate in an advisory capacity and report to the Commissioner rather than directing the Commissioner.

● Structure and Responsibilities of the Advisory Board

While the composition of the board may remain largely the same, its powers and responsibilities would shift away from governance and policy-making to a consultative and collaborative role. For example, advisory board members would likely continue to serve on standing committees, with a Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson leading discussions and formal recommendations. However, the power to adopt policies, hire key personnel, approve budgets, and make formal legislative proposals, as outlined on page 6 of the current SBOE bylaws, would no longer fall within the board members' jurisdiction.

In the new model, responsibilities such as appointing internal leadership (e.g., Deputy Commissioner, Chief Officers), and adopting budget proposals or formal five-year strategic plans would become the sole responsibility of the Commissioner. For example, rather than preparing the five-year education plan as the SBOE does under the current model, the advisory board would likely collaborate with the Department in shaping

the plan's development by offering feedback and insight based on public need and committee member expertise.

● **Advisory Role in Policy and Strategy**

Although the Board would no longer hold policy-making power, it would continue to play a crucial role in advising on major initiatives, as well as providing input on proposed regulations, state education goals, and accountability frameworks. The advisory board could still serve as a vital forum for community input, stakeholder engagement, and long-term planning.

The SBOE's powers would be reframed in the bylaws to reflect a non-governing role. Under this new model, language in the bylaws would need to shift to emphasize consultation and collaboration rather than direction and control.

For example:

- Current language: "The Board shall establish policies to direct the Department."
 - Revised: "The Board shall provide guidance and input on policies proposed by the Department."
- Current: "To recommend to the Governor the appointment of the Commissioner."
 - Revised: [Remove entirely] — This responsibility would most likely rest solely with the Governor.
- Current: "To review, amend and adopt a biennial general fund budget..."
 - Revised: "To review and provide recommendations on the biennial general fund budget."
- Current: "To prepare every five years a five-year comprehensive plan for education..."
 - Revised: "To collaborate with the Department in the development of the five-year comprehensive plan."

Such revisions reflect a move from authoritative language to phrasing that emphasizes support, such as:

- "assisting with implementation efforts"
- "making recommendations about proposed policies"
- "advising on strategic goals"
- "reviewing and commenting on departmental initiatives"

● **Loss of Formal Authority**

As an advisory body, the Board would no longer:

- Establish statewide education policy
- Approve budgets or appropriation transfers
- Appoint or terminate senior leadership positions within the Department
- Recommend the Commissioner of Education to the Governor
- Approve or submit legislative proposals

These responsibilities would be consolidated under the Commissioner's authority, which aligns Connecticut with national models used in states such as New Mexico, North Dakota, and Maine, and the transition model of Connecticut's Technical Education and Career System, where advisory boards do not hold formal decision-making power.

● **Advisory Role Moving Forward**

Even without formal authority, Connecticut's SBOE could still be a major contributor to educational planning and oversight. For example, the Board could:

- Participate in committee work that informs departmental initiatives
- Serve as a conduit for public input and stakeholder engagement
- Provide feedback on major policy decisions and statewide goals
- Support transparency/accountability by monitoring progress on our state's Five-Year Comprehensive Plan for Education

Benefits of a Single-Head Governance Structure

The research and data collection revealed that there are benefits to converting the SBOE from being the department head of the CSDE to an advisory board and empowering the Commissioner to become the single head of the leading body. These benefits include:

1. Streamlined Decision-Making
 - Faster policy implementation: With fewer entities involved in policymaking, decisions can be made and enacted more quickly. Decisions on curriculum, standards, funding distribution, and innovation can move faster when authority resides in a single executive-led agency.
 - Clear chain of command: Staff and stakeholders have a direct line of leadership, minimizing delays caused by board debates or procedural approvals.
2. Greater Accountability
 - Clear executive responsibility: If the Commissioner is directly accountable to the Governor, this would reduce the diffusion of responsibility that can occur in board-led models.
 - Single point of accountability for K-12 education outcomes
3. Governance Consistency with Other Agencies
 - Education governance in line with how most other state agencies operate: Uniform governance makes inter-agency coordination easier, for example, if the Commissioner is part of the Governor's cabinet, coordination on early childhood, mental health, or post-secondary alignment becomes more streamlined.
4. Stronger Strategic Focus
 - Long-Term Strategic Planning: The Commissioner, as department head who is informed by an advisory board, may be better positioned to lead long-term strategic planning. This would allow an advisory board to focus on research, innovation, and public input without being burdened by day-to-day governance or regulatory functions.

5. Greater Flexibility in Leadership Appointments

- Efficiency in Hiring: The Governor and Commissioner could form a leadership team with a unified vision and directly hire senior department staff. In the current model, the Board holds considerable power in recommending or approving appointments, which can dilute executive coherence or slow down leadership transitions.

6. Efficiency in Crisis Management

- In times of crisis (e.g., COVID-19, school safety emergencies, budget deficits), a single executive leader can act decisively without waiting for board consensus.

Possible Challenges of a Single-Head Governance Structure

Conversely, with benefits come challenges as well. Converting the current model may have potential drawbacks, which could include:

1. **Loss of Independent Oversight and Public Voice:** Weakening the State Board's formal authority reduces independent, public oversight of education policy. A diverse, multi-member board brings broader perspectives and acts as a check on executive power.
2. **Reduced Stakeholder Representation:** The State Board of Education currently includes parents, educators, business leaders, and students, which helps represent various community needs. These stakeholders may lose meaningful influence in policy formation if the Board becomes purely advisory.
3. **Risk of Policy Changes:** With the Commissioner aligned to the Governor's term and agenda, a leadership change (e.g., a new administration every 4–8 years) can result in major swings in policy. Stability in curriculum standards, assessments, teacher certification, and funding strategies is essential. Centralized governance increases the risk of abrupt shifts when there is a change in political leadership.
4. **Legislative Resistance:** The current board structure is embedded in statute. Restructuring may require significant legislative reform, which could spark opposition from educators, unions, parent groups, and legislators, especially if viewed as reducing democratic governance or increasing partisanship in education.
5. **Increased Administrative Burden on Commissioner:** A Commissioner with full operational and policy authority may face overextension, particularly in a complex policy landscape involving federal compliance, legal challenges, and public relations. Alternatively, a governing board can share strategic responsibilities and lighten the Commissioner's political and operational load.

Recommendations for Transitioning to a Single-Head Governance Model

Public Act No. 24-81, Sec. 121 states that not later than January 1, 2026, the commissioner shall submit a plan with related recommendations for legislation to be reviewed by the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to education in accordance with the provisions of section 11-4a of the general statutes. The following recommendations identify the first steps for the Commissioner to consider when developing the plan, including a timeline, risks, and mitigation strategies for each recommendation

● **Recommendation #1: Leverage Current Board Expertise**

Engage existing State Board of Education (SBOE) members in structured transition activities. Form an advisory group to provide historical context, operational insights, and best practices. Document their input and integrate it into planning milestones to preserve institutional knowledge. The members' expertise could be leveraged to support the plan and garner implementation fidelity.

Timeline

- Month 1–2: Identify and convene SBOE advisory group.
- Month 3: Conduct initial planning sessions and capture recommendations.
- Month 4: Integrate insights into transition roadmap.

Risks:

- Limited availability of SBOE members during transition.
- Resistance to change from existing stakeholders.

Mitigation:

- Schedule sessions well in advance and offer flexible participation options.
- Communicate the value of their expertise and role in shaping the future model.

● **Recommendation #2: Establish a Timeline for Transition and Implementation**

Develop a phased implementation schedule outlining key deliverables, deadlines, and accountability measures. Conduct stakeholder engagement sessions early to gather feedback and align expectations. Publish the timeline publicly to reinforce transparency and allow for adjustments as needed.

Timeline:

- Month 1: Draft preliminary timeline.
- Month 2: Host stakeholder engagement sessions.
- Month 3: Finalize and publish timeline.

Risks:

- Delays due to conflicting stakeholder priorities.
- Lack of consensus on timeline milestones.

Mitigation:

- Use facilitated sessions to resolve conflicts.
- Build flexibility into the timeline for adjustments.

● **Recommendation #3: Revise Statutes and SBOE Bylaws**

Conduct a comprehensive legal review to identify statutory and bylaw provisions requiring amendment (e.g., Conn. Gen. Stat. §§ 4–5, 10–3a). Draft proposed changes in collaboration with legal counsel and policy experts. Share revisions for stakeholder comment before submission to legislative or regulatory bodies, ensuring compliance with governance standards.

Timeline:

- Month 2–3: Complete legal review and draft revisions.
- Month 4: Circulate for stakeholder feedback.
- Month 5–6: Submit for legislative/regulatory approval.

Risks:

- Legislative delays or rejection of proposed changes.
- Legal challenges to revised statutes.

Mitigation:

- Engage legislators early and provide clear rationale for changes.
- Ensure legal review includes risk assessment and compliance checks.

● **Recommendation #4: Develop Communication Strategies**

Create a robust communication plan that includes regular updates through multiple channels (website, press releases, public forums). Use clear, accessible language to explain changes and their impact. Incorporate feedback loops such as surveys or Q&A sessions to build trust with families, educators, districts, and community organizations, and to demonstrate responsiveness to their concerns and suggestions.

Timeline:

- Month 1: Draft communication plan.
- Month 2: Launch initial public announcement and feedback channels.
- Ongoing: Provide monthly updates and host quarterly forums.

Risks:

- Misinformation or lack of public trust.
- Low engagement from stakeholders.

Mitigation:

- Use consistent messaging across all platforms.
- Monitor feedback and adjust communication strategies promptly.

● **Recommendation #5: Monitor and Evaluate Post-Implementation**

Establish measurable performance indicators (e.g., stakeholder satisfaction, decision-making efficiency, compliance rates). Schedule evaluations at six-month and twelve-month intervals. Utilize the findings to refine the advisory model and report the outcomes publicly, maintaining accountability and promoting continuous improvement.

Timeline:

- Month 6: Conduct first evaluation and publish findings.
- Month 12: Conduct second evaluation and adjust model as needed.
- Ongoing: Annual reviews thereafter.

Risks:

- Inadequate data for evaluation.
- Failure to act on evaluation findings.

Mitigation:

- Define clear metrics and data collection processes early.
- Assign accountability for implementing improvements.

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