

## Connecticut State Board of Education Hartford

**To Be Proposed:**  
**June 5, 2024**

**Whereas,** adult education exemplifies the concept of lifelong learning with nearly ten thousand Connecticut residents in adult basic education/secondary school completion programs and nearly twelve thousand Connecticut residents in English as a Second Language (ESL) and U.S. citizenship preparation programs; and

**Whereas,** the Connecticut Association for Adult and Continuing Education (CAACE), through its CAACE Student Award, recognized five individuals who have overcome numerous obstacles and hardships to persist and succeed in adult education; and

**Whereas,** these individuals exemplify the spirit and determination necessary to achieve a goal and serve as role models to all adult and young learners in our communities; now, therefore, be it

**Resolved,** that the Connecticut State Board of Education recognizes the following individuals for their accomplishments in this major adult education endeavor:

- Stone Dixon, Middletown Adult Education
- Krislia Griman, EASTCONN Adult Education
- Iryna Hzhesiak, Family Center Literacy Volunteer of Stamford/Greenwich
- Eric O'Connell, Middletown Adult Education
- Emuna Patterson, Manchester Adult Education

and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

Approved by a vote of \_\_\_\_\_ this fifth day of June, Two Thousand Twenty-Four.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_  
Charlene M. Russell-Tucker, Secretary  
State Board of Education

**Connecticut State Board of Education  
Hartford**

**To:** State Board of Education  
**From:** Charlene M. Russell-Tucker, Commissioner of Education  
**Date:** June 5, 2024  
**Subject:** Recognition of the Connecticut Association for Adult and Continuing Education Student Award Winners

*Executive Summary*

**Introduction**

Adult education is an essential component of Connecticut’s lifelong educational system, providing individuals with instruction in U.S. citizenship, English as a Second Language (ESL), basic skills and secondary completion. In the 2023-24 school year, nearly 10,000 individuals were enrolled in adult basic education/secondary school completion programs and nearly 12,000 individuals were enrolled in ESL and U.S. citizenship preparation programs. In order to persist and succeed in adult education, many of these learners face substantial challenges to balance their life activities.

**History/Background**

The Connecticut Association of Adult and Continuing Education (CAACE) honored five individuals from Connecticut’s adult education programs on March 8, 2024, for their perseverance and accomplishments. We would like to acknowledge these individuals for their efforts and recognize them as excellent examples of lifelong learners for all students in the adult education system.

**Recommendation and Justification**

I recommend that the State Board of Education recognize the following individuals for their accomplishments:

**Stone Dixon  
Middletown Adult Education**

Mr. Dixon entered Middletown Adult Education and enrolled in the GED program. He quickly progressed and passed all of the tests within a year, all while working night shifts six days per week. Very few learners can handle working a very physical job from 11:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m. and then arrive at school at 9:00 a.m. ready to learn. He has also completed most of his certification training online, completely self-directed. After participating in the Steam Train Fast Track-It program, Mr. Dixon achieved four certifications. Before completing the program, he had applied for a Google certification. He currently is taking advantage of these free training with the goal of completing more than one while he waits to start community college this semester.

Mr. Dixon has been asked to help others in his IT training program. He also has started the COABE Student Ambassador program and participated in the Advocast podcast. Middletown Adult Education has invited him to speak with their potential graduates. He has also allowed Middletown Adult Education to use his story in their social media and marketing efforts.

Mr. Dixon plans to obtain his associate degree in information technology with the goal of transferring to a four year program.

**Krislia Griman  
EASTCONN Adult Education**

Ms. Griman has taken advantage of several opportunities open to her through the EASTCONN adult education program. When she arrived from Venezuela, she enrolled in morning ESL classes and the evening Family Literacy classes. She attended summer classes and is now enrolled in the High School Dual-enrollment Partnership Program, taking classes at Quinebaug Valley Community College, where she will soon complete an Advanced English Proficiency ESL Certificate. Because of her strong academic achievements at the college, she was inducted into Quinebaug's Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society and has been invited to participate in other student leadership programs at the college.

Recently, Ms. Griman also won a COABE Google Scholarship and is pursuing a Digital Marketing and E-Business Certification that she hopes to complete by next year.

Ms. Griman hopes to continue her college studies and secure enough funding to obtain a bachelor's degree.

**Iryna Hzhesiak  
Family Centers  
Literacy Volunteers of  
Stamford/Greenwich**

Ms. Hzhesiak left her family in Ukraine and it has been very difficult for her to be so far from her family who are in danger. It has also been hard for her to know that she has lost the home in which she was raised.

When Ms. Hzhesiak began attending classes, she needed to build her self-assurance, especially concerning her verbal communication. She thought her English skills would be an impediment to securing a suitable position in the workplace. Participating in adult education classes, ESL in particular, helped her develop the confidence to participate in community-based activities and pursue additional coursework. As a result, Ms. Hzhesiak was selected to

participate in Stamford's Parent Leadership Training Institute. She developed social opportunities and "play groups" for newly arrived Ukrainian families to build relationships and a sense of community. At work, she maintains the Padlet (digital notice board), not only because she has the skills, but because she understands how important it is to spread the word about community resources and learning opportunities to new English language learners.

Ms. Hzhesiak intends to progress in her career and to have a sense of financial independence. She also wants to build her connections around advocacy for other families of children with special needs, with a particular focus on serving immigrant families new to navigating the public education system and the community resources available in the U.S.

**Eric O'Connell**  
**Middletown Adult Education**

Mr. O'Connell has worked hard to overcome, and he is all about giving back and helping others. His plan is just "do the right thing, put one foot in front of the other." He knows that things will all come together, if he just does that. Although he was one test short of completing the GED that he had pursued while incarcerated, he wanted to finish the high school diploma program that he had missed out on years earlier. He is the first student in the building every day and has not missed a day of school. He helps other students in adult education that he sees struggling with similar backgrounds. He also acts as a mentor in his current residence program.

Mr. O'Connell knows he wants to help others and give back. He wants to go to college. He has worked with the program counselor extensively about finding something he really enjoys as a career. He realizes that, even if he does not go into counseling, that does not mean he cannot continue as a mentor or advisor to others.

**Emuna Patterson  
Manchester Adult Education**

Ms. Patterson is the mother of four and has worked in a variety of jobs since the age of 16. She has had to care for multiple children on her own, including while experiencing homelessness and serious domestic difficulties. She has arranged for her older brother to take co-guardianship of her children in Puerto Rico so they can have a stable place to live. This was one of the most difficult decisions she has ever had to make, but she knows it was the right one for the sake of her children.

Ms. Patterson has demonstrated impressive academic progress. She began her studies with few credits and has taken the maximum number of classes during each of her five trimesters. She has excelled academically and is now on-track to complete all credits to graduate this spring.

Ms. Patterson has found employment, sought out the Manchester Adult Education career specialist, and is making progress towards her career goal of becoming a school counselor so she can help others who have also dealt with hardships.

She represented Adult Education at the CAACE sponsored "Celebration of Literacy" at the State Capitol in November. Ms. Patterson met with several legislators and advocated for their continued support of Adult Education and is an inspiration to all who know her.

Prepared by: Sabrina Mancini, Education Consultant  
Adult Education

Reviewed by: Irene E. Parisi, Chief Academic Officer

Approved by: Dr. Charles E. Hewes  
Deputy Commissioner