

CONNECTICUT STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
Hartford

Minutes
State Board of Education Meeting
June 17, 2020
(Approved July 14, 2020)

Pursuant to notice filed with the Secretary of the State and posted on the agency's Web site, the State Board of Education (hereinafter "Board") met via GoToMeeting on Wednesday, June 17, 2020. This virtual meeting was livestreamed (<https://youtu.be/0P3tN1Q1DFQ>) to allow for public access.

I. Call to Order

Chairperson Allan Taylor called the meeting to order at 9:39 a.m.

Staff Assistant to the Board, Aldith Dewar, took an attendance roll call.

Present: Allan B. Taylor, Chairperson
 Estela López, Vice Chairperson
 Erin D. Benham
 Bonnie E. Burr
 Milan Chand, Student Member
 Sophia H. Chin, Student Member
 Erik M. Clemons
 Karen DuBois-Walton
 Elwood Exley, Jr.
 Donald F. Harris, Jr.
 Martha Paluch Prou
 Awilda Reasco
 Malia K. Sieve
 Robert J. Trefry, Ex Officio

Absent: Mark Ojakian, Ex Officio

II. Public Participation

Chairperson Taylor stated that public participation had been received online and the public comments were available on the website.

III. Executive Session

The Board did not meet in executive session.

IV. Consideration of Minutes

A roll call vote was taken for the Minutes.

A. June 3, 2020, State Board of Education Meeting

Dr. DuBois-Walton moved, Mrs. Reasco seconded, that the Board adopt the minutes of the June 3, 2020, State Board of Education Meeting.

VOTE ON

MOTION:	In favor:	Benham, Burr, Clemons, DuBois-Walton, Exley, Harris, López, Prou, Reasco, Sieve, Taylor
	Opposed:	0
	Abstained:	0
	Absent:	0

Motion carried unanimously.

V. Report of the Commissioner

Commissioner Cardona opened with a heartfelt congratulations to all Class of 2020 student graduates who were graduating from our schools in Connecticut. He stated that the Class of 2020 is one that will never be forgotten. He congratulated the Class of 2020; those students who are being promoted from one grade level to another, and all students of Connecticut!

Superintendent Craig Drezek

Commissioner Cardona asked for a moment of silence in condolence and sympathy for the passing of Superintendent Craig Drezek. Mr. Drezek was the Superintendent of Goodwin University Magnet Schools. Commissioner Cardona shared that Mr. Drezek was a champion for students, a wonderful father, and a wonderful community member who would be missed by many.

Commissioner Cardona provided a summary of some of the activities at the agency.

Fall Reopening. Commissioner Cardona stated that the CSDE continues to have meetings with the Office of Policy Management, Office of the Governor, and the Department of Public Health on considerations for fall reopening.

School Discipline Collaborative Meeting. The CSDE presented a webinar on the Critically Acclaimed Book, *SCHOOLING FOR CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS: Engaging Black and Latinx*

Youth in Analyzing, Navigating, and Challenging Racial Injustice, presented by Dr. Daren Graves, an Associate Professor of Education and Social Work at Simmons University and Adjunct Lecturer of Education at Harvard Graduate School of Education. Commissioner Cardona stated that the webinar was planned pre-COVID, pre-demonstration and pre-unrest, and that it is really important that we continue to move forward with regard to racial consciousness and making sure that we can provide schools that are welcoming to all students.

He highlighted the following agency activities:

- Agency meetings with the Reopen Committee.
- Regional advisory teams with input from families, teachers, superintendents, and school leaders providing feedback on ways to reopen.
- Weekly educational partner calls with presidents of AFT, CEA, CAPSS, CABE, CAS, and CIAC.
- Agency participation calls with the Council of Chief State School Officers.
- New England conference calls with Commissioners from different states come together regularly to discuss opening considerations.
- SEL collaborative meeting. CSDE is focusing on making social emotional learning a part of our strategy in Connecticut with increased efforts to provide social emotional support and guidance support to districts.
- Participation in different webinars and forums.

Student Voice – Introduction of Statements by Student Members

Commissioner Cardona provided remarks to the introduction of the student member statements.

The Commissioner stated that we were fighting two pandemics. Both were invisible at times and both just as deadly. He applauded the work of this State Board of Education to face this head on through policy, strategic planning efforts, and direction. He stated that the reopening plans for schools will have to take into account the safety and well-being of our children from both pandemics.

The next generation will be the best strategy for improving our country. Commissioner Cardona stated that he had complete confidence in the next generation. Sophia and Milan prepared statements for their last day on our Board. He respectfully asked the board to listen to their words and consider how their thoughts will shape the important work we have ahead.

Commissioner Cardona deferred the remainder of the Commissioner's Report to Sophia Chin to speak on the importance of a diverse curriculum material, and Milan Chand to speak on the importance of mental health supports.

The Board requested that Sophia's and Milan's statements be included in its entirety into the minutes as read.

Perspectives in Curriculum and Teaching by Sophia H. Chin, Student Member

Ever since elementary school, there has been a curriculum involving the study of other nations and cultures. However, many of this has been a stereotypically one-sided perspective. From learning about Native Americans at Thanksgiving in 4th grade, to the devastating halt of the Chinese Empire due to the opioid crisis; I have seen our schools' focus on the negatives of other countries and cultures as beneficial towards Americans. We rarely learn about strengths and moments of power by other nations, and see mostly primary sources from similar backgrounds. At the beginning of my sophomore year, my AP United States History teacher warned us of the partisan information we would be learning, but that this curriculum was necessary through the Advanced Placement guidelines.

Similarly, I am currently enrolled in the UCONN Course Seminar in Writing Through Literature; in which the purpose of the course is to allow students to see the world through strong pieces of literature. Unfortunately, we have not read a single entire book written by an author of color, and do not see such literature on the course syllabus for the rest of the year. Students should not be seeing the world through the literature of only one type of human, for the world is not made up of one type of human.

This pool of knowledge about other cultures that us students must draw our schema from impedes upon the potential we have for learning and assimilating other cultures into our lives. I, myself, am certainly guilty of using information from class to make a generalization about a culture that we barely touched upon in a lecture, and I see this as a grave issue. It is ultimately crucial that Connecticut Public Schools are cognizant of such predisposed bias in national curriculum, and the potential to improve at the state level. Understandably, this takes time, and dedication towards the introduction of potential semester courses, a few lectures, and a couple lessons would go a long way towards helping the school community and beyond be more knowledgeable about the diversity around us.

Of course, this instruction begins in the classroom with the CSDE responsibility to "...provide educational opportunities for its students to interact with students and teachers from other racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds". I am proud to be a part of a school system working hard towards encouraging minority educators and reducing ethnic and racial isolation, but this can always be improved. It is more than simply opening up hiring of teachers to be more focused on race, but rather inspiring those in school now, especially children of color, to want to become a teacher. We want such students to go into teaching because they want to help and inspire not only other children of color, but also students who come from a dissimilar background. Teachers from all different backgrounds can only be beneficial, and simply the thought of having a teacher that looks like me; a multiracial, multiethnic, woman of color, genuinely inspires me to consider becoming an educator in my future. I urge the Department of Education to simply do more for the existing minority teachers, so that retention rates do not decline, and so that students will see minority educators who love what they do and find comfort in what they do. Then hopefully, we will see a surge in students wanting to give back and become educators themselves.

To conclude, a quote which reverberates strongly with me is one by Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche; a Nigerian female author who has been widely renowned as one of the most prominent African writers. She holds the title of most watched Ted Talk called *The Danger of the Single Story*, and in this lecture she says, "The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story." So, I challenge the State of Connecticut and the Department of Education to talk about the difficult topic of bias, and recognize the great room for improvement in our public schools. Not only can we improve curriculum for our students to see the world with, but we can inspire these same students to want to go into education after their experiences.

Mental Health and Education Statement by Milan Chand, Student Member

A wave. A burden. An ocean of doubt, fear, and anxiety brewing in ones mind: and the feeling of helplessness above it all. The definition of a mental disorder is believed to be innate: fixed and only defined in one way. Yet that burden is so much more than what meets the eye. A wave that takes countless forms. And an impact that lasts a lifetime.

In the world of psychology, adolescence is seen as a time of discovery, a period in an individual's life where their identity is discovered, refined, and curated. Teenagers today however encounter countless barriers while shaping their path. These barriers are usually in the form of a similar wave; a wave that begins to tear them down and change their lives dramatically. The crippling control of mental health is at the forefront of our society's struggles: whether it be affecting an individual's life, causing impacts on a community, or resulting in a tragic suicide.

Therefore, promoting mental health awareness is more than just silencing the stigma, even though changing mindsets is also pivotal to making a difference in society. Nevertheless, advocating for positive brain health is about changing a culture: a culture filled with high suicide rates in teens, negative social media influence, and closed lines of communication. The Education System, Connecticut, and America as a whole need to recognize the importance of brain health and work to change our societal standards, especially for the lives of students.

Living in Newtown, Connecticut I have experienced the pain and the suffering of surviving a tragedy in school. My once safe haven as a child has now and forever become a war zone: a place filled with trauma and fear. Although our community has become stronger, the effects of this pain will never leave. Last year Jeremy Richman, founder of The Avielle Foundation, killed himself. As a mentor and friend, his suicide affected so many others and myself, but no one could ever imagine the pain he went through. Even as the leader of a non-profit fighting for better brain health, he couldn't fight the relentless grip of his pain.

Like so many other students, sometimes the pain is too much. Sometimes their anxiety, doubt, and fears are too strong. However, being an optimist, I don't believe it has to be this way. I don't believe I can stand here and watch this happen without fighting for change. The struggles of mental health disorders are real, grief is real, pain and suffering is real, but how we cope with it and how we receive support is what truly matters. Because we *can* imagine their pain, and we need to empathize with those who are struggling.

As a monumental pillar of our great state of Connecticut I truly believe, especially after these past months on the Board of Education, that it is our job to create the resources, the support, and the aid to every district, every school, and most importantly every student: because no one deserves to suffer in silence. No one deserves to live a life full of pain where no one is listening.

This support can take many forms, whether it means more budgeting for mental health aid, or creating relevant programs for districts to implement, or educating counselors and teachers on best practices. There are countless initiatives to continue to build upon and create the best school climate for students today. It shouldn't matter if you live in Greenwich or Bridgeport, all students should have equal opportunity to mental health support.

So I urge the Department of Education, the State of Connecticut, and even America as a whole to fight the preconceived notions on mental health, to create equal access of support for all, and to continue to advocate for awareness and understanding. We need to be the listening ear, to hear the pain and to respond with empathy: because everyone deserves a little a bit of compassion.

Chairperson Taylor thanked both Sophia and Milan.

Commissioner Cardona thanked Milan for sharing his personal experience and for highlighting areas of focus for the Board.

VI. Items Requiring Action

A. Adoption of 2021 Meeting Schedule

Mrs. Benham moved, Dr. López seconded, that the State Board of Education, pursuant to Section 1-225 of the Connecticut General Statutes, approves the 2021 schedule of regular meeting dates, as follows:

January 7, 2021 (Thursday), **or**
January 13, 2021
February 3, 2021
March 3, 2021
April 7, 2021
May 5, 2021
June 2, 2021
July 7, 2021 (Tentative), **or**
July 14, 2021 (Tentative)
August 4, 2021 (Retreat)
September 1, 2021
October 6, 2021

November 3, 2021

December 1, 2021

and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

VOTE ON

MOTION: In favor: Benham, Burr, Clemons, DuBois-Walton, Exley, Harris,
López, Prou, Reasco, Sieve, Taylor
Opposed: 0
Abstained: 0
Absent: 0

Motion carried unanimously.

B. Receipt of Report on Racial Imbalance

Mr. Clemons moved, Mrs. Benham seconded, that the State Board of Education, pursuant to Sections 10-226a and 10-226b of the Connecticut General Statutes, accepts the Racial Imbalance Report for the 2019-20 school year, and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

VOTE ON

MOTION: In favor: Benham, Burr, Clemons, DuBois-Walton, Exley, Harris,
López, Prou, Reasco, Sieve, Taylor
Opposed: 0
Abstained: 0
Absent: 0

Motion carried unanimously.

C. Resolution in Honor of Milan Chand

Dr. López moved, Mr. Harris seconded, that the Board approve the following Resolution in Honor of Milan Chand as read into the record by Commissioner Miguel Cardona:

WHEREAS, Section 10-1 of the Connecticut General Statutes provides for the appointment of two student members to the Connecticut State Board of Education; and

WHEREAS, Governor Ned Lamont appointed Milan Chand of Newtown to the State Board of Education for a one-year term commencing August 6, 2019; and

WHEREAS, During his tenure, Mr. Chand has served with distinction and has contributed greatly to the Board's discussions of education policy issues;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, That the State Board of Education extends to Milan Chand its appreciation for his commitment to educational excellence and equity in Connecticut public schools and best wishes for success in his future endeavors.

APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY THIS SEVENTEENTH DAY OF JUNE, TWO THOUSAND TWENTY

VOTE ON

MOTION:	In favor:	Benham, Burr, Clemons, DuBois-Walton, Exley, Harris, López, Prou, Reasco, Sieve, Taylor
	Opposed:	0
	Abstained:	0
	Absent:	0

Motion carried unanimously.

Milan Chand - Board Student Member Experience

Mr. Chand told his fellow Board colleagues that this Board has taught him so much over this past year, and that it has been an honor and a privilege to work with them. Mr. Chand stated that this being his favorite experience has shaped what he wants to do in college. He will be taking an urban education class next year because of this Board. Thank you so much.

D. Resolution in Honor of Sophia Chin

Dr. López moved, Dr. DuBois-Walton seconded, that the Board approve the following Resolution in Honor of Sophia Chin as read into the record by Commissioner Miguel Cardona:

WHEREAS, Section 10-1 of the Connecticut General Statutes provides for the appointment of two student members to the Connecticut State Board of Education; and

WHEREAS, Governor Ned Lamont appointed Sophia Chin of South Windsor to the State Board of Education for a one-year term commencing August 6, 2019; and

WHEREAS, During her tenure, Ms. Chin has served with distinction and has contributed greatly to the Board's discussions of education policy issues;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, That the State Board of Education extends to Sophia Chin its appreciation for her commitment to educational excellence and equity in Connecticut public schools and best wishes for success in her future endeavors.

APPROVED UNANIMOUSLY THIS SEVENTEENTH DAY OF JUNE, TWO THOUSAND TWENTY

VOTE ON

MOTION:	In favor:	Benham, Burr, Clemons, DuBois-Walton, Exley, Harris, López, Prou, Reasco, Sieve, Taylor
	Opposed:	0
	Abstained:	0
	Absent:	0

Motion carried unanimously.

Sophia Chin - Board Student Member Experience

Ms. Chin told her fellow Board colleagues that it has been an absolute honor to serve on this Board. Ms. Chin stated that it has given me so many new perspectives to look at the world with; I think that I am definitely going to carry this with me. I will always remember serving on this Board. Thank you.

VII. Report of the Chair

Chairperson Taylor did not provide a report.

VIII. Financial Matters

Chief Financial Officer Kathy Demsey was not present to provide a report. It was noted that at the June 3, 2020, meeting Ms. Demsey stated that due to the process of closing the fiscal year and getting out all federal funding for COVID, there would be no report for June.

IX. Consent Agenda

Chairperson Taylor asked the Board members if any report was being requested removed from the Consent agenda.

Dr. López moved, Dr. DuBois-Walton seconded, that the Board approve the following Consent agenda items: IX.A., Approval of Proposed Contract for Whole School Management Services Between Achievement First Bridgeport Academy, Inc. and Achievement First, Inc., IX.B., Approval of Proposed Contract for Whole School Management Services Between Elm City College Preparatory, Inc. and Achievement First, Inc., IX.C., Approval of Proposed Contract for Whole School Management Services Between Amistad Academy, Inc. and Achievement First, Inc., IX.D., Approval of Proposed Contract for Whole School Management Services Between Capital Prep Harbor School, Inc. and Capital Preparatory Schools Incorporated, and IX.E., Connecticut Computer Science State Plan.

A roll call vote was taken for the Consent agenda.

A. Approval of Proposed Contract for Whole School Management Services Between Achievement First Bridgeport Academy, Inc. and Achievement First, Inc.

RESOLVED, That the State Board of Education, pursuant to Section 10-66tt of the Connecticut General Statutes, approves the contract for whole school management services between Achievement First Bridgeport Academy, Inc. and Achievement First, Inc. and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

B. Approval of Proposed Contract for Whole School Management Services Between Elm City College Preparatory, Inc. and Achievement First, Inc.

RESOLVED, That the State Board of Education, pursuant to Section 10-66tt of the Connecticut General Statutes, approves the contract for whole school management services between Elm City College Preparatory, Inc. and Achievement First, Inc. and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

C. Approval of Proposed Contract for Whole School Management Services Between Amistad Academy, Inc. and Achievement First, Inc.

RESOLVED, That the State Board of Education, pursuant to Section 10-66tt of the Connecticut General Statutes, approves the contract for whole school management services between Amistad Academy, Inc. and Achievement First, Inc, and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

D. Approval of Proposed Contract for Whole School Management Services Between Capital Prep Harbor School, Inc. and Capital Preparatory Schools Incorporated

RESOLVED, That the State Board of Education, pursuant to Section 10-66tt of the Connecticut General Statutes, approves the contract for whole school management services between Capital Prep Harbor School, Inc. and Capital Preparatory Schools Incorporated and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

E. Connecticut Computer Science State Plan

RESOLVED, That the State Board of Education approves the Connecticut Computer Science Plan and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

VOTE ON

MOTION:	In favor:	Benham, Burr, Clemons, DuBois-Walton, Exley, Harris, López, Prou, Reasco, Sieve, Taylor
	Opposed:	0
	Abstained:	0
	Absent:	0

Motions carried unanimously.

X. Items for Discussion

There were no Discussion agenda items for consideration.

XI. Committee Reports

A. Academic Standards and Assessment

Mr. Clemons reported that the committee would be meeting on Monday, June 22, 2020.

B. Accountability and Support

There was no report provided.

C. Finance, Audit, and Budget

There was no report provided.

D. Legislation and Policy Development

Mrs. Benham reported that the committee met this morning. The committee received many updates about what supports are out there for our students, our parents, special groups, special education, and EL. They reviewed the workings of the committee and set the next meeting to talk about racial inequities as well as some of the reports that the Board has gone through previously. Charlene Russell-Tucker, John Frassinelli, Glen Peterson, and Jessa Mirtle talked about work the agency did as well the collaboration with other agencies. Mrs. Benham stated that it was a very good update for the committee.

E. Connecticut Technical Education and Career System Board

In CTECS Chairman Trefry's absence from the meeting, no report was provided.

F. NASBE

Mrs. Benham referenced the NASBE Office Hours meeting that discussed a parent piece on parents accessing parent portals. Other state districts were concerned and had to address parent portals and the training or retraining of parents. As parents realized that they needed to use the parent portals more on a daily basis to see where their children were, the states found that parents reached out and said that they needed to be retrained.

With the agenda items being complete, the Board engaged in discussions and conversations on several topics.

- Question regarding the ending of the Partnership for Connecticut with the State of Connecticut. Mr. Clemons reported the Partnership for Connecticut, working with Commissioner Cardona, were able to distribute 60,000 laptops to kids in Alliance Districts. Remarks were made on the commitment of Ray and Barbara Dalio to education in Connecticut.
- Question on the students without computers that fell behind. The districts had been surveyed to learn what their needs were; and a rapid connectivity task force had been established to help support connectivity challenges.
- Inquiries were made regarding Fall Reopening. Commissioner Cardona responded that Connecticut is one of six states that is moving in the right direction. The CSDE is working in conjunction with Department of Public Health, Office of the Governor, and Office of Policy Management.
- Question regarding school buses and classroom sessions. The CSDE is having conversations with CABE, CAPSS, etc. All districts are not designed the same.

- Question regarding the Fall Reopening Guidelines. There will be benchmarks that are not negotiable with health and safety indicators.
- The concern of Latinx communications was raised. Commissioner Cardona responded that Dr. Gladys Labas had joined CSDE team. When it is time to communicate specifics, the CSDE has Dr. Labas, and it is important to understand the process in their native language.
- There was discussion of the need for public school education to have more of an understanding about racism and systemic racism in America. There was conversation on the need to offer curriculum on race as a graduation requirement or curriculum changes so that more of these classes were offered. There was further conversation on critical consciousness and the roles that schools can play with curriculum.

Chairperson Taylor adjourned the meeting at 11:25 a.m.

Prepared by: _____
Dr. Miguel A. Cardona, Secretary
State Board of Education