

CONNECTICUT STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
Hartford

Minutes
State Board of Education Meeting
November 4, 2020
(Approved December 2, 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 GoToWebinar on Wednesday, November 4, 2020. A GoToWebinar registration link was provided to allow for public attendance to the virtual meeting. This virtual meeting was livestreamed (<https://youtu.be/6uIEV3MSaqQ>.) to allow for public access.

I. Call to Order

Chairperson Allan Taylor called the meeting to order at 5:03 p.m.

National Anthem – Performed by Terrence Bogan

Commissioner Cardona thanked everyone for attending and expressed that he had a performance to share. The Commissioner stated that at the recommendation of Board member Erin Benham, Terrence Bogan would be performing for the Board. He read the bio of Terrence Bogan, a resident of Wallingford. Mr. Bogan is an 18-year old freshman at Trinity College in Hartford. Mr. Bogan plans to major in Political Science, Public Policy and Law, and a minor in Human Rights Studies. He is the Class of 2024 President, Athletes of Color Coalition freshman representative.

The Commissioner spoke on the integrity of Mr. Bogan by sharing that initially the meeting was going to be held in person, and Mr. Bogan said that he was not able to attend because he tutors someone on Wednesday evenings and did not want to miss the session. Mr. Bogan offered a video tape of his performance of the *Star Spangled Banner*: <https://youtu.be/bXo1nmXqEdI>.

After the video performance, Board member Benham followed up by sharing that Mr. Bogan graduated at the top of his class from Cheney Technical High School, and that on the night of his graduation, he won a national Broadway recording competition out of 2,000 students.

Moment of Silence in Honor of Sharon Clemons

Chairperson Taylor shared that the wife of our friend and Board colleague Erik Clemons had passed suddenly. Chairperson Taylor asked to be joined in a moment of silence in sympathy for Erik and his family on their loss.

The meeting continued with the agenda.

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
Karen DuBois-Walton
Elwood Exley, Jr.
Donald F. Harris, Jr.
Dr. Jane Gates for Mark Ojakian, Ex Officio
Martha Paluch Prou
Awilda Reasco
Malia K. Sieve
Robert J. Trefry, Ex Officio

Absent: Erik M. Clemons

II. Public Participation

Chairperson Taylor stated that two written statements were received for public participation. Access to public participation was provided via (i) e-mail communication submitted to SDE.StateBoard@ct.gov, and (ii) webinar registration as a speaker at the meeting. All written communication received were shared with the Board and will be posted on the Board's Web site.

1. Ruben Felipe, Executive Director of the CT Charter Schools Association provided written testimony in support of the proposed grade growth for Stamford Charter School for Excellence.
2. Dr. Joan E. Venditto, Treasurer of the Connecticut Chapter of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE-CT) and Director of Education Programs, Albertus Magnus College, New Haven, spoke on Collaboration of Educator Preparation Programs and Public School Districts during COVID-19.

III. Executive Session

The Board did not meet in executive session.

IV. Consideration of Minutes

A. October 7, 2020, State Board of Education Meeting

Dr. DuBois-Walton moved, Mr. Harris seconded, that the Board adopt the minutes of the October 7, 2020, State Board of Education Meeting.

VOTE ON

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

Motion carried unanimously.

Due to a technical matter with the audio, the meeting was briefly paused. Commissioner Cardona thanked everyone for their patience.

V. Report of the Commissioner

Commissioner Cardona offered condolence and prayers to Board member Erik Clemons and his family.

Moment of Silence in Honor of Commissioner Gerald N. Tirozzi

Commissioner Cardona requested a moment of silence on the passing of the former Commissioner of Education Gerald N. Tirozzi. Commissioner Tirozzi served as the agency head from 1983-1991. He also worked at the U.S. Department of Education, and served as a Director of the National Association of Secondary School Principals.

The Commissioner presented a PowerPoint during his report. Commissioner Cardona stated that the agency had been very busy and provided an updated summary of some of the October activities at the agency. He highlighted the following:

Updates for October

- Agency highlight was the Teacher of the Year and Paraeducator of the Year Announcements
- Meetings with over 100 superintendents in the last month during various forums.
- Participation in various statewide and national Hispanic Heritage Month celebrations and focus groups and conversations.
- Visiting classrooms in Farmington, Meriden, and Middletown.

Professional Support Series and Webinars – Recent Events

- Performance Matters 2020 Webinar Series
- Academic Office Fall Alliance District Symposium
- Office of Strategic Planning and Partnerships: Increase in Enrollment

- Innovation and Partnerships: Mock elections for high schoolers

Weekly Health and Safety Support Structures – Recent Events

- Rules Subcommittee – a partnership led by CSDE, DPH, and Yale School of Public Health
- DPH/CSDE COVID-19 Health and Safety Tuesdays
- DPH/CSDE COVID-19 Community Alerts
- CSDE, DCF and Attendance Works Webinar
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Congratulations!

Rochelle Brown – Connecticut Teacher of the Year
Maria Sau – Anne Marie Murphy Paraeducator of the Year

Commissioner Cardona shared that the highlight of the month was visiting Poquonock School in Windsor to announce the Connecticut Teacher of the Year and Anne Marie Murphy Paraeducator of the Year. It was noted that this was history making in that both were from the same school.

Rochelle Brown – Connecticut Teacher of the Year

Ms. Brown is a kindergarten teacher at Poquonock School in Windsor.

- Over 20 years as an educator.
- Taught U.S. citizenship course through Windsor Continuing Education Program.
- Joined an after school program for boys of color to address the achievement gap which included traveling students to other states to engage them in cultural and educational experiences.
- Serves as co-chair of her school's and district's Equity Committee.
- Most known for having a wonderful diverse collection of books in her classroom.

Maria Sau – Anne Marie Murphy Paraeducator of the Year

Ms. Sau is a paraeducator at Poquonock School in Windsor.

- The firstborn of 13 siblings. She had the responsibility of helping to raise her siblings.
- Works with children with exceptionalities and require additional support.
- She takes pride in recognizing all the strengths in her students and focus on that.
- Treats her students like her family and brings out the best in her.
- Greatest accomplishment is when students grow up and return to visit and thank her for believing in them and helping them in school.

The Commissioner congratulated the Town of Windsor on the nominations.

Manufacturing Partnership

Commissioner Cardona recognized the partnership with Enfield's Phoenix Manufacturing, a women-owned, privately held precision machined components manufacturer located in Enfield, CT, to offer districts onsite tours and learn how to enhance their schools to provide students access to high-paying, skilled, in-demand careers. Commissioner Cardona acknowledged Chief Academic Officer Irene Parisi for working closely with Board Member Martha Prou.

The Commissioner stated that the best way to talk about college and career readiness is to make sure that our students are prepared for the jobs of today to give school districts an opportunity to visit places like this and learn.

Mrs. Prou stated that they had a collaborative tour with the groups of educators that went to their facility. She noted that the tide of manufacturing was changing to being about brains. She extended an invitation to the Board to visit.

Commissioner Cardona stated that Mrs. Prou is modeling what needs to be happening. Partnerships in the field need to open their doors and ask – how could we help – how can we create internships – how can we work with districts to create elective courses that might fit with the work.

Student Voice

In partnership with Lt. Governor Bysiewicz, the CSDE hosted a Mock General Election. This first-of-a-kind high school program was designed to introduce young people to the process and power of voting. Over 3,000 juniors and seniors from 48 districts casted their votes for president. The Commissioner thanked Director of Innovation and Partnerships Chris Soto for organizing with the Lieutenant Governor's Office.

Updates for November - School Reported Cases

The Commissioner reported that the transition from the CSDE collecting these cases to the Department of Public Health collecting and reporting these cases has been completed. He requested that the link be sent to the Board. He explained that the link will show cases by adults or students in building. It is also broken down by the mode of school being hybrid, in person, or remote. The reports are updated weekly.

Updates for November – Distance Learning Models

The Commissioner reported that the CSDE continues to collect the data on school models. He displayed a graph that showed the percentage of districts that were predominantly fully in person and fully remote for the week of October 19th through the 23rd. Some schools had to close and go fully remote due to staffing issues or cases. Conversations continue to happen daily between superintendents and local health officials.

Video Presentations by CT 2020 National Blue Ribbon Schools

As a follow up to congratulating the four Connecticut 2020 National Blue Ribbon Schools, Director of Communications Peter Yazbak worked with the districts to get snippets to give you the essence of the schools. The video highlights the four Blue Ribbon Schools.

George Hersey Robertson School, Coventry – Exemplary High Performing

- Principal – Ms. Jennifer DeRagon provided a welcome to George Hersey Robertson School.
 - Principal DeRagon shared that GHR has a dynamic community and is known for promotion of kindness. Kindness is part of the CARES acronym philosophy.

- Student ownership - GHR wants students to have some leadership over their own academic learning and what they are passionate about – by creating a portfolio
- Dedication to Innovation – Adopted Portrait of the Graduate Competences
- Really proud of dedication to math and reading enrichment and intervention

Northeast Elementary School, Vernon – Exemplary Achievement Gap Closing

- Principal – Dr. Brenda L. Greene provided a welcome to Northeast Elementary School.
 - Identified as a Category 1 School, a School of Distinction, and now a National Blue Ribbon School.
 - We give students what they need when they need it.
 - It is all about relationships and culture. Staff, students, and community working together to make a great school.
 - Morning Meeting Show – topic for the day; Sight Word Song and Dance; Socially Distanced Math Partners – using walkie-talkies; Celebrating Together – birthday celebration; Friends at Recess (kids playing and singing around a tree)

South Street School, Danbury – Exemplary Achievement Gap Closing

- Principal – Mrs. Carmen Vargas-Guevara provided a welcome to South Street School.
 - Staff and students make us a Blue Ribbon School. Staff puts students first.
 - A welcoming school; best initiative is community
 - Students come to school wanting to learn and teachers come to school wanting to teach; provide students with the academics necessary to close the academic gap.
 - Regularly meeting with classroom teachers; group students in proficiency grids;
 - Target language instruction to meet students level – accelerate language acquisition
 - Highlighted the daily 30-minute WIN (What I Need) block is a key structural piece in place to meet the needs of all students whether intervention or acceleration
 - We look at data – data is transparent and drives our instruction

Norton Elementary School, Cheshire – Exemplary High Performing

- Principal – Mrs. Kelly Grillo provided a welcome to Norton Elementary School.
 - We celebrate students every day; we value relationships which fosters a positive culture and an environment where students want to come to school to learn.
 - Staff members are dedicated to providing a comprehensive educational program that meets the academic, social and emotional needs of our students.
 - Combined with rigorous curriculum and Cheshire Performance Standards.
 - Prepare and encourage our students to be collaborative, cooperative learners, community contributors, complex and creative thinkers, effective communicators and self-directed learners.
 - Honoring the importance of each child's social emotional and academic wellbeing, we employ responsive classroom practices, to create safe, playful, and engaging classrooms.
 - High level strategies of personalize student learning; leaders of their own learning and school culture; sense of ownership for wellbeing of school.
 - Monthly town meetings to celebrate student achievement.

Commissioner Cardona reflected on seeing smiles from the members from viewing the video. He captured that the threads of great blue ribbon schools is what we cannot measure. There is no test for social emotional that the school plays. When students were not in school since March that had an impact on their social emotional wellbeing. The schools showed a sense of community and caring about one another.

Vice Chair López requested a Teacher of the Year video.

VII. Report of the Chair

Chairperson Taylor did not provide a report.

VIII. Financial Matters

A. Budget Options

Chief Financial Officer Kathy Demsey provided an overview of the budget process and the budget options being presented to the Board. Ms. Demsey acknowledged that several questions were raised at the October 7th meeting and apologized to the Board for not being able to attend. Ms. Demsey indicated that she was able to go before the Legislation Policy and Development Committee meeting prior to this Board meeting and answered the questions of the committee members.

Ms. Demsey explained repurposing funds that were no longer needed for the two charter schools that had closed in Stamford over the last two years and repurposing a portion of those funds to allow for the expansion of the Stamford Charter School for Excellence to include middle school grades. Ms. Demsey clarified that at the July State Board of Education meeting, Stamford Charter School for Excellence had been before the Board and had desired a grade expansion; however, funding was not available for the Board to take action. The Board directed the school to follow the process, and the first step is to request funding as part of budgetary proposal to OPM. If that funding survives the governor's budget and legislative session, then at that time the SBE would have the opportunity for action on the expansion request.

Ms. Burr thanked Ms. Demsey for her patience in answering all her questions. Ms. Burr went on record that she remains troubled with regards to the multi-dollar reduction for technical and voag schools. Ms. Burr stated that there truly needs to be a hard discussion regarding equity for school choice with the amount per pupil that is being spent. It is my hope that in the next year we can really wrap our hand around that all students are afforded the same opportunities when they do school choice.

Dr. DuBois-Walton moved, Mrs. Reasco seconded, that the State Board of Education approves the Fiscal Year 2021-22 and Fiscal Year 2022-23 Biennial Budget Reduction, Reallocation and Expansion Options, and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

VOTE ON

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

Motion carried unanimously.

IX. Consent Agenda

A. In the Matter of RV, Certification Action

Chairperson Taylor asked for a motion for the Consent agenda.

Dr. DuBois-Walton moved, Mrs. Benham seconded, that pursuant to its authority under subsection (e) of Section 10-145d-612 of the Regulations for Connecticut State Agencies, the State Board of Education orders the Commissioner to file with it, within the regulatory time period, a written report In the Matter of RV, Certification Action.

VOTE ON

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

Motion carried unanimously.

X. Items for Discussion

Agency Update

Commissioner Cardona introduced Chief Performance Officer Ajit Gopalakrishnan and Deputy Commissioner Desi Nesmith to provide Attendance and Enrollment, and Districts Updates. The Commissioner acknowledged Mr. Gopalakrishnan and the Performance Team for their remarkable work, as well as the districts for the things that they had to do before and during a pandemic while trying to keep schools open.

A. Attendance and Enrollment

Chief Performance Officer Ajit Gopalakrishnan provided an update on two reports that were being released on enrollment and monthly attendance.

Enrollment

Chief Performance Officer Ajit Gopalakrishnan stated that from the weekly data being collected on learning models that overall enrollment aggregates from districts seemed down. After collecting the student level data, we set out to see where the decline was and which districts. Overall enrollment seemed to be down about three percent from last year to this year. About 15,000 students fewer. More than 50% of this decline was due to lower enrollment in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten. We also looked at a rough cohort persistence approach to calculate persistence rates (last year's 1st graders to this year's second graders). Fewer new students seemed to be enrolling than we might have expected in a normal year in all the grades. We also saw a substantial increase number percentage of families opting to home school their children. We saw about 3,000 more parents opting to home school. This is an increase from approximately 550 to 3,500. The decline in enrollment is about two-thirds in our Alliance Districts. The increase in home schooling is greater in non-Alliance Districts. He concluded that our students have been coming back year after year and the pandemic is the reason for this decline.

Monthly Attendance

Chief Performance Officer Ajit Gopalakrishnan reviewed that the second report stems from the August 11th meeting when the SBE passed a resolution that allowed for hybrid and remote days to be counted as student attendance days. The Board charged the SDE to make sure that the students were actually attending. We set up systems for data collection. We set up a weekly system for tracking. Before we had the October PSIS data, we set up a parallel to the October student count we set up a parallel student-level monthly attendance count to the October student count. A brand new application was developed. In addition to taking regular attendance, there is remote attendance. The student must be in attendance for half a school day. For a remote day, we actually have to create guidance on how to take attendance for remote days and continually refine the guidance. We also allow for asynchronous work where the student does work offline, submits, and then it is reviewed by the teacher for a determination to be made if enough work was complete that is worth at least a half day's worth of school and marked as remote present.

What we are seeing is that students who do not have our high need factors, have similar attendance rates to what they had last year. What we see is that students who have multiple high needs factors, their rates are even lower.

Mr. Gopalakrishnan stated that these reports will be posted on EdSight and would send the links to the Board. Questions were raised concerning home schooling and discussion was held.

B. District Updates

Deputy Commissioner Desi Nesmith reported that as mentioned, there are a number of supports that we have provided and will continue to provide going forward to support districts around these issues. He stated that he and Deputy Commissioner Charlene Russell-Tucker have a meeting coming up with the superintendents of the Opportunity Districts to discuss

technical issues. He summarized that there were no major surprises as to where we need to focus supports and we have systems set up and will continue to do that.

Deputy Commissioner Charlene Russell-Tucker updated the Board that soon they will hear about Goal #1 of the Five-Year Comprehensive Plan and that attendance is one of the metrics that we monitor with a myriad of initiatives that support that work. In March, we recognized that the engagement of attendance was something that we would need to pay attention to and we started building new processes to make sure that attendance was being addressed. Learning from Alliance Districts, continuing our parenting network efforts to hear from districts so they could share best practices, in addition working with DCF. Also monitoring child safety and wellbeing during this time. The data allows us to zero in more closely and use data to supply supports. It is a district piece, but it is also to make sure that these supports get down to the family level.

New Haven Public Schools

Deputy Commissioner Desi Nesmith provided an update on New Haven. He reported the following:

- 11,892 devices had been delivered to New Haven and 3,000 Hotspots.
- New Haven had met with the Accountability and Support Committee back in September.
- In October, Deputy Commissioner Nesmith spoke at New Haven's Board of Education to offer support from the agency and to continue to work with them as they were planning to reopen in a hybrid model on November 9th. This is no longer the case due to rising health metrics in that area. SDE's focus has shifted to continuing to support New Haven to fully remote instruction.
- SDE continues with school-level support to schools (Clinton Avenue and Wexler Grant)
- We continue to meet with New Haven monthly on school improvement grant funds.
- The Academic/Turnaround Office developed a virtual walk through tool. We can keep an eye on what is happening around remote instruction.
- SDE works with New Haven on budget revisions process for a number of the grants that SDE oversees.
- Varying agency members meet and talk regularly with the superintendent and support team.
- Eye on Academic supports – participating in the CK3LI Model (**Connecticut's Partnership for Literacy Success**)

Deputy Commissioner Nesmith stated that the Department is working with New Haven on meals and being able to provide meals to students while fully remote. He was informed this week of a situation with the bus company where there has been a number of positive COVID cases. This has affected the ability to provide different meal location sites for buses to make deliveries.

Deputy Commissioner Nesmith concluded the New Haven update by stating that New Haven is an ongoing effort of everyone at the agency.

C. CTECS Annual Report (2019-20)

Connecticut Technical Education and Career System Board Chairman Robert Trefry and Superintendent Jeffrey Wihbey presented the CTECS Annual Report. Mr. Trefry expressed that it has been a year of challenges, and he appreciated the work of the superintendent, staff, teachers, and community have done to make all this work. Mr. Trefry applauded the high class work of the CTECS Annual Report that was produced in-house by the students. He stated that CTECS is working towards being a separate agency in 2022.

Superintendent Wihbey summarized that (i) CTECS continues to offer trade areas in 12 clusters, (ii) two new trades were added for a total of 31 trades across 20 schools and locations, and (iii) 10,870 high school students are enrolled. CTECS has 600 business partners in commerce and industry. CTECS is in the second year of its Strategic Operating Plan 2019-2020. Superintendent Wihbey referenced page 8 of the Annual Report and highlighted the SOP's five goals:

- Goal 1:** Culture, Climate, Instruction.
- Goal 2:** Industry Alignment and Collaboration.
- Goal 3:** Access and Opportunities.
- Goal 4:** Creating Systems of Excellence.
- Goal 5:** Improving Human Capital.

CTECS students generated \$134, 676.00 worth of student work-based, workforce earnings. Workforce revenues stay within their own classroom programs to buy materials and equipment for the students.

- We expanded career readiness opportunities and added 9 additional advance placement courses across the district.
- Increased adult learning opportunities.
- Enrolled 463 special education students last school year.
- Redesigning CTECS as a new independent agency for the future.
- Recruiting, hiring, and developing. Three great recruitment fairs. New Teacher orientation.

Superintendent Wihbey concluded with highlight of the Coronavirus Response Timeline.

XI. Committee Reports

A. Academic Standards and Assessment

In the absence of Mr. Clemons, no report was presented. The committee should be meeting in November.

B. Accountability and Support

Dr. López reported that the committee met on October 20, 2020. She stated that two charter schools were asked to provide improvement plans. Dr. López reported that the committee would be meeting on November 19, 2020.

C. Finance, Audit, and Budget

No report was presented.

D. Legislation and Policy Development

Mrs. Benham reported that the committee met this morning. Chief Financial Officer Kathy Demsey provided the committee an update on the budget and agricultural science and technology education centers (VoAg Schools). Deputy Commissioner Desi Nesmith and Division Director Lisa Lamenzo presented an update on Goal #4 of the Five-Year Comprehensive Plan. Mrs. Benham reported that the committee would be holding a special meeting for the Legislative Proposals.

E. Connecticut Technical Education and Career System Board

CTECS Chairman Trefry stated that there was nothing further to report at this time.

F. NASBE

Mr. Exley reported that he attended NASBE Virtual Annual Conference 2020. He indicated that he had prepared a report that could be shared with members.

G. SERC

Mrs. Benham reported that the SERC Board met on October 27, 2020. She highlighted that there were numerous professional development opportunities provided by SERC. Mrs. Benham noted that SERC has typically provided offerings for special education and IDEA. From July to October, 63% of their requests from districts and towns have been for racial equity training. She stated that the African American/Black and Puerto Rican/Latino Studies curriculum, was to go to the Academics Standards and Assessment Committee on November 16th and then to the full Board on December 2nd.

Mr. Exley moved, Ms. Sieve seconded the motion for adjourning the meeting.

Chairperson Taylor adjourned the meeting at 7:33 p.m.

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