

# CONNECTICUT STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION Hartford

## Accountability and Support Committee

Tuesday, January 19, 2021

This meeting was live streamed for public access. A link to the live stream was available on the [State Board of Education's Website](#) the morning of January 19, 2021.

### Minutes

(Approved on: February 18, 2021)

#### I. Call to Order

Pursuant to notice filed with the Secretary of the State, and posted on the agency's website, the meeting was livestreamed and link to the live stream was available on the State Board of Education website for public access. Committee Chairperson Dr. Estela López called the meeting to order at 3:00 p.m.

Committee                      Dr. Estela López, Chairperson  
Members Present:              Erin D. Benham  
   Donald F. Harris, Jr.  
   Elwood Exley, Jr.  
   Bonnie E. Burr

Committee  
Member Absent:                None

Staff Present:                      Desi Nesmith  
   Lisa Lamenzo  
   Leslie Navarrete  
   Irene Parisi  
   Michael Kent  
   Matthew Falconer  
   Iris White

Guests Present:                      Nancy Sarra, Superintendent of Schools, New Britain  
   Damon Pearce, Principal, New Britain High School, New Britain  
   Dr. Verna Ruffin, Superintendent of Schools, Waterbury  
   Jackie Davis, Climate and Attendance Coordinator, Waterbury

#### II. Approval of Minutes

Elwood Exley, Jr. moved, Erin D. Benham, seconded, that the committee approve the minutes of the December 15, 2020 Accountability and Support Committee meeting.

Vote: In Favor: López, Benham, Harris, Exley, and Burr  
Abstained:                      0  
Opposed:                        0  
Absent:                            0

### **III. New Britain High School, New Britain**

Lisa Lamenzo, Division Director for the CSDE Turnaround Office, provided an overview of the work to date with New Britain High School. New Britain High School has been focusing on building teacher capacity, improving climate and culture, and supporting intentional work around curriculum development. Mrs. Lamenzo welcomed Superintendent of New Britain Public Schools Nancy Sarra and New Britain High School Principal Damon Pearce to provide a progress update.

Superintendent Sarra described the district's efforts to support New Britain High School, in particular strengthening student and family engagement. Superintendent Sarra shared the substantial work the district carried out to ensure high quality, reliable connectivity and IT support are accessible to the school community, including revamping connectivity and internet capacity at community partnership centers. Additionally, the district hired additional staff to support New Britain High School's efforts in providing basic necessities and services to students and families. The district continues to work on providing instructional alternatives to students, including in-person instruction for targeted student populations. Superintendent Sarra called on Principal Damon Pearce to further brief the committee on New Britain High School's progress.

Principal Damon Pearce described the steps New Britain High School has taken to build teacher capacity, support curriculum development, improve climate and culture, and strengthen student and family engagement. Strategies shared included creating and implementing a data team process, finalizing the establishment of the high school's student assistance center to address chronic absenteeism in targeted student populations like students in conflict, expanding school-family-community partnerships; and offering data-driven instructional alternatives to students. New Britain High school plans to continue efforts to strengthen student and family engagement, reduce chronic absenteeism, and support intentional work around curriculum development and teaching and learning.

Chair López opened the floor for questions and comments. The committee thanked Superintendent of New Britain Public Schools Nancy Sarra and New Britain High School Principal Damon Pearce for the update.

### **IV. Waterbury OCA Update Report, Waterbury**

Irene Parisi, Chief Academic Officer, provided an overview of the work to date of Waterbury district's response to the findings of the Office of Child Advocate (OCA) Report, published September 1, 2020. Mrs. Parisi noted the district's work around suspension, arrest, delayed response time, and system of support. She welcomed Superintendent of Waterbury Public Schools, Dr. Verna Ruffin, and Climate and Attendance Coordinator, Jackie Davis, to provide a progress update.

Superintendent Ruffin provided committee members with a summary of Waterbury Public Schools' collective work to identify and address the root cause of the findings reported by the OCA. Dr. Ruffin explained that this work was not just a central office effort and that the work permeates throughout the district. Mrs. Davis then provided members with further details including the district's increased efforts to build a multi-tiered system of support and the capacity of all staff to create trauma-sensitive and trauma-responsive schools. Mrs. Davis highlighted the district's work with lead community partnerships leveraged to provide robust and targeted school-based services to students and families and to develop a comprehensive professional development plan around the practice of trauma-sensitive and trauma-responsive for all staff to build staff capacity. She also shared the district now has a revised Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Wellmore, one of the district's emergency mobile crisis providers.

Expectations of Wellmore were collaboratively revised to improve response time. Waterbury Public Schools also revised the School Resource Officers' (SROs) Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to align with School Resource Officers' work with the district's goal to build and support trauma-sensitive and trauma-responsive schools.

Superintendent Ruffin added that the district established a school community committee, inclusive of student, family, law enforcement, and community partner voices, called Waterbury Voices to ensure the building of trauma-sensitive and trauma-responsive schools and systems of support are tailored to the needs of the district's student population. Superintendent Ruffin attributed the revamping of Guidance Department across the district, including the creation of counselor positions in elementary schools, to the Waterbury Voices Committee. Additionally, with the assistance of DCF, the district is planning to place DCF Preventionists in schools as a resource for teachers, students, and families. The district continues to expand its community partnership relationships and to evaluate programs and school departments in an effort to ensure the building and support of trauma-sensitive and trauma-responsive schools in the district. Chair López opened the floor for questions and comments.

The committee thanked Superintendent of Waterbury Public Schools Superintendent of Waterbury Public Schools, Dr. Verna Ruffin, and Climate and Attendance Coordinator, Jackie Davis, for providing a progress update.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:00 p.m.

Prepared by: Leslie Navarrete