

**CONNECTICUT STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION  
Hartford**

**Minutes  
State Board of Education Meeting  
January 13, 2021  
(Approved February 3, 2021)**

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, January 13, 2021. A GoToWebinar registration link was provided to allow for public attendance to the virtual meeting. This virtual meeting was livestreamed (<https://youtu.be/HWAIDhNBK0>) to allow for public access.

**I. Call to Order**

Chairperson Allan Taylor called the meeting to order at 9:49 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  
Karen DuBois-Walton  
Elwood Exley, Jr.  
Donald F. Harris, Jr.  
Dr. Jane Gates\*  
Martha Paluch Prou  
Awilda Reasco  
Malia K. Sieve  
Robert J. Trefry, Ex Officio

Absent: \*Dr. Jane Gates absent at the time of the attendance roll call.

**II. Public Participation**

Chairperson Taylor stated that there was a total of four public participation participants including one written statement. Access to public participation was provided via (i) e-mail communication submitted to [SDE.StateBoard@ct.gov](mailto: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. Ingrid Canady, Executive Director, SERC. Ms. Canady thanked Commissioner Cardona his leadership and congratulated him as the future Secretary of Education. Ms. Canady expressed gratitude on behalf of SERC, the SERC staff, and the families served by SERC for the recognition honoring George Coleman for his years of distinguished service in education.
2. Sarah Egan, JD, Connecticut Office of the Child Advocate (OCA). Ms. Egan congratulated Commissioner Cardona for being selected to lead the U.S. Department of Education. Ms. Egan spoke on education advocacy on behalf of vulnerable populations. The OCA, in partnership with the Martha Stone, Center for Children's Advocacy were concerned about the impact of school closures on our most high needs students, in particular, students with significant disabilities who lack the ability to access education remotely. Ms. Egan requested an urgent rollout and an educational recovery framework for these students.
3. Martha Stone, JD, Director for the Center for Children's Advocacy. First, Ms. Stone congratulated Commissioner Cardona for his appointment as U.S. Secretary of Education. She then spoke on agenda item VI.A., Recognition in Honor of George A. Coleman, State Education Resource Center (SERC) Board, and congratulated Mr. Coleman. Ms. Stone spoke on students in the special education category with the highest most vulnerable children and districts' adherence to guidance of State Department of Education. She also spoke on inequality district to district.
4. Catherine O'Callaghan, Secretary of the Connecticut Chapter of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE-CT), and Chair of the Education and Educational Psychology Department, Western Connecticut State University, in Danbury thanked the Board of Education, Commissioner Cardona, and the Department of Education, in particular, those individuals with whom the AACTE-CT works with frequently. AACTE-CT is committed to helping transform their programs for the future in recognition of the many changes generated by this pandemic.

#### Public Participation Follow-Up

Deputy Commissioner Russell-Tucker requested to provide an update to the public participation. Deputy Commissioner Charlene Russell-Tucker thanked Attorneys Egan and Stone for the information that they presented. She confirmed that our interests were aligned as they had noted the systems that the SDE had set up. Also, she informed the Board that conversations had been had with Chair Taylor and Vice Chair Lopez, and a meeting is scheduled with senior staff to meet with both Attorneys Egan and Stone. Furthermore, Deputy Commissioner Russell-Tucker extended an invitation for the attorneys to attend the Accountability and Support Committee meetings to further dive into their recommendations and the information they shared, and also allow the SDE to share some of the things we are doing around engagement. She thanked the attorneys for their commitment to students and looked forward to the work going forward.

Commissioner Cardona requested to take a moment and acknowledge the public speakers today. He wanted to thank the speakers for their well wishes, and more importantly, for their continued partnership.

### **III. Executive Session**

Chairperson Taylor requested a motion to go into Executive Session for the discussion of Interim Commissioner.

On a motion by Vice Chair López, seconded by Board Member Benham, the Board voted unanimously to move into executive session at 10:27 a.m. to discuss a personnel matter. Present in executive session were Board Members Erin Benham, Bonnie Burr, Erik Clemons, Karen DuBois-Walton, Elwood Exley, Donald Harris, Estela López, Jane Gates (departed the meeting at 10:30 a.m.), Martha Prou, Awilda Reasco, Malia Sieve, Allan Taylor, and Robert Trefry. Also, present for executive session were Chief of Staff Paul Mounds, Office of the Governor, Legal Director Jessa Mirtle, and SDE Chief of Staff Laura Stefon.

On a motion by Board Member DuBois-Walton, seconded by Board Member Reasco, the Board voted unanimously to adjourn its executive session and reconvene in public session at 10:56 a.m.

The Board reconvened its regular meeting at 10:56 a.m.

Present:       Allan B. Taylor, Chairperson  
                  Estela López, Vice Chairperson  
                  Erin D. Benham  
                  Bonnie E. Burr  
                  Erik M. Clemons  
                  Karen DuBois-Walton  
                  Elwood Exley  
                  Donald F. Harris, Jr.  
                  Jane Gates\* (joined meeting at 11:00 a.m.)  
                  Martha Paluch Prou  
                  Awilda Reasco  
                  Malia K. Sieve  
                  Robert J. Trefry, Ex Officio

Absent:         Dr. Jane Gates (joined meeting at 11:00 a.m.)

Vice Chair López reconvened the regular meeting. Vice Chair López requested a motion for the minutes of December 2, 2020.

#### **IV. Consideration of Minutes**

##### **A. December 2, 2021, State Board of Education Meeting**

Board Member DuBois-Walton, Board Member Burr seconded, that the Board adopt the minutes of the December 2, 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 acknowledged the attendance of George Coleman and Board Member Erik Clemons at the meeting.

The Commissioner expressed that he was appreciative of all the support that had been provided to him personally especially over the last months as he served as Commissioner. He shared that he was proud to serve as the Commissioner of Education for Connecticut. The Commissioner stated that the successes we have had was due in large part to the Board. Furthermore, he stated that any consideration of him for nominee by the President-elect was because of the success of this Board and the team at the State Department of Education.

The Commissioner expressed how pleased he was with the work done by everyone at the agency especially during the pandemic. The Commissioner recognized the hard work of the Leadership Team; a group of people who went through a crisis together and put what was best for Connecticut's kids at the forefront of conversations. At the end of the day, we came together for the children of Connecticut; and I am so proud to have been a part of this team at the State Department of Education.

To the Board, your support has been instrumental for us to be doing what we are doing. Your support when we faced challenges or heavy criticism kept us feeling confident that we were doing what was right for kids. I want to reiterate that it was very important. You did it at the right times.

Vice Chair López returned the meeting to Chair Taylor.

Vice Chair López moved, Chair Taylor seconded, that the Board add to the agenda and approve the following Resolution in Honor of Dr. Miguel A. Cardona as read into the record of the meeting by Vice Chair López:

*WHEREAS*, Dr. Miguel A. Cardona was appointed by Governor Ned Lamont to serve as Commissioner of Education for the State of Connecticut in August 2019; and

*WHEREAS*, He led the Connecticut State Department of Education with honor and distinction; and

*WHEREAS*, He has an accomplished career in education spanning over two decades; and

*WHEREAS*, He has served as Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning; Adjunct Professor; Performance Evaluation Specialist; Principal; Arts Curriculum Supervisor; Teacher; and has served on various state- and local-level committees, taskforces and boards;

*NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED*, that the Connecticut State Board of Education honors Dr. Miguel A. Cardona for his selfless dedication to Connecticut's children, the Connecticut State Department of Education, and the Connecticut State Board of Education, and expresses appreciation for his service to the State of Connecticut, and wishes him well in his appointment as Secretary of Education for the United States of America.

Approved unanimously this thirteenth day of January, Two Thousand Twenty-One.

Commissioner Cardona thanked the Board. He expressed that the Board's support and acknowledgment meant the world to him.

Chair Taylor stated that the vote was unanimous and enthusiastically approved.

## **VI. Items Requiring Action**

### **A. Recognition in Honor of George A. Coleman, State Education Resource Center (SERC) Board**

Board Member DuBois-Walton moved, Board Member Reasco seconded, the motion for agenda item VI.A., Recognition in Honor of George A. Coleman, State Education Resource Center (SERC) Board. Vice Chair López read the resolution into the record of the meeting:

*WHEREAS*, George A. Coleman was appointed to serve as Chairman of the State Education Resource Center Board by Governor Dannel P. Malloy on December 21, 2018; and



are the challenges the nation will see and you will bring out your talent. All of Connecticut is behind you. We are absolutely certain that you will be the next Secretary of Education. Thank you for the distinction that you have brought to our state by the virtue the appointment.

Mr. Coleman expressed that it was absolutely a privilege that the Board asked him to represent the SBE on the SERC Board. He stated, "I don't know that I ever served any two institutions with greater fidelity with a greater sense of commitment and genuine love as I have the State Department of Education and SERC."

He expressed that his greatest privilege was to be given the opportunity to nurture SERC during its transition in way that affirms its past contributions to public education, but more than that for being the responsible agent that it must be as we address the challenges of the future. Having not discovered Ingrid, but elevated her in the process. To the extent that her unique challenges can be brought forward and made available to the teachers and school districts across our state has been a singular wish. We are indeed privileged to have people who are so thoroughly committed to seeing that every child in our state has the opportunity to realize all the dreams their families have for them.

Mr. Coleman expressed that he was appreciative for all the support that has been given him as the Chairman of the SERC Board by the SERC staff. They have been wonderful and their commitment to being a partner to the State Board in your agenda to help facilitate the agenda for the State Department of Education is their singular mission.

He shared that everyone has been so supportive and that there are still challenges out there. Thank you all and good luck as you continue to support the great work on behalf of students and families in Connecticut.

## **VII. Report of the Chair**

The Chair did not present a report.

## **VIII. Financial Matters**

There was not a Financial Matters report.

## **IX. Consent Agenda**

### **A. Report on Agricultural Science and Technology Education Graduates Five Years After Graduation**

Vice Chair López requested that Consent Agenda item IX.A., Report on Agricultural Science and Technology Education Graduates Five Years After Graduation, be removed from Consent for discussion. Vice Chair López stated that her request was on behalf of Board Member Bonnie Burr and former Board Member William Davenport.

Board Member Burr stated that she was carrying the mantle of former Board Members, Terry Jones and Bill Davenport. She wanted to highlight and recognize the amazing accomplishments that students who come through agriscience achieve as they go forward in life. These students graduating out of agriscience, are going into all areas around how food becomes available. She reiterated to Board Member Benham that she is looking for equity in terms of how we get students in and out of our programs and how it is funded. We have some amazing programs from one end of the state to the other. I can only hope that we can get more students who want to come in. Want to hammer home the fact that this is not just for a bunch of farm kids. This is for students all over, urban, rural, and suburban.

Vice Chair López moved, Board Member Reasco seconded, that the Board approve the following Consent agenda item: IX.A., Report on Agricultural Science and Technology Education Graduates Five Years After Graduation.

**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.

**X. Items for Discussion**

**Agency Update**

Commissioner Cardona introduced that the Agency Update would be provided by Deputy Commissioner Charlene Russell-Tucker with an overview from the Department of Public Health and Deputy Commissioner Desi Nesmith with FAFSA Challenge and district updates.

Deputy Commissioner Charlene Russell-Tucker

Deputy Commissioner Charlene Russell-Tucker opened with leading with health and safety. She informed the Board members that since August, the Department has been partnering with the Department of Public Health and have set up Health and Safety Tuesday calls every Tuesday morning from 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. for school superintendents, school medical advisors, local health officials and policymakers. She highlighted that Board Member Erin Benham has been on almost all of them. She noted that updates were provided from both the SDE and DPH.

Deputy Commissioner Russell-Tucker introduced Dr. Lynn Sosa, Deputy State Epidemiologist, who had been invited to address the Board. She is the expert that can share information

directly with the Board and can answer any questions as we go forward as we are leading with health and safety.

#### Dr. Lynn Sosa, Deputy State Epidemiologist

Dr. Sosa first congratulated Commissioner Cardona and extended her pleasure and excitement for him.

- Dr. Sosa provided an update on the B-17 Strain, the official name of the UK Strain. She confirmed that last week the DPH announced that two people were found with the B-17 Strain. We expect that we will continue to find more of these strains, and potentially, other strains of interest as we become aware of them in the state.
- It does not appear to cause more severe infection. But, it is important to understand that because this strain is more transmissible, it is going to result in more cases. Dr. Sosa highlighted that the good news was that the vaccines do appear to work against the strain.
- Dr. Sosa emphasized that it is also important to recognize that the mitigation measures that have been put in place in schools, appears to really work. This is the time to really be reinforcing those mitigation measures and not letting guards down because those mitigation measures do work. And we need to make sure that people are continuing - continually re-engaging on those measures.
- Dr. Sosa concluded that this was the time to really be re-enforcing the distancing, the mask wearing, the cleaning and disinfection so that we can continue to engage against this strain and all the other SARS-CoV-2 strains that are out there.

#### Deputy Commissioner Charlene Russell-Tucker

Deputy Commissioner Russell-Tucker thanked Dr. Sosa for her presentation to the Board and made a public statement that the SDE appreciates our colleagues at the DPH. Deputy Commissioner Russell-Tucker stated that the vaccine was not Dr. Sosa's area. She noted that the vaccine expert from DPH has been on the Tuesday morning calls.

Deputy Russell-Tucker highlighted that the State has contracted with testing partners to promote and share information, including the ability for teachers to have priority COVID testing. She further highlighted that we are also promoting the Rapid BinaxNOW testing where districts can partner with a health provider to make sure asymptomatic students and staff can be tested.

#### Reflection on Agency Collaboration- Commissioner Cardona

Commissioner Cardona reflected that from the onset the SDE set out to blur the lines among agencies. He illustrated that the SDE had worked well with Department of Children and Families, Department of Economic Development, and the Department of Public Health. He noted that this was a shining example of what is possible when we come together and we support one another in an effort to

provide clear and consistent communication. The degree of trust is the ability to get students safely in the classrooms and is dependent on how well we can make sure we're treating the education emergency in the right context during a public health pandemic.

The Commissioner publicly thanked Dr. Sosa and her team for partnering with SDE, for Commissioner Deidre Gifford's leadership and all other colleagues to make sure that the information that we were giving out puts health and safety first. The Commissioner commended Deputy Commissioner Russell-Tucker for taking agency partnerships to the next level.

#### Deputy Commissioner Charlene Russell-Tucker

- Greenwich Public Schools. Deputy Commissioner Russell-Tucker stated that at the December 2, 2020, meeting, the Board heard from parents from Greenwich who had concerns about special education. She informed the Board that Special Education Division Director Bryan Klimkiewicz and his staff had followed up with the parents, met with them, and had also reached out to the district.
- ESSER II Funding. Chief Financial Officer Kathy Demsey presented a synopsis on the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief – Round Two (ESSER II Fund). Ms. Demsey reported that Connecticut will receive \$492 million dollars. The Department will be able to reserve 10% of those funds for statewide activities. The Department was in the midst of doing the calculations necessary to get the district allocations out to the districts.

[Board Member Sieve left the meeting at approximately 11:40 a.m.]

#### Deputy Commissioner Desi Nesmith

Deputy Commissioner Nesmith thanked Vice Chair López for championing the FAFSA Completion Challenge that has come to fruition. The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) launched a [new data dashboard](#) providing all district and school-level completion rates for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA®) which is an important step in the path to postsecondary education and associated with higher rates of college enrollment.

Deputy Commissioner Nesmith provided a shout-out to Director of Innovation and Partnerships Chris Soto and Chief Performance Officer Ajit Gopalakrishnan and their staff for the respective work that went into building the infrastructure to get it off the ground.

- New Haven Public Schools. The Department continues to have weekly conversations with the superintendent. The plan is to bring students in on January 19, 2021, at the elementary level in a hybrid model. They will look to increase that and expand to middle school in the following weeks.
- Danbury Public Schools – Danbury is looking at a combination of the hybrid model to be able to bring some kids back in on January 19, 2021.

- Other Districts – The Department is in the process of scheduling meetings with various districts in which students have not had the opportunity to go into school. The purpose is to have conversations on what additional supports are needed by the districts.
- School Model Data. Deputy Commissioner Nesmith provided a shout-out to the Performance Office for building the infrastructure to create a weekly data collection so that we know which districts across the state are in which model.

Commissioner Cardona wrapped up the Agency Update by stating that we have a tremendous team. He pointed out that both Deputy Charlene and Deputy Desi are quick to deflect credit and give to others and have cultivated a team of selfless leaders that work well together and with each other. The Commissioner concluded that there was a lot of work to be done, and he was confident of the direction being taken as an agency under this Board's leadership.

## **XI. Committee Reports**

### **A. Academic Standards and Assessment**

No report was presented.

### **B. Accountability and Support**

Dr. López reported that the committee would meet on January 19, 2021.

### **C. Finance, Audit, and Budget**

No report was presented.

### **D. Legislation and Policy Development**

Ms. Benham report that the committee met this morning. The committee was presented an update on Goal #1 of the Five-Year Plan. Ms. Benham expressed kudos to the SDE staff for the update and for all the work that was going on with our families and children. She reported that the committee passed a racial justice and equity statement that will be coming to the full Board for February.

### **E. Connecticut Technical Education and Career System Board**

CTECS Chairman Trefry introduced the names and association of each new member who were appointed to the CTECS Board.

Superintendent Wihbey reported that on January 12<sup>th</sup>, they had a ribbon cutting ceremony in collaboration with the Meriden Public Schools. H.C. Wilcox Technical High School opened an after school career and technical education program for 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade Meriden Public School students. It will graduate students from Maloney and Platt High Schools with 2½ CTE credits. Students will be taking manufacturing, culinary, and carpentry classes, which not only

counts towards their high school diploma, but it also gives them credentials in career tech education fields.

Superintendent Wihbey also reported on the establishment of a committee called, "Looking to the Future." The purpose of the committee is to brainstorm about what has been learned from the hybrid learning model and distance learning model. They hope to learn from mistakes and replicate the successes moving forward.

Commissioner Cardona commended Superintendent Wihbey and applauded him for his ability to work with local districts and promote these innovative programs is exceptional.

**F. NASBE**

Mr. Exley reported that NASBE had requested for him to write an article about all the initiatives that are underway in Connecticut to increase diversity of our educators.

**G. SERC**

No report was presented.

Farewell Salute to Commissioner Miguel A. Cardona

Vice Chair Lopez raised the subject that this could possibly be Commissioner Cardona's last meeting. Although a resolution was presented honoring him, she apologized to the Commissioner that because of the pandemic, we cannot get together appropriately to toast him and wish him the best. As a farewell salute to Commissioner Cardona, Vice Chair Lopez sang a few lines from an old Spanish song.

Commissioner Cardona responded in Spanish with some words from the song. The Commissioner expressed that "you guys have really enriched my life. Thank you."

Board Member DuBois-Walton moved, and Board Member Benham seconded, the motion to adjourn.

Chairperson Taylor adjourned the meeting at 12:12 p.m.

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