

**CONNECTICUT STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION  
Hartford**

**Minutes  
State Board of Education Meeting  
February 3, 2021  
(Approved March 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, February 3, 2021. A GoToWebinar registration link was provided to allow for public attendance to the virtual meeting. This virtual meeting was livestreamed (<https://youtu.be/tDFdQnQYGg8>) to allow for public access.

**I. Call to Order**

Vice Chairperson Estela López 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  
Karen DuBois-Walton  
Elwood Exley, Jr.  
Donald F. Harris, Jr.  
Martha Paluch Prou  
Awilda Reasco  
Malia K. Sieve  
Robert J. Trefry, Ex Officio

Absent: Dr. Jane Gates

**II. Public Participation**

Vice Chair López stated that two submissions were received for public participation. 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. Carol Ciotto, Legislative and Policy Committee, Connecticut Chapter of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE-CT), spoke about their work with teacher

candidates during the COVID-19 Pandemic and collaborative work with the Department of Education.

2. Roger Shulman of Fairfield, CT, submitted a written statement on the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **III. Executive Session**

The Board did not meet in Executive Session.

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

#### **A. January 13, 2021, State Board of Education Meeting**

Chairman Taylor moved, Board Member Reasco seconded, that the Board adopt the minutes of the January 13, 2021, 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**

No report was presented.

### **VI. Items Requiring Action**

#### **A. Principles, Procedures, and Standards for the Approval of Private Special Education Programs**

Division Director Bryan Klimkiewicz, Bureau of Special Education, presented revised Principles, Procedures, and Standards for the Approval of Private Special Education Programs to the Board for approval. Principles, Procedures, and Standards for the Approval of Private Special Education Programs serve as the basis on which special education programs in private facilities in the State of Connecticut are reviewed and approved. Mr. Klimkiewicz noted that the revisions focused on new legislative requirements, best practice strategies, and updated links and resources.



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

The Chair did not present a report.

## **VIII. Financial Matters**

No report was presented.

## **X. Items for Discussion**

### **Agency Update**

Deputy Commissioner Charlene Russell-Tucker provided an overview of the Agency Update.

### **ESSER II Funding**

Chief Financial Officer Kathy Demsey presented a synopsis of the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief – Round Two (ESSER II Fund). Ms. Demsey concluded that there is a separate pool of funding for nonpublic schools that is coming through the Governor's Emergency Education Relief Fund (GEER).

### **State-Level Priority - Academic Supports**

Deputy Commissioner Desi Nesmith reported that the first State-Level Priority is Academic Supports, Learning Loss, Learning Acceleration and Recovery to address the learning loss and the need for learning recovery for students. He indicated that the Department's expectation is that districts will measure where their kids are and target the most vulnerable population. He concluded that a key priority is to help bridge the gap between what our kids need to know and how they are doing academically during the pandemic.

### **State-Level Priority - Family and Community Connections**

Deputy Commissioner Charlene Russell-Tucker reported that the second State-Level Priority is Family and Community Connections by providing parents and guardians with the skills to support their children's academic endeavors. There is a need for districts to work with faith-based organizations, businesses and social service providers to provide added support for students and families as we are addressing learning loss and recovery in acceleration. She stated that supporting the whole student is supporting the whole family.

### **State-Level Priority - School Safety and Social-Emotional Well-being**

Deputy Commissioner Charlene Russell-Tucker reported that the third State-Level Priority is to continue to look at school safety and the social-emotional well-being of the whole student and provide support for school staff to address unprecedented physical and mental health concerns by following public health and safety measures, as well as, mental health support both in-person and remotely.

### **State-Level Priority - Remote Learning, Staff Development and the Digital Divide**

Deputy Commissioner Desi Nesmith reported that the fourth State-Level Priority is closing the digital divide in Connecticut with devices, hot spots and broadband vouchers. He stated that providing a device and connectivity is only the first step, and we need to maintain or upgrade access to technology and connectivity for the long term; increase robust professional development in providing remote learning; and provide technical assistance and/or training for families.

### **Reopening Plans and Support**

Deputy Commissioner Desi Nesmith reported that he and Deputy Commissioner Russell-Tucker, along with Division Director Lisa Lamenzo and Special Advisor Chris Clouet have begun meeting with districts, board chairs and charter schools on re-opening plans and supports. Discussions are targeted around in-person learning opportunities for students and learning recovery, with focus on students who are particularly vulnerable and have not had access to in-school learning. Deputy Commissioner Nesmith concluded by sharing with the Board that over 87% of districts are currently providing some sort of in-school learning.

### **2020-21 School and District Accountability**

Chief Performance Officer Ajit Gopalakrishnan presented on the 2020-21 School and District Accountability Waiver. Connecticut is not planning to implement school/district accountability in 2020-21. Mr. Gopalakrishnan reported that the primary purpose of student assessment this year is to know the impact of the pandemic on student learning outcomes.

### **Attendance and Engagement**

Deputy Commissioner Charlene Russell-Tucker opened by stating that having children in attendance and engaged in learning is critically important to their success. She highlighted data that we have to date on chronic absenteeism. She indicated that there are some troubling realities for some of our student groups and that we are using the data to inform the supports that we are providing and the areas that we are focusing on.

Deputy Commissioner Russell-Tucker shared that Connecticut was recognized in an Attendance Works press release as the first state in the country to collect, analyze, and publicly report 2020-21 chronic absence data.

Chief Performance Officer Ajit Gopalakrishnan highlighted an interactive map on EdSight that shows districts experiencing chronic absenteeism. Mr. Gopalakrishnan reported that attendance on remote days is lower than attendance on in-person days for all student groups, but the impact is greater for students from our most vulnerable student populations.

### **FAFSA Challenge & CCR**

Director of Innovations and Partnerships Chris Soto provided an overview on the FAFSA Challenge and the FAFSA work being done at the CSDE. He indicated that the FAFSA is the best predictor for college enrollment, and underscored that FAFSA is important to complete because it is not just for two and four year colleges. There are many post-secondary opportunity training programs and certificate programs that allow for Pell Grants for federal student loans.

## **XI. Items for Discussion**

### **A. Report on Student Discipline in Connecticut Public Schools**

Deputy Commissioner Charlene Russell-Tucker introduced the Report on Student Discipline and noted it would be presented by Chief Performance Officer Ajit Gopalakrishnan and Division Director John Frassinelli. The reports are data analysis and the status of school discipline in our state, identification of districts with high suspension and expulsion rates and actions being taken by the Agency to reduce disproportionate discipline across the board. Mr. Gopalakrishnan provided an overview of the Tier methodology.

Mr. Frassinelli reported that there is a significant amount of work around reducing suspensions and expulsions in schools and provided an overview of Connecticut's Tiered System of Supports. He stated that the report of school discipline starts with the analysis of the data at the district level and then targeting supports to assist districts in their efforts to develop policies and procedures, corrective action plans and professional learning that are conducive to reducing exclusionary discipline.

## **XI. Committee Reports**

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

Vice Chair López reported that the committee would be meet on February 9, 2021.

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

Vice Chair López reported that the committee met on January 19, 2021. The next meeting will be on February 18, 2021.

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

No report was presented.

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

Board Member Benham reported that the committee met prior to the Board meeting.

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

CTECS Chairman Trefry noted that CTECS Superintendent Jeffrey Wihbey would provide an update to the Board.

Superintendent Wihbey reported that the district is creating a grading committee to assist students who are struggling with some of the online learning; as well as the establishment of a committee called, "Looking to the Future" to brainstorm about what has been learned from the hybrid and distance learning models, learn from mistakes and replicate the successes moving forward.

#### **E. NASBE**

Board Member Exley reported that he attended his first meeting of the NASBE Conference Planning Committee and asked Board members for any topics they would like considered at the Annual Conference.

#### **F. SERC**

Board Member Benham reported that the board would be meeting next month.

Chairperson Taylor adjourned the meeting at 12:23 p.m.

Prepared by: \_\_\_\_\_

Charlene M. Russell-Tucker, Secretary  
State Board of Education