

Connecticut State Board of Education
Hartford

Special Legislation and Policy Development Committee
Virtual Meeting

Wednesday, November 16, 2022, 2:30 p.m.

Committee Members

Malia K. Sieve, Chair
Karen DuBois-Walton, Donald F. Harris, Bonnie E. Burr,
Martha Paluch Prou, Elwood Exley, Jr., and Valli Pendyala

Minutes

Pursuant to notice filed with the Secretary of the State, the Board of Education Legislation and Policy Development Committee [“LPDC”] held a virtual special meeting on November 16, 2022. This virtual meeting was live streamed <https://youtu.be/KUoSSbLLrel> to allow for public access.

I. Call to Order

Committee Chair Malia K. Sieve called the meeting to order. Also attending the meeting were Committee Members Karen DuBois-Walton, Donald F. Harris, Bonnie E. Burr, Martha Paluch Prou, and Valli Pendyala. In addition, Erin Benham, Vice-Chair, Connecticut State Board of Education [“CSBE”], was in attendance as were the following individuals from the Connecticut State Department of Education [“CSDE”]: Kathy Demsey, Chief Financial Officer; Laura Stefon, Chief of Staff and Legislative Liaison; Michael McKeon, Director of Legal and Governmental Affairs; Robin Colombo Cecere, Director of the Regional School Choice Office; Laura Anastasio, Attorney, Legal and Governmental Affairs; and Sharon Fuller, Education Consultant.

II. Review and Discussion – CSDE’s Legislative Proposals

Ms. Sieve noted that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss the CSDE’s legislative proposals. As she was unable to remain for the entire meeting, Dr. DuBois-Walton shared her thoughts regarding the proposals, first recognizing the substantial work that CSDE staff had done in crafting them. Given the imminence of the legislative session, Dr. DuBois-Walton noted that her suggestions would most likely apply to future sessions, but she discussed her interest in connecting the LPDC’s and CSBE’s areas of concern with the CSDE’s legislative proposals. Dr. DuBois-Walton identified three specific areas: 1) Whether there was a need for legislative changes to address teacher shortages; 2) Whether there was a need for legislative changes to the racial imbalance law; and 3) Whether there were measures that needed to be considered or implemented now in order to prepare for the imminent end of federal, ESSER-related funding?

Ms. Stefon noted the importance of all three issues and thanked Dr. DuBois-Walton for raising them. With respect to teacher-shortage concerns, Ms. Stefon explained that during a prior legislative session, the General Assembly had charged the CSDE with reviewing regulations and statutes pertaining to teacher certification and determining whether there are revisions that could be made that would help enhance teacher recruitment and certification. The report on this review was due on January 1, 2023, and there would be a meeting with the Commissioner and the Talent Office in the next couple of weeks to review the draft report.

Ms. Stefon added that with respect to the “funding cliff,” the CSDE is working in partnership with UConn and other higher education institutions on the Connecticut COVID Research Collaborative, examining education-related practices that were implemented during the pandemic to determine which were the most effective for use going forward. Ms. Demsey added that she had formed an advisory group of district finance officials to discuss what were the most effective uses of the federal funding on the district level.

Dr. DuBois-Walton thanked Ms. Stefon and Ms. Demsey. She added that given its complex nature, she did not expect any proposal regarding racial imbalance, but it is something she wanted the CSDE and the CSBE to keep in mind. Ms. Stefon noted that she had discussed this issue with Mr. McKeon and that it would make sense having LPDC meetings dedicated solely to the racial imbalance issue, including a determination of individuals who could be helpful in crafting a potential proposal.

Ms. Sieve turned the floor over to Ms. Stefon to discuss the CSDE’s legislative proposals. Ms. Stefon began by discussing proposed changes to the Alliance District statutes on which she had worked with Ms. Demsey. This proposal was aimed at addressing some of the changes that were made during the last session and that has caused certain issues for the CSDE and for districts. Ms. Stefon explained that five years ago, the legislature increased Alliance Districts from thirty to 33, and this past session increased them to 36. This threatens to dilute the resources the CSDE can provide; thus, the proposal would cap Alliance Districts at 33 going forward. This proposal would also permit any district that had either previously or currently been designated an Alliance District to maintain that designation – even if the district was no longer considered one -- for the purpose of calculating Alliance District grants. Ms. Demsey added that the proposal would also change the look-back period for the three newest Alliance Districts from 2022 to 2012. This would bring these three Alliance Districts into conformity with the previously designated districts, thereby ensuring that all 36 of the Alliance Districts used the same 2012 base year when calculating funding.

Mx. Pendyala asked whether the funding calculations would remain in place in perpetuity; it was Ms. Stefon’s understanding that they would. Ms. Sieve asked whether under this proposal the State could maintain funding at the same level going forward. Ms. Demsey believed that it would only implicate approximately 1% of the ECS funding. Dr. DuBois-Walton asked whether the CSDE anticipated any entities or individuals objecting to this proposal. Ms. Demsey suggested that there were two districts could object as the establishment of the 2012 base year look-back would require these districts to contribute more of their own funding.

Ms. Stefon began discussing the educator evaluation proposal, which she understood to have the support of both the teacher unions and CAPSS, which collectively feel that the CSDE’s proposal was a move in the right direction. Ms. Stefon and Ms. Fuller noted that there are outdated statutes from 2012 that govern teacher evaluations. Since then, more innovative evaluation strategies have been emerging, but they do not align with the current legislation. This proposal would give the CSBE the authority to accept changes to the evaluation format by enabling districts to explain their rationale for teacher evaluation protocols and how they align with best practices.

Ms. Stefon then noted the technical proposal pertaining to the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunities for Military Children. Specifically, the current iteration of the statute contains two erroneous citations to federal law in the Connecticut statute, which adversely affects individuals who

should be covered under its protections. This proposal would correct those two citations so that all students who should be covered under the Compact would be.

Ms. Stefon noted that the next five proposals were from the Regional School Choice Office [“RSCO”]. The first proposal would extend three dates for magnet enrollment standards in statutes. It would continue the period that the inter-district reduced isolation and residency enrollment requirements would apply from June 30, 2023, to each fiscal year thereafter, which was consistent with the Sheff agreement. It also would extend the period in which inter-district magnet schools must meet the Commissioner’s reduced-isolation and residency standards beyond the existing end date of July 1, 2023, continuing through every fiscal year thereafter. It would also extend the period that the Commissioner’s reduced-isolation and residency standards must be met to qualify for the magnet operator grant beyond the current end date of June 30, 2023, to every fiscal year thereafter. This would avoid having to go back to the legislature every year asking for additional extensions.

The next RSCO proposal would repeal statutory language that provided a unique funding structure for one magnet school that was based upon enrollment numbers from Meriden. The school relocated to Waterbury, so the existing legislation is no longer applicable. Ms. Sieve asked whether this would adversely affect the new magnet school’s funding. Ms. Cecere noted that the relocated magnet school understands the State’s magnet-funding formula applies to them as well as other magnets but is seeking a one-time amendment for themselves.

The third RSCO proposal would update the Commissioner’s authorization to develop reduced isolation standards as necessary to comply with the Sheff stipulated agreement and to comport with legal considerations involving non-Sheff schools. Mx. Pendyala requested the definition of reduced isolation, which Ms. Cecere explained. Ms. Sieve noted that this proposal had raised questions with her about the possible linkage between the racial balance issues the LPDC confronts and these Sheff-related reduced isolation issues.

Ms. Stefon next discussed a RSCO proposal that would extend the prohibition currently in place that prevents districts that operate inter-district magnet schools from charging student tuition for attending such schools, the only exception being the Hartford Public Schools, which may charge tuition for students who attend Great Path Academy, which is located at Manchester Community College but administered by Hartford. Mr. Harris asked for further clarification of this proposal, and Ms. Cecere explained the statutory funding mechanism for inter-district magnets that underlie this prohibition. Ms. Sieve asked whether Mr. Harris would like further discussion prior to referring it to the full CSBE to consider, but Mr. Harris stated that he was not requesting that it be held back.

Ms. Stefon finished her presentation by citing the final RSCO legislative proposal, which addressed the Commissioner’s authority to make grant payments to voluntary inter-district school choice programs as a means of furthering the provisions of the Sheff agreement.

Ms. Sieve thanked Ms. Stefon and the other CSDE staff members who worked on these legislative proposals and asked for a motion to move the proposals to the full Board. Mr. Harris moved and Ms. Prou seconded. The motion passed unanimously, 4-0 (Dr. DuBois-Walton having had to leave the meeting early).

The meeting adjourned at 3:17 p.m.

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