

**CONNECTICUT STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
Hartford**

The Legislation and Policy Development Committee

Wednesday, November 1, 2023, 8:00 a.m.

Committee Members

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

Minutes

Pursuant to notice filed with the Secretary of the State, the State Board of Education Legislation and Policy Development Committee met in person on October 4, 2023.

I. Call to Order

Committee Chair Malia K. Sieve called the meeting to order at 8:11. Also present were Committee Members Karen DuBois-Walton, Donald F. Harris, Elwood Exley, Jr., and Bonnie Burr, who were joined shortly thereafter by Yasmeen Galal and Connor Cowan, the student members of the State Board of Education. In addition, the following individuals from the CSDE were in attendance: Irene Parisi, Chief Academic Officer; John Frassinelli, Division Director of School Health, Nutrition, and Family Services; Michael P. McKeon, Director of Legal and Governmental Affairs; and Sonya Efanayi, Administrative Assistant, Communications Office, and they were later joined by Megan Alubicki Flick, ESL/Bilingual Consultant.

Presenters:

John Frassinelli, Division Director of School Health, Nutrition, and Family Services
Irene Parisi, Chief Academic Officer, CSDE
Megan Alubicki Flick, ESL/Bilingual Consultant, Academic Office, CSDE

II. Approval of Minutes

Ms. Burr moved to approve the October 4, 2023, meeting minutes. Dr. DuBois-Walton seconded. The motion was passed unanimously.

III. Review and Further Discussion: CSDE Firearm Safety Guide

Ms. Sieve noted that Connecticut Against Gun Violence [“CAGV”] had previously met with the Committee regarding the CSDE’s Firearm Safety Guide [“Guide”] and, based upon that meeting, opened the floor to discussion among Committee members regarding the Guide. Mr. Exley raised CAGV’s opinion that the Guide went beyond what was required by statute but added that he presumed the CSDE had a good reason for doing so.

In response, Mr. Frassinelli explained that the genesis of the guidance was Ethan’s Law, so the focus was on safe storage as the majority of children’s death by firearms was due to inappropriate storage of

weapons. Research had shown, however, that simply telling male students not to use guns had been shown to be ineffective, so CSDE staff wanted to encourage discussion of the pros and cons of firearms. The CSDE also felt that these discussion topics should be ones that students could further discuss with their parents at home. This comported with the stakeholder meetings the CSDE had convened, in which participants suggested that the Guide cover these related areas of discussion. Ms. Sieve concurred that the CSDE's approach made sense.

Dr. DuBois-Walton shared that she had been involved in the original approval process, and having heard of stakeholders' involvement, she inquired as to whether consulting with pediatricians would have been helpful, a point that CAGV had raised. Mr. Frassinelli explained that the legislation iterated certain stakeholder groups with whom the CSDE was required to consult, including the Connecticut State Police. Although those statutorily prescribed groups did not include the Connecticut Pediatricians Association, the CSDE had reviewed pediatric literature and worked with a Massachusetts-based gun safety group.

Mr. Cowan suggested that it would have perhaps been beneficial to have included some of the information from the parents' section of the Guide in the students' section.

Ms. Burr found the Guide to be balanced, and Dr. DuBois-Walton opined that the parents' section was well done, adding that the sections CAGV had questioned seemed to be confined to those that applied to students.

Mr. McKeon advised the Committee that there was no need for a motion to affirm the Guide; a motion would only be necessary were the Committee inclined to seek its revision. Ms. Sieve asked whether anyone wished to make such a motion. No one did.

IV. Review and Discussion: Religious Accommodation Guidance

This agenda item arose from the presentation that Sikh leaders had made to the full State Board of Education. Dr. DuBois-Walton noted that the Sikh community had reached out to her regarding the kirpan, a religious artifact, the wearing of which is part of the Sikh faith. Although some school boards have treated it as a disciplinary matter, after some discussion and intervention, at least a couple of districts have implemented policies regarding religious accommodations.

Mr. McKeon advised that in May 2023, the United States Department of Education had disseminated lengthy and detailed guidance to schools and districts about the legal parameters and obligations of religious accommodations, which guidance Mr. McKeon summarized. Committee members expressed their belief that some clarification should be sent to districts, reminding them that the kirpan is part of the Sikh community's religious observations. The Committee agreed to further discuss this matter at its next meeting.

V. Review and Further Discussion: Parent Bill of Rights for English Learners/Multilingual Learners

Turning to the Parent Bill of Rights for English Learners/Multilingual Learners, Ms. Sieve noted that Ms. Parisi had provided information pertaining to accessible language the prior evening, and Ms. Parisi then distributed to the Committee members the anticipated timeline for the completion and dissemination of the Bill of Parental Rights. In reviewing the proposed accessible language,

Dr. Alubicki Flick explained that the lexile levels for the explanatory paragraphs were at the fourth-to-sixth-grade levels. Mr. Exley believed the preamble language citing to the Bill's statutory authority appeared a bit too legalistic. Mr. McKeon explained that the document would go through various levels of review within the CSDE and that language could be addressed.

Committee members expressed appreciation for the more accessible language. Dr. DuBois-Walton asked whether the document could be revised were it to be determined in future years that there were differences in predominant languages. Mr. McKeon responded that it is a dynamic document and could be revised in accordance with any such changes.

A member of the public asked whether he could obtain a draft copy. Mr. McKeon noted that drafts are generally not susceptible to FOI requests, and that it is probably better wait until a formal, finished product is available.

Ms. Parisi reiterated that there would be changes to the text to underscore that this is a flexible document that could be revised in the future.

Ms. Sieve called for a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:04. Ms. Burr moved, and Mr. Exley seconded. The motion passed unanimously.