

**Connecticut State Board of Education
Hartford**

Accountability and Support Committee

Thursday, December 12, 2024
450 Columbus Blvd.
Plaza North, Meeting Room C & D
Hartford, Connecticut

**Meeting Minutes
(Approved on: April 23, 2025)**

I. Call to Order

Pursuant to the notice filed with the Secretary of the State, Committee Chairperson Erin D. Benham, called the meeting to order at 3:34 p.m.

Committee

Members Present:

Erin D. Benham
Donald F. Harris, Jr.
Kristen A. Record
Dr. Seth D. Zimmerman

Committee

Members Absent:

Allan B Taylor

CSDE Staff Present:

Deputy Commissioner Charles E. Hewes, Ed.D.
Dr. Melissa Jenkins (via Microsoft Teams)
Felicia Canty
Shakira Jacobs-Vazquez
Leslie Navarrete

Guests Present:

Dr. Steve Perry, Head of School, Capital Preparatory Schools, Bridgeport
Dr. Ayanna Carter, State Superintendent, Capital Preparatory Schools, Bridgeport
Ronald Hawkins, Lower School Principal, Capital Prep Harbor Lower School, Bridgeport
Wynton Borders, Upper School Principal, Capital Prep Harbor Upper School, Bridgeport
Natasha Banks, Chief Talent Officer, Capital Preparatory Schools, Bridgeport
Jill Culter-Hodgman, Chief of Staff, Capital Preparatory Schools, Bridgeport
Rich Beganski, Senior Executive Director, Data and Accountability, Capital Preparatory Schools, Bridgeport
Scott Wojnarowicz, Assistant Superintendent, Curriculum and Instruction, Capital Preparatory Schools, Bridgeport
Amy D'Angelo, Superintendent, Achievement First Charter Schools, Bridgeport
Samantha Lucky, Principal, Achievement First Charter Schools, Bridgeport
Kiersten Gibson Cooper, Regional Superintendent, Achievement First Charter Schools
John Sharkey, Chief Academic Officer, Achievement First Charter Schools, Bridgeport
Kiah Hufane, Associate Chief of Recruitment, Achievement First Charter Schools, Bridgeport
Mel Reid, Director, Team Recruit, Achievement First Charter Schools, Bridgeport
Stacy Gilinson, Manager of Teacher and Leader Certification, Achievement First Charter Schools, Bridgeport
Shaila Garnett, Elementary Principal, Achievement First Bridgeport Academy Elementary School, Bridgeport
Oriana Simmons, Middle School Principal, Achievement First Hartford Academy, Hartford
Lauren Raimondi, Elementary Principal, Achievement First Amistad Academy Elementary School, New Haven
Charmayne Joseph, Chief of Middle Schools, Achievement First Charter Schools, Bridgeport

II. Approval of Minutes

The Committee moved to table the minutes of the November 14, 2024, Accountability and Support Committee meeting.

III. Capital Preparatory Schools (Capital Prep) Charter School Renewal Corrective Action Updates:

Capital Prep Harbor Lower and Upper Schools, Bridgeport

Chairperson Benham recognized the meeting agenda item and opened the meeting to the CSDE Deputy Commissioner Charles Hewes, Ed.D., CSDE. He welcomed Capital Prep Head of School Dr. Steve Perry; State Superintendent Dr. Ayanna Carter; Chief Talent Officer Natasha Banks; Chief of Staff Jill Culter-Hodgman; Schools Senior Executive Director of Data and Accountability Rich Beganski; Assistant Superintendent, Curriculum and Instruction, Scott Wojnarowicz; Capital Prep Lower School Principal Ronald Hawkins; and Capital Prep Upper School Principal Wynton Borders to provide a progress update.

Capital Prep shared highlights of its' progress in its' corrective action focus points of student academic achievement in the English language arts (ELA), student performance in mathematics, and school climate. Some of the highlights Capital Prep shared: The charter school has embedded self-assessment for scholars to take stewardship of their studies; and the charter school has implemented a research-based comprehensive intervention framework to promote academic strategy. Some of the actionable steps the charter school is taking to build teacher capacity are: 1:1 coaching with administrators on intellectual preparation for personalized support; training on Tier I instruction; and providing targeted, sustained professional development on restorative practices.

The charter school's status for certification compliance is 100 percent across all certifications and has a visible guideline that ensures growth, prioritizes certified staff, and monitors the certification status of its educators. The charter school continues to foster partnerships with teacher programs like UCONN and Sacred Heart University and has been actively expanding its partnerships with the University of Bridgeport and Southern Connecticut State University. Moreover, Capital Prep is in collaboration with Sacred Heart University to increase diversity in the recruitment and retention of its educators and is prioritizing certified staff.

The charter school's suspension rate has slightly reduced. Capital Prep will continue to work on improving the charter school's chronic absenteeism. Some of the practices the charter school is using to support its work include establishing an advisory program and an absenteeism intervention team under the student advisory team, closely monitoring daily attendance, and using data points to identify scholars struggling with attendance to deploy intervention plans immediately.

The Chair opened the floor for comments and questions from the Committee. The Committee commended Capital Prep's efforts in reducing chronic absenteeism.

IV. Achievement First (AF) Charter Schools Renewal Corrective Action Updates:

- **Achievement First Bridgeport (AFBA), Bridgeport;**
- **Achievement First Hartford (AFHA), Hartford;**
- **Amistad Academy (AF Amistad), New Haven; and**
- **Elm City College Preparatory (ECCP).**

Deputy Commissioner Charles Hewes, Ed.D., CSDE., welcomed AF Superintendent Amy D'Angelo; AF Regional Superintendent Samantha Lucky; AF Regional Superintendent Kiersten Gibson Cooper; Chief Academic Officer John Sharkey; Chief of Middle Schools Charmayne Joseph; Associate Chief of Recruitment Kiah Hufane; Director of Team Recruit Mel Reid; Manager of Teacher and Leader Certification Stacy Gilinson; AFBA Elementary Principal Shaila Garnett; AFHA Middle School Principal Oriana Simmons; and AF Amistad Elementary Principal Lauren Raimondi to provide a progress update.

AF shared highlights of its' progress in its' corrective action focus points of performance index in ELA and mathematics and chronic absenteeism. Some of the highlights shared: AF charter schools have been closely monitoring attendance, focusing efforts on building a school and home relationship, recruiting and retaining diverse certified educators, and working with the CSDE to ensure certification applications are successfully processed; ECCP is holding attendance team meeting weekly; AFHA is partnering with community organizations and collaborating with other AF charter schools to problem solve and brainstorm; and AFBA has shifted its school schedule. Additionally, AF reported a slight decrease in its suspension rate.

The charter school's status for certification compliance is under 50 percent. AF noted that AFBA lost a significant amount of its educators when the charter school shifted its school schedule – as many of its educators could not accommodate to the new school schedule. Additionally, AF noted having recruitment and retention issues because it is difficult for them to compete with schools, especially in shortage teaching areas.

The Chair opened the floor for comments and questions from the Committee.

Following the discussion at the March SBE meeting, Chair Benham took the initiative to follow up with AF at the Committee meeting. She asked about the proactive measures being implemented to tackle the charter school's high suspension rate, particularly in regards to establishing an in-school suspension program. Given the small class sizes for each grade level and AF's suspension data, AF has decided not to implement an in-school suspension program. Instead, AF will continue to provide professional development for staff on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and restorative practices.

The Committee strongly recommended AF work closely with the CSDE to resolve the charter school's certification compliance. If AF continues to have difficulty with certification, the Committee will request the SBE to intervene and AF to report back to the SBE.

V. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 4:29 p.m.

Prepared by: Leslie Navarrete