

## Connecticut State Board of Education Hartford

### State Board of Education Meeting

December 4, 2024

#### *Draft*

Pursuant to notice filed with the Secretary of the State and posted on the agency's website, the members the of State Board of Education (hereinafter "Board") held a meeting on Wednesday, December 4, 2024, in Plaza North Meeting Room C and D of the State Office Building, 450 Columbus Boulevard, Hartford, Connecticut. Public access to the building allowed for public attendance at the meeting.

The meeting can be viewed here: <https://youtu.be/doqspkBXNSs>.

#### **I. Call to Order**

Vice Chairperson Erin Benham called the meeting to order at 9:39 a.m.

Present: Erin D. Benham, Vice Chairperson  
Sreenidi Bala, Student Member  
Bonnie E. Burr  
Donald F. Harris, Jr.  
Sophia Messina, Student Member  
Kristen A. Record  
Juan C. Salazar  
Allan B. Taylor

Absent: Dr. Aynsley Diamond (designee for Terrence Cheng, Ex Officio)  
Kelli-Marie Vallieres, Ex Officio  
Seth D. Zimmerman  
Christine Benz, Ex Officio

#### **II. Public Participation**

1. Sarah Tyszka, shared her concerns regarding the approved menu of research-based universal screening reading assessments. A copy of Ms. Tyszka's written testimony is enclosed in the official meeting file.
2. Elizabeth Sked, Education Issues Specialist, CEA, spoke on the Aspiring Educators Diversity Scholarship Program that was established to recruit more educators of color.
3. Tom Stringfellow, resident of Manchester, spoke on various topics.

Vice Chair Benham asked for a motion to move agenda item VI.B. Anne Marie Murphy Paraeducator of the Year Semifinalists Recognition. Board Member Record moved, and Board Member Burr seconded, that agenda item XI.B. be moved on the agenda.

## **XI. Items for Discussion**

### **A. Anne Marie Murphy Paraeducator of the Year Semifinalists Recognition**

Chief Talent Officer Dr. Shuana Tucker and Education Consultant Dr. Jessica Ocasio presented to the Board and were joined by the paraeducators at the table.

Vice Chair Benham read aloud the bios of each paraeducator into the minutes of the meeting.

- **Rabia Boufares-Alhawari:** Deer Run Elementary School (East Haven)

- Principal: Laura Cretell
- Superintendent: Erica Forti

Rabia is an Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) paraeducator who supports individuals with autism or other developmental disabilities in their learning and behavior goals. She provides one-on-one or small group instruction, using techniques like discrete trial training and naturalistic teaching methods. Rabia is responsible for collecting high quality data during work sessions and frequently collaborates with certified teachers. Rabia's greatest strength is her ability to build strong and meaningful relationships with students, families, and co-workers. She is fluent in five languages and willingly offers translation services to families during PPT meetings, ensuring effective communication and understanding. Furthermore, she has created and delivered parent workshops on ABA approaches encouraging families to help their children learn at home. Being a paraeducator allows Rabia to be a part of a devoted team that is working toward the same objective of improving children's outcomes and creating an inclusive learning environment.

- **Jennifer Palmieri:** Fawn Hollow Elementary School (Monroe)

- Principal: Leigh Metcalf Ances
- Superintendent: Joseph Kobza

Jennifer's main responsibilities include providing support to students with multiple disabilities in their daily routines throughout the school day. She assists with modified academics, social support, daily living skills such as, but not limited to, toileting, using tools and utensils, managing executive functioning and much more. She is proactive about coming to the office to solve logistical issues that arise at recess and lunch. Jennifer is instrumental in fostering a sense of community by organizing events for the staff. She was also a founding member of the School Garden, and has generously given her time to help maintain the crops. She also co-chairs the school's before and after school Arts and Imagination program. She prepares all communications, hires advisors to run the classes, collects payments, manages the budget, orders supplies, and prepares programming that is both relevant and engaging to students. She does all this work for the benefit of children so that they can have a well-rounded experience in and out of school. Lastly, Jennifer is involved in the Unified Sports Program and CT Special Olympics where she coaches and assists student athletes.

- **Aimee Sheren:** Cook Hill Elementary School (Wallingford)

- Principal: Amy Turner
- Superintendent: Danielle Bellizzi

- Aimee has been a paraeducator for 6 years in Wallingford Public Schools. As a paraeducator, she assists teachers with lesson preparation, classroom management,

and student supervision to facilitate a conducive learning environment. She provides individualized support and offers one-on-one or small group assistance to students who need additional help with academic tasks or social skills development. Her ability to clarify concepts, reinforce lessons, and offer individualized attention significantly contributes to student academic progress. She plays a crucial role in inclusive classrooms, ensuring that all students, including those with special needs, receive the support and accommodation they require to participate fully in the educational experience. Aimee has forged strong bonds with students, offering mentorship, encouragement, and a supportive presence in their educational journey. She received the Wallingford's Parent Choice Award in 2022, where district parents nominate educators who have impacted their child's life and education.

○ **Susan Lyons:** John F. Kennedy Elementary School (Windsor)

- Principal: Dana Gagne
- Superintendent: Dr. Terrell Hill

Susan is a dedicated special education paraeducator with 25 years' experience, 20 of those for Windsor Public Schools. This past school year, she was tasked with being an Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) paraeducator for students on the autism spectrum. She leads small groups and plans projects with case managers. She works one-to-one on Discrete Trial Instruction (DTI) Programs that involves breaking a skill into small steps. She strives to ensure strong collaboration with each students' special education case manager, their general education teachers and all their service providers to help her understand how to work with her students. As a special education paraprofessional, she believes it is important to highlight student's differences and bring awareness to all kinds of disabilities to better educate everyone, not just the students who require support. Susan is very passionate about Autism Awareness Month and every April she organizes several activities to raise funds and educate as many people as possible about autism.

○ **Helen Tricarico:** Frisbe Elementary School (Wolcott)

- Principal: Kim Murtaugh
- Superintendent: Shawn Simpson

Helen is a paraeducator who provides one-to-one support in the district's Compass Program which provides programming for students on the Autism Spectrum. She has completed 40 hours of Relias training to provide additional skills and strategies to better support students. She delivers Discrete Trial Instruction with exceptional skill, helping students acquire and generalize new skills in a systematic and supportive manner. She proactively collaborates with others to ensure she is well-equipped to effectively support her students. She diligently brings students into the regular education setting when appropriate, fostering inclusivity and promoting social integration. Helen's efforts help students feel more connected and valued within the broader school community.

### **2025 Anne Marie Murphy Paraeducator of the Year Award Honoree**

○ **Keysha Evans:** Tashua Elementary School (Trumbull)

- Principal: Jennifer J. Neumeyer
- Superintendent: Dr. Martin J. Semmel

Keysha Evans spent the last 5 years, living the dream in "Para-dise" as a paraprofessional at Tashua Elementary School. As a reading paraprofessional, she helped children discover and re-discover their love for reading and literacy, while supporting their academic goals with child-centered lessons. Keysha has helped support

continual incremental growth, both socially and academically in her students, which has boosted their confidence as well as independence. It is truly inspiring to see. She effortlessly handles student schedules while keeping notes to catch students up on content, so they are prepared for the next lesson. She knows exactly how to push students to the next level and when to take a step back to foster independence. If content is not modified enough, she is able to think on her feet and come up with a way to make that learning accessible. On the other hand, if material has been modified too much, she is not shy about asking for more so that her students can show off their knowledge. Keysha naturally knows what to say in order to problem-solve and build up confidence in others. As a result, the growth Keysha's students have made in math is out-of-this-world.

Vice Chair Benham moved the agenda back to agenda item III., Executive Session.

### **III. Executive Session**

#### **A. Discussion of Pending Connecticut Superior Court Litigation of Freedom of Information Commission Decision Related to School Choice Program under Sheff v. O'Neill**

Vice Chair Benham asked for a motion for agenda item, III.A. to go into Executive Session. Board Member Harris moved, and Board Member Burr, seconded, that the Board move into executive session. At approximately 10:09 a.m., the Board went into executive session. Present in executive session were Vice Chair Erin Benham, Board Members Sreenidi Bala, Bonnie Burr, Donald F. Harris, Jr., Sophia Messina, Kristen A. Record, Juan C. Salazar, Allan B. Taylor, and Seth D. Zimmerman. Also, present were Legal Director Mike McKeon, Regional School Choice Office Director Robin Cecere, Commissioner Charlene M. Russell-Tucker, and Staff Assistant Aldith Dewar.

At approximately 10:33 a.m., the Board reconvened the regular meeting. Vice Chair Benham asked for a motion to exit executive session. Board Member Harris moved, and Board Member Salazar seconded, that the Board exit executive session and reconvened the regular meeting.

Vice Chair Benham asked for a motion to move agenda item VI.A., Recognition of CT's 2023-2024 Red, White & Blue Schools. Board Member Record moved, and Board Member Salazar seconded, that agenda item XI.A. be moved on the agenda.

### **XII. Items for Discussion**

#### **A. Recognition of CT's 2023-2024 Red, White & Blue Schools**

Commissioner Russell-Tucker introduced the importance of civic education and civic engagement.

Secretary of the State Stephanie Thomas, and Education Consultant Steve Armstrong presented to the Board.

Mr. Armstrong provided an overview of the Red, White, and Blue Schools program which recognizes schools and school districts doing an exemplary job of civic education. Mr. Armstrong stated that each year the program recognizes three to four Red, White & Blue schools as "Schools of Distinction" and one school is recognized as an "Outstanding School." The Outstanding School honoree was Cornwall Consolidated School (CCS), West Cornwall.

Secretary of the State Sephanie Thomas shared that the program was a call to action for schools and a challenge for students to think about their roles as citizens and ways their voices can help shape and have an impact on school, community, state, and nation.

Cornwall Consolidated School (CCS)

Teacher Will Vincent from CCS was joined at the table by the students who were involved in the civics project: Jonny Bindley, Mason Bryant, Donna Polk, Austin Ward, Myra Weed, and Qaid Aljasem.

The students presented on The Americans with Disabilities Act at Cornwall Consolidated School, and how they made their school more accessible and inclusive for the differently abled. They presented on their initial ideas and how their ideas grew, developed, and changed CCS. The students concluded their presentation with a summary of (i) how this project changed them; (ii) the impact it had at CCS; and (iii) what can be done to be more ADA compliant.

Vice Chair Benham and Commissioner Russell-Tucker thanked the students for sharing their project and presenting to the Board.

The Board members engaged in questions, and discussion.

**IV. Consideration of Minutes:**

**A. November 6, 2024, State Board of Education Meeting**

Board Member Taylor moved, Board Member Record seconded, that the Board adopt the minutes of the November 6, 2024, State Board of Education Meeting.

**VOTE ON**

<b>MOTION:</b>	In favor:	Benham, Burr, Harris, Record, Salazar, Taylor
	Opposed:	0
	Abstained	0
	Absent:	Zimmerman

Motion carried unanimously.

**V. Report of the Chair**

Vice Chair Benham highlighted the following:

- Attended the 2025 Teacher of the Year Ceremony at the Bushnell with the Commissioner, Governor Lamont, and Board Member Kristen Record.
- Attended the Milken Educator Award announcement at Norwich Free Academy.
- Attended the 2024 CABE/CAPSS Conference.
- Announced that Allan Taylor was awarded the 2024 CABE Friend of Public Education Award at the CABE/CAPSS Convention.
- Shared that former SBE student member Valli Pendyala is now an intern with NASBE.

**V. Report of the Commissioner and Agency Update**

The Commissioner welcomed everyone to the meeting. She referenced her report in the Supplemental Folders.

- Hosted the Advancing Multilingual Education: Illuminating the Linguistic and Cultural Assets of ELs/MLs Summit at Central CT State University.
- Hosted, in partnership with SERC, the Special Education Legislative Forum at the LOB. The summit on "Belonging."
- Participated on a panel at the New England State Policy Summit: Advancing Educator Workforce Diversity at Boston University.
- Invited districts to apply to participate in a state pilot utilizing Artificial Intelligence.
- CSDE staff and SBE member Bonnie Burr visited Agricultural Science and Technology Education (ASTE) centers at Suffield High School, Glastonbury High School and Lyman Memorial High School in Lebanon.

#### State Policy Summit: Advancing Educator Workforce Diversity at Boston University

The Commissioner shared data on CT's enhanced reciprocity. She highlighted that the Enhanced Reciprocity program is working with up to 21 states, DC, and Puerto Rico.

- Dr. Shuana Tucker highlighted that a district has now taken advantage of the enhanced reciprocity with Puerto Rico and has connected with three universities to work with CSDE.
- Vice Chair Benham highlighted that CT's Enhanced Reciprocity has been presented to NASBE.

#### State Pilot of Utilizing Artificial Intelligence

Chief Academic Officer Irene Parisi reported that an invitation application was released. It will be launched from January to June.

#### Creating Opportunities for Students to Explore Multiple Career Pathway Options

Board Member Burr, Chief Academic Officer Parisi, and Deputy Commissioner Hewes reported on the ASTE school visits that were coordinated by ASTE Consultant Harold Mackin.

Commissioner Russell-Tucker continued to highlight events as follows:

- Held Commissioner's Superintendents Advisory Panel with Governor Lamont and other key OTG staff.
- Team CSDE supported the CT Foodshare Turkey Drive giving back to our community.
- Hosted the annual Teacher of the Year Award Ceremony at the Bushnell with the CT Teacher of the Year Council.
- Provided luncheon remarks at the CABA/CAPSS Convention and congratulated Board Member Allan Taylor.
- Presented remarks at an event to kick-off the Lieutenant Governor's Computing Challenge.

Commissioner Russell-Tucker invited Chief Performance Officer Ajit Gopalakrishnan to the table to provide an update on the menu of research-based universal K-3 assessments.

#### Menu of Research-based Universal K-3 Assessments

Chief Performance Officer Ajit Gopalakrishnan reported on the K-3 universal screening benchmark assessments that are required by state law. He noted that the Department is required to put out a menu and administer them three times a year and that the assessment part of the work was transitioned to the Performance Office. Mr. Gopalakrishnan reported on the goals of the assessments and highlighted that external faculty from Michigan State University and the University of Connecticut were retained to work in the K-3 assessment space and review all the assessments on the menu.

#### Update on the Office of Dyslexia and Reading Disabilities

Deputy Commissioner Sinthia Sone-Moyano with Chief Talent Officer Dr. Shuana Tucker provided the legislative historical establishment of the ODRD, and Dr. Tucker introduced each member of the ODRD team.

Dr. Althena McAllenney and Kristin Allen, M.A. presented. They provided an in-depth overview on the following work of the ODRD:

- Legislative charges
- Internal and External Collaboration and Partnerships
- Structured Literacy and Dyslexia Educator Competencies
- Compliance Measures and Audit Procedures
- PA 15-97 Information and Assistance Updates
- IDEA Funding for SLD: Dyslexia Initiatives

The Board members engaged discussion.

#### Update on Hartford Public Schools Fiscal Operations

The Commissioner referenced her commitment to keep the Board updated on its authorized action at the June 5, 2024, meeting concerning Hartford Public Schools Financial Management and summarized the three-prong approach: (i) Magnet School Assessment: Optimizing Funds Utilization; (ii) Special Education Services Assessment and Enhancement; and (iii) Improvement of Financial Systems. She invited Chief Strategic Planning Officer Keith Norton, Deputy Commissioner Dr. Charles Hewes, Special Education Division Director Bryan Klimkiewicz, and Director of Internal Audit Monique Coates to present to the Board.

The Board members engaged discussion.

Vice Chair Benham brought the agenda back to agenda to VII., Items Requiring Action.

## **VII. Items Requiring Action**

### **A. Approval of Legislative Proposals**

Vice Chair Benham asked for a motion on agenda item VII.A. Board Member Taylor moved, and Board Member Record seconded, that the State Board of Education adopts these 2025 Legislative Proposals and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

Chief of Staff/Legislative Liaison Laura Stefon introduced the agency's 2025 Legislative Proposals.

#### **VOTE ON**

<b>MOTION:</b>	In favor:	Benham, Burr, Harris, Record, Salazar, Taylor
	Opposed:	0
	Abstained	0
	Absent:	Zimmerman

Motion carried unanimously.

## **VIII. Financial Matters**

There were no financial matters presented.

## **IX. Consent**

There were no Consent items on the agenda.

## **X. Committee Reports**

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

Vice Chair Benham reported that the committee met on November 19, 2024. The next committee meeting will be on February 11, 2024.

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

Committee Chair Benham reported that the committee met on November 14, 2024. The committee meetings will be on December 12, 2024, and on January 9, 2025.

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

Committee Chair Harris reported that the committee met on December 3, 2024. The committee received an update on the staff workload and capacity.

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

Committee Chair Burr reported that the committee met on November 6, 2024, at 1:00 p.m. after the November SBE meeting.

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

Vice Chair Benham reported that Dr. Christine Benz will be attending the January 15, 2025, meeting.

### **F. NASBE**

Vice Chair Benham reported NASBE was reported earlier in the meeting.

### **G. SERC**

Vice Chair Benham referenced her written report. She announced that the SBE has filled its required seat on the SERC Board and noted that the SERC Board is still actively seeking members to fill other seats.

Vice Chair Benham asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting, Board Member Harris moved, Board Member Taylor seconded, that the meeting be adjourned.

Vice Chair Benham adjourned the meeting at 12:54 p.m.

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

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