

**Connecticut State Board of Education  
Hartford**

Accountability and Support Committee

**Thursday, January 9, 2025**  
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 3:33 p.m.

**Committee**

**Members Present:**

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

**Committee**

**Members Absent:**

**CSDE Staff Present:**

Deputy Commissioner Charles E. Hewes, Ed.D.  
Laura Stefon  
Dr. Melissa Jenkins  
Jennifer Webb  
Felicia Canty  
Shakira Jacobs-Vazquez  
Leslie Navarrete

**Guests Present:**

Jill Johnson, Executive Director/Principal, Explorations Charter Schools, Winsted  
Joseph White, Assistant Principal, Explorations Charter Schools, Winsted  
Sarah Hayne, Board Chair, Explorations Charter Schools, Winsted  
Akisha Cassermere, Board of Education Member, Bridgeport Public Schools, Bridgeport  
Albert Benejan Grajales, Board of Education Secretary, Bridgeport Public Schools, Bridgeport  
Andre Woodson, Board of Education Member, Bridgeport Public Schools, Bridgeport  
Christine Baptiste-Perez, Board of Education Member, Bridgeport Public Schools, Bridgeport  
Domenic Costello, Chief Human Resources Officer, Bridgeport Public Schools, Bridgeport  
Dr. Albert Sackey, Assistant Superintendent of Leadership and Services, Bridgeport Public Schools, Bridgeport  
Dr. Royce Avery, Interim Superintendent, Bridgeport Public Schools, Bridgeport  
Jennifer Perez, Board of Education Chair, Bridgeport Public Schools, Bridgeport  
Joseph Sokolovic, Board of Education Vice-Chair, Bridgeport Public Schools, Bridgeport  
Margaret Hughes, Executive Director of School Turnaround, Bridgeport Public Schools, Bridgeport  
Nadira Clarke, Director of Grants Development & Management, Bridgeport Public Schools, Bridgeport  
Nestor Nkwo, Chief Financial Officer, Bridgeport Public Schools, Bridgeport  
Peter Karaffa, Chief Information Officer, Bridgeport Public Schools, Bridgeport  
Robert Traber, Board of Education Member, Bridgeport Public Schools, Bridgeport  
Willie Medina, Board of Education Member, Bridgeport Public Schools, Bridgeport

**II. Approval of Minutes**

Allan B. Taylor, moved, and Dr. Seth Zimmerman., seconded, that the Committee approve the minutes of the November 14, 2024, Accountability and Support Committee meeting.

Vote:

In Favor:	Benham, Harris, Jr., Zimmerman, Taylor, and Record
Abstained:	
Opposed:	0
Absent:	0

The Committee moved to table the minutes of the December 12, 2024, Accountability and Support Committee meeting.

**III. Charter School Renewal Corrective Action Updates:**

**Explorations Charter School (Explorations), Winsted**

Chairperson Benham recognized the meeting agenda item and opened the meeting to Dr. Melissa Jenkins, Chief Turnaround Officer, CSDE. Dr. Jenkins provided an overview of the work to date with Explorations. She welcomed Explorations Executive Director/Principal Jill Johnson, Assistant Principal Joseph White, and Board Chair Sarah Hayne to provide a progress update.

Some of the highlights Explorations shared: The charter school's professional learning communities (PLCs) will begin to identify areas for needed professional development/professional learning, which they intend to start providing in May of this year, 2025; the charter school has streamlined its' rubric and established a common grading baseline to ensure students know what is expected of them; the charter school has revised its' protocols around parental communication; the charter school has established monthly parent events and meetings to increase parent engagement and strengthen its' parent-school relationship; the charter school has partnered with Apex Learning and Study.com for accelerated learning programs; and the charter school has completed its program studies catalog for the 2025-2026 school year.

Explorations will continue to work on improving the charter school's chronic absenteeism. Some of the practices the charter school is using to support the work include strengthening teacher-student outreach for attendance; revamping Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) for attendance; daily attendance monitoring; and updating Tier supports tracking twice a quarter.

Additionally, Explorations will continue to work on carrying out more home visits to improve student attendance and parent-school relationship and on increasing student voice through the circulation of the student feedback form to the student body and its summary data to teachers, which has shown to be successful in the past.

The Chair opened the floor for comments and questions from the Committee. Committee member Kristen A. Record shared some ideas on how to deepen the charter school's student-school relationship through an advisory model approach.

#### **IV. Bridgeport Public Schools (BPS), Bridgeport**

Dr. Charles Hewes, Deputy Commissioner for Academics and Innovation, provided an overview, indicating that an invitation letter via e-mail was sent to the Interim Superintendent of Bridgeport Public Schools Dr. Royce Avery to attend and provide the SBE Accountability and Support Committee a progress update on the budget deficit impacting the district's service delivery of special education (SPED) services, the district leadership changes, and the training Bridgeport Board of Education (Bridgeport BOE) has received on the supervision and evaluation of the Superintendent, managerial guidelines, and the support systems in place to the Superintendent and district administrators.

Deputy Commissioner Hewes proceeded to provide the Committee with an overview of Bridgeport Public Schools's state and federal grants, the obligations for liquidation of state and federal grants, and the reimbursement process.

Deputy Commissioner Hewes welcomed BPS Interim Superintendent Dr. Royce Avery and Board of Education Chair Jennifer Perez. BPS reported to the Committee that the deficit is in the operations budgetary line item of the district's budget. Dr. Avery shared that the Bridgeport BOE and the Superintendent's Office have been building a partnership since his hire and highlighted the need for the Bridgeport BOE and Superintendent's Office to work

collaboratively and swiftly to address the district's budget deficits and SPED service delivery issues to turnaround BPS's learning and instruction. Dr. Avery went on to inform the Committee that the district is relying on recently proposed state legislation to help address SPED educator shortages while the district is working on identifying root causes impacting SPED, such as increasing educator and administrator capacity in administering Planning and Placement Team (PPT) meetings.

Bridgeport BOE Chair Perez has been working with the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE) to further train the Bridgeport BOE on the aforementioned objectives and to facilitate goal setting for the board of education. Moreover, CABE will be assisting the Superintendent and the Bridgeport BOE with the update of school and governance policies and procedures. BPS welcomes the support of the CSDE and Dr. Avery is confident in the current administration team and expressed optimism in the partnership with the BOE to continue moving learning forward in Bridgeport public schools.

The Chair opened the floor for comments and questions from the Committee. The Committee expressed concern about BPS fulfilling the SPED learning statutory obligations and board of education functioning. Chairperson Benham moved that the SBE Accountability and Support Committee recommend the discussion of concerns relative to BPS be moved to the full State Board of Education. Committee member Donald Harris seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

**V. Adjourn**

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

Prepared by: Leslie Navarrete