

**Connecticut State Board of Education  
Hartford**

Accountability and Support Committee

**Wednesday, April 23, 2025**  
450 Columbus Blvd.  
Plaza North, Meeting Room C & D  
Hartford, Connecticut

**Meeting Minutes  
(Approved on: June 18, 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 3:38 p.m.

**Committee**

**Members Present:**

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

**SBOE Committee**

**Members Present:**

Paula S. Gilberto

**Committee**

**Members Absent:**

Dr. Seth D. Zimmerman

**SBOE Committee**

**Members Absent:**

Dr. Gladys Labas

**CSDE Staff Present:**

Deputy Commissioner Charles E. Hewes, Ed.D.  
Dr. Melissa Jenkins  
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
- Monique Frasier, School Director, Common Grounds High School, New Haven
- Joel Tolman, Director of Community & Engagement, Common Grounds High School, New Haven
- Jeremy Stone, Lead Teacher of Curriculum & Instruction, Common Grounds High School, New Haven
- Che Dawson, Principal, Highville Charter School, New Haven
- Stefanie Cervoni Leng, Academic Interventionist, Highville Charter School, New Haven

**II. Approval of Minutes**

Record moved, and Gilberto., seconded, that the Committee approve the minutes of December 12, 2024, and January 9, 2025, Accountability and Support Committee meetings.

**Vote:**

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

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

**Highville Charter School, New Haven**

Chairperson Benham recognized the meeting agenda item and opened the meeting to Dr. Melissa Jenkins, Chief Turnaround Officer, CSDE. Dr. Jenkins shared an overview of the ongoing efforts at Highville Charter School to implement the Corrective Action Plan. This plan focuses on improving academic achievement in English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics, ensuring teacher certification compliance, and addressing chronic absenteeism.

She welcomed Highville Charter School (Highville) Principal Che Dawson and Academic Interventionist Stefanie Cervoni Leng to provide a progress update.

Highville shared several key highlights: The charter school is offering early intervention starting in Pre-K, providing after-school academic support, and has implemented a Read Aloud curriculum. Additionally, Highville is focused on providing professional development to enhance teacher capacity in the instruction of the charter school's curricula. Highville has also established an attendance rewards system to encourage students to maintain regular attendance and credit recovery program. Furthermore, the school is actively committed to strengthening family engagement and promoting a greater understanding of the link between attendance and student success.

The Chair opened the floor for comments and questions from the Committee. Chair Beham commended Highville for implementing an attendance rewards system to encourage students to maintain regular attendance. She reminded the charter school of the importance of including student voices in the development of the incentive program and strongly recommended that Highville explore opportunities to expand its community partnerships to support its reading incentives.

**Explorations Charter School, Winsted**

Dr. Jenkins provided an overview of the ongoing efforts at Explorations Charter School (Explorations) to implement the Corrective Action Plan. This plan focuses on addressing chronic absenteeism, improving academic achievement in English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics, developing systems to support student graduation. 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 shared by Explorations include the implementation of a credit recovery program at the charter school. Explorations is also dedicated to enhancing family engagement and support by improving the understanding of the connection between attendance and student success. This is achieved through meetings and workshops, such as those focused on building student resilience, offered to students and their families. Additionally, the charter school has established a tiered system to proactively intervene by providing individualized support to students who show early signs of attendance issues, academic struggles, or mental health concerns. The school officials reported that they drafted and published a Program of Studies.

At the end of January and the beginning of February 2025, the charter school conducted a climate and culture survey. The Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) of Explorations in collaboration with The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), in collaboration with EdAdvance are working to identify and provide targeted professional development and coaching opportunities for the charter school's teaching staff. The data collected from the survey will inform these efforts and guide the support and resources that Explorations is developing for teachers. Additionally, the survey results indicated that Explorations would benefit from a more comprehensive advisory model, and the charter school is actively pursuing this initiative. Explorations continues to build partnerships with community and higher education stakeholders and institutions to create and support a robust career readiness catalog for students and to strengthen student and teacher connectivity in efforts to reduce chronic absenteeism.

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

### **Common Ground High School, New Haven**

Dr. Jenkins provided an overview of the ongoing efforts at Common Ground High School (Common Ground) to implement the Corrective Action Plan. This plan focuses on addressing the charter school's teacher certification compliance and improving academic achievement in English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics. She welcomed School Director Monique Frasier; Director of Community & Engagement Joel Tolman; Lead Teacher of Curriculum & Instruction Jeremy Stone and Board Member and Chair of School Committee Liz Cox to provide a progress update.

Common Ground shared several highlights, including the implementation of new evaluations for leaders and educators, as well as a support plan for professional development. They have also reviewed and updated summative assessments for each unit to ensure alignment with the charter school's curriculum and instruction. The Mathematics Team Lead is providing intensive support for the Illustrative Mathematics and IXL platforms. Additionally, Academic Labs are offered four times a week during school hours, after school, and on Saturdays to enhance student learning. Common Ground reported to the Committee that student attendance in the Academic Labs is steadily increasing and becoming more consistent.

Common Ground is dedicated to achieving 100 percent teacher certification. The charter school is providing training for its Human Resources team and school leaders on the requirements and processes involved in teacher certification. Additionally, the school has updated its teacher evaluation model to track staff compliance with certification. The charter school director is actively monitoring and ensuring that teachers understand and follow the certification process.

The Chair opened the floor for comments and questions from the Committee. The Committee recommended that Common Grounds explore effective strategies to strengthen student cognitive engagement for a more stimulating and supportive learning environment, ultimately leading to increased student engagement and improved instructional outcomes.

### **IV. Adjourn**

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

Prepared by: Leslie Navarrete