

Connecticut State Board of Education Hartford

Accountability and Support Committee

Wednesday, September 10, 2025

450 Columbus Blvd
Plaza North, Hearing Room J
Hartford, Connecticut

**Meeting Minutes
(Approved on: November 12, 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

SBE Committee

Members Present:

Dr. Gladys B. Labas

CSDE Staff Present:

Deputy Commissioner Charles E. Hewes, Ed.D.
Dr. Melissa Jenkins
Jennifer Webb
Felicia Canty
Anika Martin
Ruby Rodriguez
Leslie Navarrete

Guests Present:

- Dr. Steve Perry, Head of School, Capital Prep Harbor Charter, Bridgeport
- Dr. Ayanna Carter, State Superintendent, Capital Prep Harbor Charter, Bridgeport
- Natasha Banks, Chief Talent Officer, Capital Prep Harbor Charter, Bridgeport
- Jill Culter-Hodgman, Chief of Staff, Capital Prep Harbor Charter, Bridgeport
- Rich Beganski, Senior Executive Director, Data and Accountability, Capital Prep Harbor Charter, Bridgeport
- Scott Wojnarowicz, Assistant Superintendent, Curriculum and Instruction, Capital Prep Harbor Charter, Bridgeport

II. Review of Approved 2025–26 ASC Meeting Schedule

The Committee reviewed the approved 2025–26 Accountability and Support Committee meeting schedule. The Committee members agreed to remove meetings originally scheduled for March 2026, July 2026, and October 2025. The next meeting is on November 12, 2025.

III. 2025-26 Commissioner’s Network (CN) Update

Chair Benham recognized the agenda item and opened the meeting to Jennifer Webb, Bureau Chief of the Turnaround Office, CSDE. Ms. Webb presented on the state’s monitoring system for schools and districts receiving state and federal improvement funds, focusing on Commissioner’s Network (CN) schools, Alliance Districts, and Opportunity Districts. She described the balance of accountability and support, noting that tools such as the Alliance District Tracker, 90-day Implementation Tracker, walkthroughs, site visits, audits, and fiscal reviews ensure both compliance and capacity-building.

At the district level, the Alliance District Tracker captures annual priorities, midyear and year-end reflections, and progress on achievement, attendance, and climate. At the school level, which includes CN schools and School Improvement Grant (SIG) schools, the 90-day Implementation Tracker breaks turnaround plans into manageable cycles, uses a color-coded system to flag progress, and helps schools adjust in real time. Ms. Webb noted that CN schools and SIGs undergo more intensive monitoring, with SIGs also required to submit a federal report. Regular biweekly walkthroughs provide non-evaluative classroom observations aligned with school priorities and offer immediate feedback to principals and staff. Broader site visits bring together state, district, and school teams for deeper analysis and collaborative planning. In addition, CN schools undergo operations and instructional audits, while fiscal monitoring ensures budgets and spending align with approved strategies and evidence-based practices. Ms. Webb highlighted the Turnaround Office’s annual results, which included 35 Alliance District trackers, 54 school implementation trackers, 276 walkthroughs, 140 site visits, 155 monitoring meetings, 22 audits, 80 fiscal reviews, and 174 grant applications reviewed—work carried out by a five-member team.

With only five staff members, she noted, the Turnaround Office has worked to streamline tools, document protocols, and strengthen user-friendly systems so districts can carry forward the work themselves. Ms. Webb emphasized that monitoring only matters if it leads to action, feeding directly into technical assistance, professional learning, and budget adjustments.

Chair Benham opened the floor for comments and questions from the Committee. Committee members engaged with questions about how the observational data connects with broader outcome measures such as student performance. Ms. Webb responded that the Turnaround Office cross-checks school-level data, often updated every two weeks, against district and state reports, which helps uncover discrepancies in areas like attendance or suspensions. She explained that this focus on leading indicators—such as teacher training and the implementation of specific instructional strategies—offers early signs of change before outcome data is available. The discussion also touched on the importance of sustainability, the role of leadership and teacher evaluations, and how schools are supported after exiting the Commissioner’s Network. Ms. Webb affirmed that walkthroughs are intentionally non-evaluative but tied to professional learning, such as the Alliance District Symposium and NetStat Professional Learning Series, and improvement goals, and that schools continue to receive follow-up support even after they leave the Commissioner’s Network.

The Committee acknowledged the intensity of the work, emphasized the importance of balancing accountability with long-term capacity, and expressed their appreciation for the Turnaround Office’s efforts and results.

2025-26 Charter School Renewal Updates

Felicia Canty, Turnaround Office, Charter School Liaison, CSDE, and Anika Matin, Turnaround Office, Charter School Program Manager, CSDE, provided the Committee with updates on state charter renewals. Committee members were reminded that state charters are approved, funded, and monitored by the State Board of Education (SBE), while local charters are authorized by local boards with state approval. Charter schools are tuition-free public school options, granted authority to operate through a state-issued charter, and in exchange for greater autonomy, are held to heightened accountability. They operate only on a provisional basis, subject to continuous review and renewal for terms of up to five years.

The Committee was briefed on the current landscape of 23 charter schools in Connecticut, including recent openings in New Haven and Stamford, and informed that six schools are scheduled for renewal this year. Ms. Canty explained that the renewal process begins with submission of a renewal toolkit, followed by scheduling of public hearings in local districts and site visits led by CSDE staff. Notices are sent to contiguous districts to solicit input. Committee members were reminded of their key role in presiding over public hearings, which are essential to the process.

The renewal team includes consultants and CSDE staff who review curriculum, instruction, school climate, assessment, teacher certification, operations, finance, multilingual learner supports, special education, and governance. Information is collected through site visits, focus groups, superintendent feedback, and public testimony. This data is synthesized into renewal reports, which provide ratings of “meets,” “pending action,” or “does not meet,” informing the length of the renewal term. Terms may range from probationary status to one- to five-year renewals.

Ms. Matin introduced a new one-page summary document that will accompany site visits for each charter school up for renewal. This tool is intended to support the Committee’s review process by consolidating key information for ease of reference.

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

The Committee acknowledged the importance of the renewal process, emphasized the value of transparency and equity, and expressed appreciation for the work of the Turnaround Office, Charter School Program. Committee members also asked clarifying questions about the relationship between staff recommendations and SBE charge.

It was confirmed that while the Turnaround Office, Charter School Program consultants provide recommendations, the SBE may adjust the length of a renewal during its meeting, and any changes agreed upon are incorporated into the final resolution and forwarded to the Commissioner of Education. Ms. Canty and Ms. Matin noted that recommendations are grounded in cross-divisional review and benchmarking across charter schools to ensure fairness and equity.

The Committee acknowledged the intensity of the work and expressed their appreciation for the efforts and results from the Turnaround Office, Charter School Program.

IV. Charter School Renewal Corrective Action Update – Discipline / In-School Suspension

Capital Prep Harbor Charter, Bridgeport

Chair Benham recognized the meeting agenda item and opened the meeting to Dr. Melissa Jenkins, Chief Turnaround Officer, CSDE. Dr. Jenkins provided background information on Capital Prep Harbor School (Capital Prep), noting that the charter school opened in 2015 in Bridgeport with a mission to serve historically disadvantaged students through a social justice model and college preparatory framework. She reviewed current performance data: a Category 2 accountability rating with an index of 73.2, above both the district at 58.7 and the state average of 70.8. Chronic absenteeism stands at 16.8 percent, compared to 33.1 percent in the district and 17.2 percent statewide. She also highlighted prior English language arts (ELA) and mathematics performance indices, and noted that discipline, particularly suspension rates, was an area of focus for improvement.

Following this overview, Dr. Jenkins welcomed Capital Prep Head of School Dr. Steve Perry; State Superintendent Dr. Ayanna Carter; Chief Talent Officer Natasha Banks; Chief of Staff Jill Cutler-Hodgman; Senior Executive Director of Data and Accountability Rich Briganski; and Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction Scott Wojnarowicz to provide a progress update on the charter school's discipline and in-school suspension practices.

Dr. Perry underscored the charter school's mission and outcomes, emphasizing that Capital Prep serves an overwhelmingly Black and Latino student population from low-income backgrounds, yet consistently outperforms both district and state averages. He pointed to a 100 percent graduation and 4-year college acceptance rate for Black, Latino, and special education students, significantly higher than state and district averages. Dr. Perry described Capital Prep's extended school day and year, which increases learning opportunities while fostering a culture of high expectations, belonging, and respect. Capital Prep spoke with pride about student accomplishments while also candidly acknowledging challenges tied to discipline, trauma, and attendance. They framed student outcomes as evidence of the charter school's model, while also noting ongoing efforts to strengthen restorative practices and school culture.

Capital Prep further reported 92 out-of-school suspensions last year, primarily for physical and verbal confrontations, but highlighted steady declines in suspension rates: from 15.8 percent in 2021–22 to a projected 11.9 percent in 2024–25. Subgroup suspension rates for Black and Latino students are now below state averages.

Ms. Banks provided staffing and certification updates, confirming that the charter school is in compliance with state requirements. She reported 62.3 percent of educators are now fully certified, up from 56.5 percent the prior year, while acknowledging tensions between certification rules and the goal of diversifying the educator workforce. She explained that certification requirements have limited the number of Black and Latino teachers, particularly men, despite research showing the positive impact of teacher diversity on student achievement. Capital Prep continues to recruit through Connecticut universities, alternate certification pathways, and partnerships with the University of Puerto Rico, while supporting staff development.

Additional updates included the charter school's nationally recognized dual enrollment program, which allows students to earn significant college credit and, in some cases, associate degrees before graduation. The charter school also expanded English language learner supports, with a dedicated department, inclusion practices, and tutoring partnerships with Sacred Heart University.

Chair Benham opened the floor for comments and questions from the Committee. The Committee members raised questions about certification reciprocity, workforce readiness alongside college preparation, and strategies for supporting multilingual learners. Capital Prep reiterated the charter school's identity as a college preparatory institution while affirming students retain flexibility in post-graduation pathways. The Committee expressed appreciation for the Capital Prep's results and the leadership team's commitment to continuous improvement.

V. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 5:19 p.m. The next meeting will be on November 12, 2025.

Prepared by: Leslie Navarrete