

Connecticut State Board of Education

Hartford

Special State Board of Education Meeting

January 22, 2025
(Approved March 5, 2025)

Pursuant to notice filed with the Secretary of the State and posted on the agency's website, the members of the State Board of Education (hereinafter "Board") held a special meeting on Wednesday, January 22, 2025, 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/5Szefd6avnM>.

I. Call to Order

Vice Chairperson Erin Benham called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.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
Seth D. Zimmerman

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

II. Public Participation

1. Jeff Morrissey, President of the Bridgeport Education Association, shared Bridgeport educators' concerns about their work challenges, and how they continue to educate their students despite facing the daily challenges. Also, he spoke on the year with the previous superintendent, and now being hopeful and confident. A copy of Mr. Morrissey's written testimony is enclosed in the official file of this meeting.
2. Maria Pereira, spoke in opposition to agenda item, III.A., Bridgeport Public Schools: Action to Address District Needs.
3. Joseph Sokolovic, Vice Chair, Bridgeport Board of Education, spoke on the passing of the \$309,00 million budget, the need for the state and community to give the board an opportunity to find a new superintendent, holding the board accountable for the decisions it makes, and advocating for more funding. A copy of Mr. Sokolovic's written testimony is enclosed in the official file of this meeting.

4. Robert Traber, Member, Bridgeport Board of Education, 4th and 5th grade teacher at Blackham School from 2001 to 2020, former president of the Bridgeport Education Association, spoke on his daughter graduating from Central High School, being a grandparent in the Bridgeport Public Schools, and the passing of the \$309 million budget. A copy of Mr. Traber's written testimony is enclosed in the official file of this meeting.
5. Albert Benejan Grajales, Secretary, Bridgeport Board of Education, shared that we are working very hard to ensure that our students have a very good education, it has not been easy, and together we make a difference.
6. Andre Woodson, Member, Bridgeport Board of Education, spoke in support of agenda item, III.A., Bridgeport Public Schools: Action to Address District Needs.
7. Kate Dias, President, Connecticut Education Association, spoke to support of the idea of an intervention in the Bridgeport public schools. She highlighted that all speakers had a common interest in the 19,000 students. Ms. Dias requested that teachers be invited to the table. The fiscal hole cannot be fixed by eliminating social workers, teachers, and school counselors. And we must anchor ourselves in hiring certified, qualified individuals.
8. Willie Medina, Member, Bridgeport Board of Education, shared that we were asking permission to make change. He stated that we are talking about collaboration, not takeover. Changes should be done locally with collaboration to foster a sense of ownership. We want to work hand-in-hand with the state. We have a problem with being underfunded. There are classrooms that need certified teachers, and money to pay the teachers.

Public Participation ended.

VII. Items Requiring Action

A. Bridgeport Public Schools: Action to Address District Needs

Vice Chair Benham asked for a motion on agenda item III.A. Board Member Salazar moved, and Board Member Harris seconded, that pursuant to Section 10-223e(e)(2) of the Connecticut General Statutes, and in order to address the stability of operations of the Bridgeport Public Schools, improve student performance, and address other needs of the school district, the State Board of Education directs the Commissioner of Education to take the necessary action to implement, on behalf of the State Board of Education, the powers set forth in Connecticut General Statutes Section 10-223e(e)(2), including but not necessarily limited to 1) assigning a technical assistance team to the district to guide district initiatives and report progress to the Commissioner of Education; 2) requiring the board of education to undergo training designed to improve operational efficiency and effectiveness; and 3) requiring the appointment of a Superintendent approved by the Commissioner and/or the appointment of a District Improvement Officer selected by the Commissioner for a term of up to one year, with the understanding that such one-year term may be extended by the State Board of Education.

Vice Chair Benham presented timeline overview on the Accountability and Support Committee's meetings with Bridgeport Public Schools' previous superintendent and board of education to present for Board members not on the committee.

Deputy Commissioner Charles Hewes provided a presentation of the following:

- ❖ Bridgeport Education Landscape
- ❖ Summary of Funding Available in 2024-2025
- ❖ Leadership of the District and Board Training

Special Education Division Director Bryan Klimkiewicz presented on special education:

- ❖ Connecticut Special Education Employment System (CSEES) that was launched in 2022
- ❖ Summary of the number of Due process complaints and mediations since 2021
- ❖ Determination: Based on Compliance and the Special Education Indicators

Legal Director Mike McKeon presented on the statutory authorization provided to the Commissioner in the resolution.

- ❖ Assigning of a Technical Team
- ❖ Requiring training for the Bridgeport Board of Education
- ❖ Requiring the appointment of a District Improvement Officer selected by the Commissioner for a term of one year

The Board members engaged with questions and answers with discussion.

Board Member Salazar asked for a clarification concerning the "or: in #3 of the resolution.

Legal Director McKeon provided the clarification and agreed to edit with "and/or."

VOTE ON

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

*Members voted "In favor" for the resolution with the edit of changing "or" to "and/or."

Motion carried unanimously.

Commissioner Russell-Tucker thanked the Board members for their commitment of coming together for importance of this special meeting. The Commissioner expressed that the resolution is an opportunity to support Bridgeport Public Schools in a way that is sustainable for positive transformative change.

Vice Chair Benham adjourned the meeting at 3:18 p.m.

Prepared by: _____

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