

Connecticut State Board of Education

Hartford

State Board of Education Meeting

April 2, 2025
(Approved May 7, 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 meeting on Wednesday, April 2, 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://ct-n.com/ondemand.asp?id=24623>.

I. Call to Order

Vice Chairperson Erin Benham attended the meeting virtually. The chair responsibilities of the meeting were assigned to Board Member Donald Harris as the Chair Pro Tempore.

Pro Tem Harris called the meeting to order at 9:34 a.m.

Present: Erin D. Benham, Vice Chairperson (virtual)
Sreenidi Bala, Student Member
Bonnie E. Burr
Dr. Aynsley Diamond (designee for Terrence Cheng, Ex Officio)
Donald F. Harris, Jr.
Sophia Messina, Student Member
Kristen A. Record
Juan C. Salazar
Seth D. Zimmerman

Absent: Christine Benz, Ex Officio
Kelli-Marie Vallieres, Ex Officio

Oath of Office

Attorney Michael P. McKeon, Commissioner of the Superior Court, administered the Oath of Office to the two newly appointed Board members: (i) Paula S. Gilberto, and (ii) Gladys B. Labas. Copies of the Oaths of Office are enclosed in the official file of this meeting.

II. Public Participation

1. Alissa Heizler-Mendoza, a parent of a child with dyslexia, and a member of Decoding Dyslexia-CT, spoke on the removal of Amira from the Universal Screening Reading Assessments K-3 Menu. A copy of Ms. Heizler-Mendoza's written testimony is enclosed in the official file of this meeting.

2. Kim Healy, a member of the Reading Leadership Implementation Council, spoke on the statutory intent of the Council and the limitations on its capacity to function. A copy of Ms. Healy's written testimony is enclosed in the official file of this meeting.
3. Lindsey MacKay, a Wilton resident, spoke on her experience regarding her son learning to read, and shared concerns about Amira being on the list of Universal Screening Reading Assessments K-3 Menu.
4. Astrid Acosta, a parent, spoke in support of agenda item VII.A., Renewal of State Charter: Stamford Charter School for Excellence, Stamford.
5. State Representative Kadeem Roberts, director of engagement at Stamford Charter School for Excellence, spoke in support of agenda item VII.A., Renewal of State Charter: Stamford Charter School for Excellence, Stamford.

Public Participation ended.

III. Executive Session

There was no executive session held.

IV. Consideration of Minutes:

A. March 5, 2025, State Board of Education Meeting

Board Member Burr moved, Board Member Zimmerman seconded, that the Board adopt the minutes of the March 5, 2025, State Board of Education Meeting.

VOTE ON

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

Motion carried unanimously.

V. Report of the Chair

Vice Chair Benham congratulated and welcomed the two newly appointed Board Members to the Board. She asked the two new Board Members to provide an introduction of themselves.

- Board Member Labas shared her background and experience.
- Board Member Gilberto shared her background and experience.

Vice Chair Benham highlighted the following:

- SERC Awards Program attended by Board Member Harris and Commissioner Russell-Tucker, where Board member Harris' wife, Dr. Harris was presented with an award.
- Thanked Board Member Record for joining Connecticut School Discipline Collaborative that continues to advise the Department on student discipline.

V. Report of the Commissioner and Agency Update

The Commissioner welcomed the new Board Members. She noted that she would highlight a few items from her written report in the Board's Supplemental Folders.

The Commissioner presented an update on federal actions related to education, and specifically funding, noting that the Department continues to access funding for federal programs administered from both the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Agriculture for Child Nutrition Programs.

Update Regional School Choice

Regional School Choice Office Director Robin Cecere presented on the year-round outreach initiatives and fairs to raise brand awareness about school choice options and to support access for families through information and application assistance.

Legal Director Mike McKeon updated the Board regarding an unfavorable ruling by the Freedom of Information Commission regarding a freedom of information request related to the school choice lottery algorithm protocol that the CSDE subsequently appealed to the Superior Court. Attorney McKeon concluded that he was pleased to report that the Superior Court agreed with the Department and reversed the Freedom of Information of Commission's ruling and held that the protocol is exempt from the Freedom of Information Act.

Update Bridgeport Public Schools – Action to Address District Needs

Deputy Commissioner Charles Hewes referenced that the report was in the Board's Supplemental Folder and presented an overview of the CSDE intervention commencing with the special January 22, 2025, Special State Board of Education meeting, that authorized interventions for the Commissioner to take action in order to support the district of Bridgeport. Dr. Hewes then presented an update on the three interventions (1) establishing a Technical Assistance Team, (2) professional development training for the members of the Bridgeport Board of Education, and (3) opportunity to work with the district with the Commissioner reserving the right to approve of the hiring of a new superintendent.

Update Bridgeport Public Schools – Technical Assistance Team

The Commissioner invited SERC Executive Director, Dr. Ingrid Canady, a member of the Technical Assistance Team to the table. Dr. Canady reported on the progress of work with the Technical Assistance Team and shared a summary of relevant, repeated key points of information received from over 40 listening sessions with educators, students, and administrators.

Update Bridgeport Public Schools - Nutrition

Commissioner Russell-Tucker requested that Division Director John Frassinelli, School Health, Nutrition, and Family Services present on nutrition. He presented on the national School Lunch and Breakfast programs, and the U.S.D.A.'s food distribution programs for districts to select school meals that have a negotiated lower price. He shared the Bridgeport School District was not aware of an approaching deadline in the food distribution system to order food with a significant dollar reduction

amount for the next school year until contacted by the CSDE team that monitors the food program portal.

Board members engaged in discussion.

Update on Hartford Public Schools Fiscal Operations

The Commissioner invited Chief Strategic Planning Officer Keith Norton to present to the Board. He referenced the April update in the Supplemental Folder with the history going back to 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.

Magnet School Assessment

The Office of Internal Audit continues to review data and documents from HPS.

Special Education

Mr. Norton reported that a report was received from New Solutions K-12, and is being reviewed by the agency, SERC, and the CDSE's Bureau of Special Education for recommendations and next steps.

Improvement of Financial Systems

Mr. Norton reported that at the March 5, 2025, meeting Public Works, LLC. presented its final report regarding improvement of financial services and will submit a follow-up report on the technical assistance to be provided, along with a review of how Hartford is implementing the recommendations that were provided to them.

Board members engaged in discussion.

The Commissioner shared information on the following items:

- Provided testimony at the Education Committee's Public Hearings on March 12, and March 19, 2025.
- Provided opening remarks for the Connecticut screening of the film *Counted Out: Math is Power*, at Central CT State University.

Pro Tem Harris requested the Board's permission to bring the agenda to item VII.D., CT Educator Preparation and Certification Board Proposed Legislative Language.

VII. Items Requiring Action

D. CT Educator Preparation and Certification Board Proposed Legislative Language

Pro Tem Harris asked for a motion on agenda item VII.D. Board Member Salazar moved, and Board Member Burr seconded, that pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes Section 10-150c(b)(1), the State Board of Education affirmatively move by Board vote either to approve or reject the proposed legislative language for the 2025 Legislative Session recommended by the Connecticut Educator Preparation and Certification Board pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes Section 10-150c(a) and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action to

effectuate such vote, including, if such proposed legislative language is approved by majority vote of the State Board, transmitting such legislative language to the Connecticut Educator Preparation and Certification Board for submission to the Education Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly for consideration.

Jennifer Rodriguez, Chair, Connecticut Educator Preparation and Certification Board, presented.

Vice Chair Benham requested to be on record with the process by which the State Board of Education operates and provided background on the Connecticut Educator Preparation and Certification Board report going to the Legislation Policy and Development Committee and moving to the full State Board of Education.

Vice Chair Benham noted that the CT Education Certification Board is a new Board, and this is a new collaboration with the State Board of Education. She stated that the State Board of Education has always operated with the agency's work going through committee. She highlighted the importance of working through the committee because it gives Board members on the State Board of Education their due diligence of reading through reports and items.

Vice Chair Benham requested that moving forward the Connecticut Educator Preparation and Certification Board come to the State Board with an Item for Discussion because there is a process established, and the State Board intends to continue the process of using our committee work to move things out of committee to the full Board.

The Board engaged in discussion.

VOTE ON

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

Motion carried unanimously.

Pro Tem Harris returned the agenda back to agenda order.

VII. Items Requiring Action

A. Recognition of Paraeducators

Pro Tem Harris asked for a motion on agenda item VII.A. Board Member Burr moved, and Board Member Zimmerman seconded, the Recognition of Paraeducators.

Pro Tem then turned the presentation over to Chief Talent Officer Dr. Shuana Tucker, and Education Consultant Dr. Jessica Ocasio, Talent Office. Dr. Ocasio then introduced the four Paraeducator representatives.

Pro Tem Harris then read the resolution into the record of the minutes as follows:

To Be Proposed:

WHEREAS, National Paraprofessional Appreciation Day is celebrated annually on the first Wednesday of April; and

WHEREAS, Paraeducators are instrumental in supporting students in the various aspects of the educational process; and

WHEREAS, Paraeducators collaborate with teachers and related service providers to support the diverse needs of students; and

WHEREAS, Paraeducators take pride in their profession and are dedicated to supporting their students, families, and school communities; and

WHEREAS, Paraeducators welcome opportunities to engage in professional learning to build upon their existing skills and knowledge of best practices pertinent to their specific roles; and

WHEREAS, Paraeducators recognize the importance of their role in maximizing student engagement to ensure students experience positive outcomes; now therefore be it

Resolved, That the Connecticut State Board of Education extends its gratitude and appreciation to all Connecticut Paraeducators for their dedication and service to the students and families of the State of Connecticut.

Commissioner Russell-Tucker thanked the Paraeducators for the work they do every day on behalf of their students.

VOTE ON

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

Motion carried unanimously.

B. Renewal of State Charter: Stamford Charter School for Excellence, Stamford

Pro Tem Harris asked for a motion on agenda item VII.B. Board Member Burr moved, and Board Member Zimmerman seconded, that the State Board of Education, pursuant to Section 10-66bb of the Connecticut General Statutes, renews the charter of Stamford Charter School for Excellence from July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2030, subject to the conditions and recommendations set forth in the Commissioner's April 2, 2025, memorandum to the State Board of Education, and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

Deputy Commissioner Dr. Charles Hewes, Chief Turnaround Officer Dr. Melissa Jenkins, with school representative Kevin Fisher, Principal, presented.

VOTE ON

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

Motion carried unanimously.

C. Renewal of State Charter: Odyssey Community School, Manchester

Pro Tem Harris asked for a motion on agenda item VII.B. Board Member Salazar moved, and Board Member Burr seconded, that the State Board of Education, pursuant to Section 10-66bb of the Connecticut General Statutes, renews the charter of Odyssey Community School from July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2030, subject to the conditions and recommendations set forth in the Commissioner's April 2, 2025, memorandum to the State Board of Education, and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

Deputy Commissioner Dr. Charles Hewes, Chief Turnaround Officer Dr. Melissa Jenkins, with school representatives, Dr. Philip B. O'Reilly, Executive Director, Jessica Swann, Co-Principal, and Michelle Bashaw, Co-Principal presented.

Board members engaged in discussion.

VOTE ON

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

Motion carried unanimously.

VIII. Financial Matters

Pro Tem Harris asked for a motion on agenda item VIII.A. Board Member Burr moved, and Board Member Record seconded, that the State Board of Education approves the request for Finance Advisory Committee action to transfer funds from the Magnet School account to the Adult Education accounts and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

Chiefs of Fiscal and Administrative Services Roger Persson and Jessica Brunetti presented.

VOTE ON

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

Motion carried unanimously.

IX. Consent Agenda

Pro Tem Harris asked if there was a Board member wishing to remove an item from Consent. Hearing none, he asked for a motion on agenda items IX.A., Appointments to CSDE Educator Preparation Provider (EPP) Program. Board Member Burr moved, Board Member Salazar seconded, that the State Board of Education approves the Consent Agenda.

A. Appointments to CSDE Educator Preparation Provider (EPP) Program

Resolved, That the State Board of Education, pursuant to Section 10-145d-9(f)(1) of the Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies, appoints the following individuals to serve on the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) Educator Preparation Provider (EPP) Program Approval Review Committee, which is tasked with the review and approval of Connecticut educator preparation provider (EPP) programs, effective April 2, 2025, and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

Name	Affiliation	Representati on	Term Ending
Mel Horton	Sacred Heart University	EPP	April 1, 2028
Megan Mackey	Central Connecticut State University	EPP	April 1, 2028
Camille Cooper	Yale Child Study Center/Yale School of Medicine	Community	April 1, 2028
Verna Ruffin	Verna Ruffin, Executive Consultant	Community	April 1, 2028
Salvatore Escobales	Manchester Public Schools	K-12	April 1, 2028

VOTE ON

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

Motion carried unanimously.

X. Committee Reports**A. Academic Standards and Assessment**

Vice Chair Benham encouraged the new Board members to attend committee meetings prior to official appointments in June. She reported that the committee will be meeting on May 20, 2025.

B. Accountability and Support

Committee Chair Benham reported that the committee will be meeting on April 23, 2025.

C. Finance, Audit, and Budget

Committee Chair Harris reported that the committee will be meeting on June 3, 2025.

D. Legislation and Policy Development

Committee Chair Burr reported that the committee held a special meeting on April 2, 2025, regarding the CT Educator Preparation and Certification Board Proposed Legislative Language, and that the committee will be meeting today at 1:00 p.m. after the adjournment of the Board meeting.

E. Connecticut Technical Education and Career System Board

Pro Tem Harris reported that CTECS Chair Dr. Christine Benz was not able to attend today's meeting, but a CTECS report has been provided in the Supplemental Folders.

F. NASBE

Vice Chair Benham stated that she would keep the Board updated on the NASBE member exchange for April.

G. SERC

Vice Chair Benham referenced her written report. She reported that at SERC's recent board meeting, the discussion centered on federal funding. She noted that the SERC board was pleased to know that Dr. Ingrid Canady was on the Bridgeport Technical Assistance Team; and informed members that they would be receiving an invitation to attend SERC's upcoming ***Dismantling Systemic Racism Conference***.

XI. Items for Discussion

B. 2023-2024 Student Discipline in Connecticut Public Schools

Chief Performance Officer Ajit Gopalakrishnan and Division Director John Frassinelli, School Health, Nutrition, and Family Services, presented the annual report on the analyses of data trends in student disciplinary behaviors in Connecticut public schools. Mr. Gopalakrishnan introduced the disciplinary data generated from student level data, and Mr. Frassinelli explained the types of violations, suspensions, and sanctions, and the grouping of districts into tiers that are used to identify districts in order to provide systems of support and targeted action planning.

Members of the Board engaged in discussion.

Pro Tem Harris asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting, Board Member Zimmerman moved, Board Member Record seconded, that the meeting be adjourned.

Pro Tem Harris adjourned the meeting at 12:42 p.m.

Prepared by: _____

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