

**Connecticut State Board of Education  
Hartford**

**State Board of Education Meeting**

**May 7, 2025**  
(Approved June 11, 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, May 7, 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/d\\_VCdipEOv8](https://youtu.be/d_VCdipEOv8).

**I. Call to Order**

Vice Chairperson Erin Benham called the meeting to order at 9:37 a.m.

Present: Erin D. Benham, Vice Chairperson  
Sreenidi Bala, Student Member  
Bonnie E. Burr  
Dr. Aynsley Diamond (designee for Terrence Cheng, Ex Officio)  
Paula S. Gilberto  
Donald F. Harris, Jr.  
Gladys B. Labas  
Sophia Messina, Student Member  
Kristen A. Record  
Seth D. Zimmerman

Absent: Christine Benz, Ex Officio  
Juan C. Salazar  
Kelli-Marie Vallieres, Ex Officio

**II. Public Participation**

1. Stephen Tracy, chair of planning committee for Danbury Charter School, spoke in support of agenda item VII.C., Consideration of Capital Prep Petition for Declaratory Ruling. A copy of Mr. Tracy's written statement is enclosed in the official file of this meeting.
2. State Representative Anne Dauphinais, member of the Education Committee, spoke on agenda item VII.C., Consideration of Capital Prep Petition for Declaratory Ruling.
3. Erienne E. Rojas, Elevate Charter Schools director of external relations and special projects, spoke in support of agenda item VII.C., Consideration of Capital Prep Petition for Declaratory Ruling, and requested funding for Danbury Charter School and Capital Prep Middletown. A copy of Ms. Rojas' written statement is enclosed in the official file of this meeting.
4. Michele Clay, co-chair of Capital Prep Middletown, spoke in support of agenda item VII.C., Consideration of Capital Prep Petition for Declaratory Ruling.

5. Dr. Steve Perry, head of schools and founder of Capital Prep, spoke on agenda item VII.C., Consideration of Capital Prep Petition for Declaratory Ruling.
6. John Taylor, CEO of Elevate Charter Schools, spoke in support of agenda item VII.C., Consideration of Capital Prep Petition for Declaratory Ruling. A copy of Mr. Taylor's written statement is enclosed in the official file of this meeting.
7. Anita Ford Saunders, co-chair of Capital Prep Middletown Planning Committee, spoke in support of agenda item VII.C., Consideration of Capital Prep Petition for Declaratory Ruling. A copy of Ms. Saunders' written statement is enclosed in the official file of this meeting.
8. Bishop William J. McKissick, Jr., New Jerusalem Christian Center Church. Ms. Anita Ford Saunders read aloud the written testimony of Bishop William J. McKissick, Jr., in support of agenda item VII.C., Consideration of Capital Prep Petition for Declaratory Ruling. A copy of Bishop McKissick's written testimony is enclosed in the official file of this meeting.
9. Meredith Gavin, of New Haven, spoke in support of agenda item VII.D., Approval of Certification for Javon Adote #015 English 4-12.
10. Jill Cutler Hodgman, chief of staff, Capital Preparatory Schools, spoke in support agenda item VII.C., Consideration of Capital Prep Petition for Declaratory Ruling.
11. Elizabeth Sked, Education Issues Specialist, CEA, spoke against agenda items VII.D., Approval of Certification for Javon Adote #015 English 4-12, and VII.E., Approval of Certification for Tyler Bugarchich Feldman #015 English 4-12. A copy of Ms. Sked's written statement is enclosed in the official file of this meeting.
12. Blanca Estela Camacho, of Danbury, spoke in support of agenda item VII.C., Consideration of Capital Prep Petition for Declaratory Ruling. A copy of Ms. Camacho's written statement is enclosed in the official file of this meeting.
13. Dianna Wentzell, of South Windsor, spoke in support of agenda item VII.D., Approval of Certification for Javon Adote #015 English 4-12. A copy of Ms. Wentzell's written statement is enclosed in the official file of this meeting.
14. Charles Wentzell, of Manchester, spoke in support of agenda item VII.D., Approval of Certification for Javon Adote #015 English 4-12. A copy of Ms. Wentzell's written statement is enclosed in the official file of this meeting.
15. James Rollins, Jr. waived his time stating that he will speak during agenda item VII.A., Renewal of State Charter: New Beginnings Family Academy, Bridgeport.
16. Mark Sommaruga, Esq., attorney representing Capital Prep Schools, spoke in support agenda item VII.C., Consideration of Capital Prep Petition for Declaratory Ruling.
17. Reverend Robyn Anderson, Pastor of Cross Street AME Zion Church in Middletown, spoke in support of agenda item VII.C., Consideration of Capital Prep Petition for Declaratory Ruling.

Public Participation ended.

### **III. Executive Session**

There was no executive session held.

### **IV. Consideration of Minutes:**

#### **A. April 2, 2025, State Board of Education Meeting**

Board Member Burr moved, and Board Member Zimmerman seconded, that the Board adopt the minutes of the April 2, 2025, State Board of Education Meeting.

#### **VOTE ON**

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

Motion carried unanimously.

### **V. Report of the Chair**

Vice Chair Benham highlighted the following:

- Reminded Board Members that CSDE Superintendent Update items are open to SBE members and are welcome to attend any event with notice.
- AI in Education Leadership Summit was attended by Board Member Gladys Labas at Central Connecticut State University (CCSU).
- NASBE member state and federal updates and engagements.
  - Attended by Board Members Paula Gilberto, Kristen Record, and Seth Zimmerman
  - Board Member Record presented a federal update of the state of Kansas' ESSER appeal
- Provided testimony to the State of Vermont's Education Committee on CT's cell phone guidance.
- Happy Teacher Appreciation Week shoutout to all teachers, including SBE member Kristen Record.
- Attended a Funds for Teachers Fellows Ceremony.
- Spoke at Saint Joseph's University 2025 Commencement Master's Ceremony.
- Announced Student Members Sophia Messina will be attending Yale University; and Sreenidi Bala will be attending Harvard University.

### **V. Report of the Commissioner and Agency Update**

The Commissioner welcomed the Board members and everyone to the meeting.

#### Teacher Appreciation Week

She opened by acknowledging Teacher Appreciation Week, and expressed a heartfelt "thank you to all the incredible educators for their dedication and passion." The Commissioner shared a video of students responding to the interview question "Why Is Your Teacher Special?"

She highlighted the launch of the ***Fourth Annual School Staff Appreciation Digital Backpack Program*** for businesses to opt-in and provide discounts to all PK-12 school staff, including Adult Education program staff, from June through September.

#### Federal Transition Updates

The Commissioner presented updates on federal transition actions related to education.

Grant Funding - The Department continues to access funding without interruptions for federal programs administered from both the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Agriculture for Child Nutrition Programs.

COVID Funding - The Department had received liquidation extension approval for the department and districts for utilization of COVID funds. The extension was subsequently rescinded on March 28, 2025. The department has submitted 11 projects that were previously approved.

Title VI Certification Compliance - The Commissioner also provided a federal update on the U.S. Department of Education's April 3, 2025, reminder of legal obligation communications regarding the department and local districts certification of compliance with Title VI, and the department's submitted response.

Board members engaged in discussion.

Commissioner Russell-Tucker noted that her written report was in the Board's Supplemental Folders.

The Commissioner highlighted events as follows:

- ❖ CSDE Office of Dyslexia and Reading Disabilities (ODRD), in partnership with the Bureau of Special Education, hosted a live-streamed virtual read-aloud event.
- ❖ CSDE hosted Day of AI: Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Education Leadership Summit at Central Connecticut State University.
- ❖ CSDE met with members of the New York Education Office of the Taipei Economic and Cultural Office to discuss the partnership between the CSDE and the Ministry of Education of Taiwan.
- ❖ Hosted Commissioner's Superintendent Advisory Panel to inform and support education policy.
  - Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection Commissioner Ronnell Higgins joined for a discussion around school safety.
- ❖ Held CSDE All Staff Meeting.
- ❖ EDUCATION PSA: Finish the Year Strong, In School, Together, Every Day!

#### Update Bridgeport Public Schools – Action to Address District Needs

Deputy Commissioner Charles Hewes referenced the report in the Board's Supplemental Folder and presented an overview of the CSDE intervention commencing with the 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 provided 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.

Deputy Commissioner Hewes highlighted three categories of new findings:

1. Four underfunded and underbudgeted line items for the 2024-2025 budget.
2. The new Bassick High School enrollment exceeding building capacity prior to opening.

3. School Climate matters of chronic absenteeism, and overrepresentation of Black, African-American, Hispanic, Latino and students with disabilities, in-school and out-of-school suspensions.

Board members engaged in discussion.

### **Update on Literacy Efforts**

Dr. Melissa Wlodarczyk Hickey, Director of the Center for Literacy Research and Reading Success, provided an update on the Center for Literacy Research and Reading Success with the Why, How, and What, and the legislative body of the Reading Leadership Implementation Council. She reviewed the Council's outline of the Center's responsibilities, goals, and strategies. Dr. Hickey highlighted the following:

- Reviewed Council projects as reviewers, development of Center goals, and co-created CT's K-3 Literacy Strategy.
- Providing implementation assistance to all districts: funding, professional learning.
- Fostering collaborative networks.
- Impact of Connecticut K-3 Literacy Progress with Voices from the Field.

Board members engaged in discussion.

Vice Chair Benham asked for a motion to move agenda item VII.F., Revised Menu of Grades K-3 Literacy Universal Screening Assessments, to follow "Updates on Literacy Efforts." Board Member Burr moved, and Board Member Record seconded, that agenda item VII.F. be moved to present.

## **VII. Items Requiring Action**

### **F. Revised Menu of Grades K-3 Literacy Universal Screening Assessments**

Vice Chair Benham asked for a motion on agenda item VII.F. Board Member Burr moved, and Board Member Record seconded, that the State Board of Education, pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes Section 10-14t:

1. Removes DIBELS 6<sup>th</sup> Edition and Amira Learning from the Approved Menu of Research-Based Grades K-3 Literacy Universal Screening Assessments;
2. Continues approval of the following early literacy universal screening assessments for a period of three years starting with the 2025-26 school year for use by all districts with all students in Grades K-3:
  - aimsWebPlus Early Literacy and Reading and aimswebPlus RAN;
    - easyCBM;
  - DIBELS 8<sup>th</sup> Edition paper;
  - mClass DIBELS 8<sup>th</sup> Edition on Amplify; and
  - Acadience Reading K-6 and Acadience RAN.
3. Approves a pilot of iReady Early Literacy Screening at the Stamford School District; and
4. Directs the CSDE to:

- a. assist districts currently using DIBELS 6<sup>th</sup> Edition or Amira Learning to transition to one of the other fully approved assessments;
- b. collect student benchmark performance data on the literacy universal screening assessments for all students in Grades K-3 from all districts, and report meaningful aggregate results publicly on EdSight; and
- c. conduct studies to maximize the efficacy of these early literacy assessments to support instruction, inform additional diagnoses, and develop future reading comprehension.

Chief Performance Officer Ajit Gopalakrishnan, together with external guests, Dr. Adrea Truckenmiller, an associate professor at Michigan State University's College of Education, and Dr. Michael Coyne, professor and department head at the University of Connecticut School of Education, presented.

Board engaged in discussion.

VOTE ON

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

Motion carried unanimously.

## IX. Consent Agenda

Vice Chair Benham asked if there was a Board member wishing to remove an item from Consent. Hearing none, she asked for a motion on agenda items IX.A., The Condition of Education in Connecticut 2023-24; and IX. B., Connecticut Educator Competencies for Structured Literacy and Dyslexia. Board Member Burr moved, and Board Member Harris seconded, that the State Board of Education approves the Consent Agenda.

### A. The Condition of Education in Connecticut 2023-24

**Resolved,** That the State Board of Education, pursuant to Section 10-4(b) of the Connecticut General Statutes, receives *The Condition of Education in Connecticut (2023-24)* and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

### B. Connecticut Educator Competencies for Structured Literacy and Dyslexia

**Resolved,** That the State Board of Education, pursuant to Section 10-14z of the Connecticut General Statutes, adopts the Connecticut Educator Competencies for Structured Literacy and Dyslexia.

VOTE ON

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

Motions carried unanimously.

Vice Chair Benham asked for a motion to move agenda item XI.A., Hartford Public Schools Fiscal Operations New Solutions K-12 Review Executive Summary of the Final Findings Report, to present. Board Member Record moved, and Board Member Burr seconded.

## **XI. Items for Discussion**

### **A. Hartford Public Schools Fiscal Operations New Solutions K-12 Review Executive Summary of the Final Findings Report**

Deputy Commissioners Charles Hewes and Sinthia Sone-Moyano, and Division Director Bryan Klimkiewicz, together Nate Levenson, President of New Solutions K-12, presented. Mr. Klimkiewicz provided an overview of the work with New Solutions K-12, and introduced Mr. Levenson who presented on Key Findings to their review of special education in Hartford Public Schools.

Board engaged in discussion.

Vice Chair Benham asked for a motion to move agenda items VII.D. and VII.E. to the present place on the agenda. Board Member Record moved, and Board Member Zimmerman seconded that they be moved.

## **VII. Items Requiring Action**

### **D. Approval of Certification for Javon Adote #015 English 4-12**

Vice Chair Benham asked for a motion on agenda item VII.D. Board Member Harris moved, and Board Member Zimmerman seconded, that pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.) Section 10-145bb(b), the State Board of Education determines that Javon Adote presents a combination of education and experience that is the equivalent of the education and experience required under Section 10-145bb(b) and thereby waives the requirements set forth in C.G.S. Section 10-145bb(a) and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action to issue an Initial Educator Certificate endorsed for English, 4-12 (#015).

Chief Talent Officer Shuana Tucker, Education Consultant Kaylan Ricciardi, and Education Consultant Julianne Frost, presented.

Board engaged in discussion.

#### **VOTE ON**

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

Motion carried unanimously.

**E. Approval of Certification for Tyler Bugarchich Feldman #015 English 4-12**

Vice Chair Benham asked for a motion on agenda item VII.E. Board Member Harris moved, and Board Member Zimmerman seconded, that pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.) Section 10-145bb(b), the State Board of Education determines that Tyler Bugarchich Feldman presents a combination of education and experience that is the equivalent of the education and experience required under Section 10-145bb(b) and thereby waives the requirements set forth in C.G.S. Section 10-145bb(a) and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action to issue an Initial Educator Certificate endorsed for English, 4-12 (#015).

Chief Talent Officer Shuana Tucker, Education Consultant Kaylan Ricciardi, and Education Consultant Julianne Frost, presented.

**VOTE ON**

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

Motion carried unanimously.

**A. Renewal of State Charter: New Beginnings Family Academy, Bridgeport**

Vice Chair Benham asked for a motion on agenda item VII.A. Board Member Record moved, and Board Member Labas seconded, that the State Board of Education, pursuant to Section 10-66bb of the Connecticut General Statutes, renews the charter of New Beginnings Family Academy from July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2028, subject to the conditions and recommendations set forth in the Commissioner's May 7, 2025, memorandum to the State Board of Education, and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

Chief Turnaround Officer Dr. Melissa Jenkins, with school representatives, Collette Fearon, Interim Director, Don Foley, Board Chair, and Pamela Dalton, Chief Academic Officer, presented.

**VOTE ON**

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

Motion carried unanimously.

**B. Renewal of State Charter: The Bridge Academy, Bridgeport**

Vice Chair Benham asked for a motion on agenda item VII.B. Board Member Harris 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 The Bridge Academy from July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2029, subject to the conditions and recommendations set forth in the



Commissioner's May 7, 2025, memorandum to the State Board of Education, and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

Chief Turnaround Officer Dr. Melissa Jenkins, with school representative, Tyrone Elliott, School Superintendent, and Dr. James Rawlins, Board Chair, presented.

VOTE ON

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

Motion carried unanimously.

**C. Petition for a Declaratory Ruling – Capital Preparatory Schools, Inc. and Capital Preparatory Middletown Charter School Planning Committee**

Vice Chair Benham asked for a motion on agenda item VII.B. Board Member Harris moved, and Board Member Record seconded, that pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.) Section 4-176, the State Board of Education agrees to issue a declaratory ruling on the eight issues set forth in the Petition for Declaratory Ruling filed on March 18, 2025, by Capital Preparatory Schools, Inc. and Capital Preparatory Middletown Charter School Planning Committee and further directs that the Commissioner, through the Connecticut State Department of Education's Division of Legal and Governmental Affairs (DLGA), take the following actions:

- (1) Provide notice to the public and interested parties as deemed necessary that the Board will issue declaratory rulings on the eight issues set forth at pages ten through eleven of the Petition;
- (2) Convene a scheduling conference among the Petitioners, any interested parties who have sought and been granted party status, and the DLGA, the purpose of which scheduling conference will be to set dates and procedures for the filing of petitions, motions, briefs, and to also set a date for the Board's deliberation on and issuance of such declaratory rulings;
- (3) Provide the Board with the materials received from Petitioners and interested parties, or a summary thereof, and other materials as appropriate, including but not necessarily limited to the recommendation of the CSDE in order to allow the Board to deliberate on and issue declaratory rulings; and
- (4) Take other actions necessary to implement the issuance of declaratory rulings on these issues.

Legal Director Mike McKeon, and Staff Attorney Louis Todisco, presented.

The Board engaged in discussion on the declaratory process.

A clarification was provided to the Board concerning the effect of voting for a declaratory ruling.

**VOTE ON**

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

Motion carried unanimously.

**VIII. Financial Matters**

There were no financial matters presented.

**X. Committee Reports**

**A. Academic Standards and Assessment**

Vice Chair Benham reported that the committee will meet on May 20, 2025. She encouraged other Board members to attend and gain insight on the committee's work.

**B. Accountability and Support**

Committee Chair Benham reported that the committee will meet on May 15, 2025.

**C. Finance, Audit, and Budget**

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

**D. Legislation and Policy Development**

Committee Chair Burr reported that the committee met after the adjournment of the April Board meeting, and there was no meeting scheduled for today. She noted that there will be a meeting in June.

**E. Connecticut Technical Education and Career System Board**

Vice Chair Benham reported that no report had been provided by CTECS. She confirmed that a new CTECS superintendent had been hired.

**F. NASBE**

Vice Chair Benham reported that the next member engagement will be on Monday, June 2, 2025, at 4:00 p.m.

**G. SERC**

Vice Chair Benham referenced her written report. She noted SERC's Dismantling Systemic Racism Conference on May 9, 2025. She then highlighted a sentence from SERC Executive Director Dr. Ingrid M. Canady's letter to Governor Lamont: "I am reaching out to express deep concern about the future of SERC."

Vice Chair Benham adjourned the meeting at 1:41 p.m.

Prepared by: \_\_\_\_\_  
Charlene M. Russell-Tucker, Secretary  
State Board of Education