

# **Connecticut State Board of Education Hartford**

## **State Board of Education Meeting**

**September 3, 2025**

(Approved October 8, 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, September 3, 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=25249>.

### **I. Call to Order**

Vice Chairperson Erin Benham called the meeting to order at 9:33 a.m.

Present: Erin D. Benham, Vice Chairperson  
Samarth Basanth, Student Member  
Bonnie E. Burr  
Dr. Aynsley Diamond (designee for Interim Chancellor Dr. John Maduko, Ex Officio)  
Donald F. Harris, Jr.  
Gladys B. Labas  
Hansika Lenkala, Student Member  
Dr. Alice Pritchard (designee for Christine Benz, Ex Officio)  
Kristen A. Record  
Seth D. Zimmerman

Absent: Paula S. Gilberto  
Kelli-Marie Vallieres, Ex Officio

### **Oath of Office**

Attorney Michael P. McKeon, Commissioner of the Superior Court, administered the Oaths of Office to the two newly appointed 2025-26 student members (i) Samarth Basanth, and (ii) Hansika Lenkala. Copies of the Oaths of Office are enclosed in the official file of this meeting.

### **II. Public Participation**

1. Dr. Ira Rubenzahl, West Hartford, member of the Capital Preparatory Schools Board of Directors, spoke in support of the Capital Prep Middletown Charter School. A copy of Dr. Rubenzahl's written testimony is enclosed in the official file of this meeting.

2. Rich Beganski, Middletown, an employee of Capital Prep, spoke regarding the establishment of Capital Prep Middletown Charter School. A copy of Mr. Beganski's written testimony is enclosed in the official file of this meeting.
3. \*Paul Gionfriddo, of Middletown, spoke regarding Capital Prep Middletown Charter School.
4. Sebastian Guiliano, of Middletown, spoke in support of Capital Prep Middletown Charter School.
5. Tom Stringfellow, of Manchester, spoke on various topics.
6. Angela Newman, of North Haven, spoke in support of agenda item VII.B., Approval of Certification for Angela Newman **#113** Integrated Early Childhood/Elementary Education N-3 and Special Education N-K. A copy of Ms. Newman's written testimony is enclosed in the official file of this meeting.
7. Dr. Steve Perry, of West Haven and head of schools and founder of Capital Prep, spoke regarding Capital Prep Middletown Charter School.

\*At the October 8, 2025, Board meeting, Vice Chair Benham stated that under Public Participation, #3, John Gionfriddo, should be corrected to Paul Gionfriddo in the minutes for September 3, 2025.

Public Participation ended.

### **III. Executive Session**

There was no executive session held.

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

Vice Chair Benham highlighted the following:

- Attended the SBE Retreat, held on August 20, 2025, at Norwich Free Academy in Norwich.
  - Shared that the two students were appointed and were able to attend the Retreat.
  - Thanked Norwich Free Academy for hosting the SBE.
  - Thanked Dr. Ingrid Canady, Executive Director, SERC, for being the Facilitator.
  - Thanked Paolo DeMaria, President and CEO, **NASBE**, for his presentation
- Attended the Bridgeport Public Schools 2025 Convocation on August 27, 2025, at the Hartford HealthCare Amphitheatre in Bridgeport.
  - She thanked the Board members who attended for their support.
- Reminded Board of the 2025 Superintendents' Back-to-School Meeting on Tuesday, September 9, 2025, at the Science Center in Hartford.
- Announced the CABA Board of Directors Meeting on September 18, 2025.
- Reminded Board that the October 8, 2025, SBE meeting is scheduled as an evening meeting at 4:30 p.m.

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

#### **A. June 11, 2025, State Board of Education Meeting**

Board Member Harris moved, and Board Member Labas seconded, that the Board adopt the minutes of the June 11, 2025, State Board of Education Meeting.

VOTE ON

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

Motion carried unanimously.

### **B. August 20, 2025, Special State Board of Education Meeting**

Board Member Burr, and Board Member Record, that the Board adopt the minutes of the August 20, 2025, Special State Board of Education Meeting.

VOTE ON

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

Motion carried unanimously.

### **A. August 20, 2025, State Board of Education Retreat**

Board Member Record moved, and Board Member Burr seconded, that the Board adopt the minutes of the August 20, 2025, State Board of Education Retreat

VOTE ON

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

Motion carried unanimously.

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

The Commissioner welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the 2025-2026 school year.

- ❖ Reported that the school year was underway with enthusiasm, optimism for a successful year focused on “***Unlocking Lifelong Potential***,” the CSDE’s theme for this year.
- ❖ Welcomed the two new student members.

The Commissioner made reference to the concern for school safety and security and expressed that schools should be safe spaces for learners, and Connecticut works collaboratively across agencies, specifically with sister agency the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection (DESPP) to

support school districts. She invited Division Director John Frassinelli to speak on DESPP's school security safety plans.

#### Update on School Security and Safety Plans

Division Director John Frassinelli, School Health, Nutrition, and Family Services, presented on three aspects of school security and safety plans.

- ❖ All Hazards School Security and Safety Plans.
- ❖ Immigration Activities.
- ❖ SEL and Mental Health.

Mr. Frassinelli was joined at the table by Superintendents Dr. Alexandra Estrella, Norwalk Public Schools and Dr. Susan Nash-Ditzel, Killingly Public Schools. Superintendents Estrella and Nash-Ditzel each presented and shared their district's experience of participating in the CSDE's Behavioral Health Pilot program for social-emotional learning and mental health.

Commissioner Russell-Tucker thanked the superintendents for their attendance and presentations.

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

#### Update on Hartford Public Schools Fiscal Operations – Financial Analysis of Hartford

The Commissioner invited Chief Strategic Planning Officer Keith Norton to present to the Board. He summarized that it was initially at the June 5, 2024, meeting that the Board voted and authorized action concerning Hartford Public Schools Financial Management and the three-prong approach: (i) Magnet School Assessment: Optimizing Funds Utilization; (ii) Special Education Services Assessment and Enhancement; and (iii) Improvement of Financial Systems.

Mr. Norton was joined by Justin Cleary, Office of Internal Audit (OIA), and Staff Attorney Matthew Venhorst, Legal and Governmental Affairs.

Mr. Cleary reported that OIA was charged with the review of Hartford's utilization of state magnet school funding to support the operation of interdistrict magnet schools. He summarized that the OIA review included financial analyses of the funding of HPS magnet schools. Mr. Cleary reported that the findings and conclusions of OIA's analyses will be provided to the CSDE's Legal Office to be evaluated for compliance with the most recent Stipulation and Court Order of the Sheff v. O'Neill case, as well as statutory requirements for interdistrict magnet schools.

The Board engaged in questions.

Attorney Venhorst provided an overview of the legal and historical background of laws, Sheff v. O'Neill, Sheff magnet funding, as well as key components of the Phase V Stipulation and Order, Sheff Magnet Schools, Hartford's Theoretical Magnet Funding Framework, and impacts of Hartford student enrollment. Attorney Venhorst concluded that the Comprehensive School Choice Plan (CCP) and magnet school laws require Sheff magnets to have equivalent levels of funding.

Board members engaged in questions and discussion.

Dr. Alice Pritchard, Executive Director, CTECS, raised concerns with the representation of CTECS on the slide deck and requested clarification that the three CTECS schools noted were included in the School Choice Lottery program as options, but that the magnet grant funding resources do not flow to CTECS.

Commissioner Russell-Tucker confirmed that the slide deck would be updated for better clarification of Dr. Pritchard's concern.

#### Student Assessment and Attendance Results

Chief Performance Officer Ajit Gopalakrishnan provided an overview on the end of year state assessments of English Language Arts, Math, and Science. He reported an overall improvement statewide in ELA, mathematics, and science in all student groups and in all grades, and in attendance. Chronic absenteeism rates declined for the third consecutive year.

Commissioner Russell-Tucker referenced the press conference of August 28, 2025, "*Connecticut Students See Gains in Test Scores and Attendance*," and the superintendents that spoke on the value of the initiatives the agency is offering them for support.

The Commissioner referenced her participation on a national panel, *The Power of Presence*, hosted by the American Enterprise Institute, with state agency leaders from Ohio and Virginia on how states can address chronic absenteeism and their local efforts on attendance.

The Board members engaged in questions and discussion.

#### Educator Vacancy Update

Chief Performance Officer Ajit Gopalakrishnan reported that data is collected twice a year in August and February. He clarified that the vacancies are based on budgeted positions that districts can actively fill. He concluded that teaching and special service vacancies have declined but paraeducator vacancies have increased.

Deputy Commissioner Sinthia Sone-Moyano provided additional reporting on the paraeducator vacancies and highlighted the assessment being a barrier. She reported that the CSDE has partnered with CCSU to offer the ParaPro Assessment prep test.

Mr. Gopalakrishnan reported on educator pathways to enter the field of teaching through educator preparation programs in CT, and others through Enhanced Reciprocity, the tracking of data.

The Board engaged with questions.

## **VII. Items Requiring Action**

### **A. Approval of Certification for Jose Falcon #049 Music PreK-12**

Vice Chair Benham asked for a motion on agenda item VII.A. Board Member Zimmerman moved, and Board Member Labas seconded, that pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes Section (C.G.S.) Section 10-145bb(b), the State Board of Education determines that Jose Falcon 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 Music, PreK-12 (#049).

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

Board engaged in discussion.

**VOTE ON**

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

Motion carried unanimously.

**VII. Items Requiring Action**

**B. Approval of Certification for Angela Newman #113 Integrated Early Childhood/Elementary Education N-3 and Special Education N-K**

Vice Chair Benham asked for a motion on agenda item VII.A. Board Member Labas moved, and Board Member Harris seconded, that pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.) Section 10-145bb(b), the State Board of Education determines that Angela Newman 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 Early Childhood/Elementary Ed. N-3 and Special Ed. N-K (#113).

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

Board engaged in discussion.

**VOTE ON**

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

Motion carried unanimously.

**VII. Financial Matters**

**A. Fiscal Year 2026-27 Mid-Term Budget Technical Adjustments**

Chief Fiscal Officer Jessica Brunetti presented on the mid-term technical adjustments.

Board Member Harris raised his concern that this budget should have been presented to the Finance, Audit, and Budget Committee.

## **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., Continuing Approval of the Office of Higher Education Alternate Route to Certification Educator Preparation Programs; IX. B., Continuing Approval of Mitchell College Educator Preparation Programs; and IX.C., Continuing Program Approval of the Area Cooperative Educational Services, Alternate Route to Certification for Library Media Specialist.

Board Member Labas moved, and Board Member Harris seconded, that the State Board of Education approves the Consent Agenda.

### **A. Continuing Approval of the Office of Higher Education Alternate Route to Certification Educator Preparation Programs**

**Resolved**, That the State Board of Education, pursuant to Section 10-145d-9(g)(1)(A) of the Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies, grants continuing approval to the Connecticut Office of Higher Education (OHE) Alternate Route to Certification Program (ARC) for the period September 3, 2025, through October 31, 2030, contingent upon its successful completion of the reaccreditation process beginning in Fall 2029 by the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), for the purpose of certifying graduates from OHE ARC in the following areas and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action:

<b>Program</b>	<b>Grade Level</b>	<b>Program Level</b>
Business Education	7-12	Initial
English	7-12	Initial
Mathematics	7-12	Initial
English	7-12	Initial
Science		
Biology	7-12	Initial
Chemistry	7-12	Initial
Earth Science	7-12	Initial
General Science	7-12	Initial
Physics	7-12	Initial
Music Education	PK-12	Initial
Family and Consumer Science	PK-12	Initial
Technology Education	PK-12	Initial
World Languages:		
Mandarin Chinese	7-12	Initial
French	7-12	Initial
German	7-12	Initial
Italian	7-12	Initial
Latin and Classical Humanities	7-12	Initial
Spanish	7-12	Initial
Portuguese	7-12	Initial
Russian	7-12	Initial

Other World Language	7-12	Initial
Elementary World Language		
Mandarin Chinese	K-6	Initial
French	K-6	Initial
German	K-6	Initial
Italian	K-6	Initial
Spanish	K-6	Initial
Portuguese	K-6	Initial
Russian	K-6	Initial
Other World Language	K-6	Initial

## **B. Continuing Approval of Mitchell College Educator Preparation Programs**

**Resolved,** That the State Board of Education, pursuant to Section 10-145d-9(g)(1)(A) of the Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies, grants continuing approval to Mitchell College for the period September 3, 2025, to October 31, 2030, contingent upon Mitchell Colleges' successful completion of the reaccreditation process beginning Fall 2029 by the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP), for the purpose of certifying graduates from Mitchell College in the following area and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

<u>Program</u>	<u>Grades</u>	<u>Certification</u>	<u>Program Type</u>
Early Childhood	Nursery-Grade 3	Initial	Undergraduate

## **C. Continuing Program Approval of the Area Cooperative Educational Services, Alternate Route to Certification for Library Media Specialist**

**Resolved,** That the State Board of Education, pursuant to Section 10-145d-9(g)(1)(A) of the Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies, grants full approval to the Alternate Route to Certification Library Media Specialist (ARCLMS), administered by the Area Cooperative Educational Services (ACES), for the period October 1, 2025, through September 30, 2032, with annual progress monitoring conducted using program key assessment performance data, for the purpose of certifying graduates from the ARCLMS program, and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

### **VOTE ON**

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

Motions carried unanimously.

## **XI. Items for Discussion**

### **A. Update on Bridgeport Public Schools Action to Address District Needs**

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 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) the opportunity to work with the district with the Commissioner reserving the right to approve of the hiring of a new superintendent.

Deputy Commissioner Hewes conducted the BPS update with a two-part presentation.

#### CliftonLarsonAllen LLP (CLA) Presentation – Part I

Emilie Deveraux, Signing Director, and Ayla Grady, CliftonLarsonAllen LLP (CLA), the vendor contracted by the CSDE to conduct a forensic audit of BPS, attended the meeting virtually and presented on their forensic audit summary of BPS. CLA presented on the scope, purpose, and focus of work, methods for data collection for work performed and analysis, key findings, and concluded with 34 recommendations for BPS.

#### Technical Assistance Team Presentation – Part II

Deputy Commissioner Hewes was joined at the table with three of the four Technical Assistance Team members. Dr. Hewes introduced BPS Technical Team members David Erwin, Ed Arum, and Dr. David Abbey. Each presented on their work, findings, methodologies, and highlighted the sustainable strategies implemented and accomplishments to date. Dr. Hewes commended the Technical Assistance Team for the magnitude and key successes of their work.

Commissioner Russell-Tucker thanked the Technical Assistance Team members for their presentation, and noted that member, Dr. Ingrid M. Canady, had previously presented to the Board at an earlier Board meeting.

Board members engaged in questions and discussion.

### **B. Implementation of State Board of Education Comprehensive Plan**

Deputy Commissioner Charles Hewes referenced the Comprehensive Plan 2023-2028 is focused on four priorities that the SBE and CT want to achieve for students:

- Ensuring equitable access to education;
- Ensuring safe and healthy learning environments;
- Elevating Connecticut's curriculum frameworks; and
- Creating opportunities for students to explore multiple career pathway options.

He presented that the Plan is this agency's charge to advance education and spoke on the Indicators and Actions for the SDE to track progress to achieving these outcomes.

## **X. Committee Reports**

### **A. Academic Standards and Assessment**

Vice Chair Benham reported that the committee will meet on September 23, 2025.

**B. Accountability and Support**

Committee Chair Benham reported that the committee will meet on September 10, 2025.

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

Committee Chair Harris reported that the committee met on August 26, 2025, and reviewed the 2025-2026 Audit Plan, updates on audits in progress, and some financial matters. Mr. Harris thanked Chief Strategic Officer Keith Norton for his leadership in the temporary absence of Director Coates.

**D. Legislation and Policy Development**

Committee Chair Burr reported that the committee met on June 11, 2025, and will meet after the adjournment of today's Board meeting.

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

In Dr. Pritchard's absence Chief Strategic Planning Officer Keith Norton provided a report. Mr. Norton reported that all CTECS schools started on August 28, 2025, with 11,709 high school students. He highlighted 1,400 students registered for Adult Education and shared the availability of new and expanded programs for this fall.

**F. NASBE**

Vice Chair Benham reported on the next Member Exchange for Monday, September 8, 2025, at 4:00 p.m., and on October 6, 2025, at 4:00 p.m.

**G. SERC**

Vice Chair Benham referenced her written report. She highlighted a restorative practices presentation for suspension and expulsion from the SERC Board meeting.

Vice Chair Benham asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Board Member Burr moved, and Board Member Record seconded the motion to adjourn.

Vice Chair Benham adjourned the meeting at 1:57 p.m.

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