

**Connecticut State Board of Education
Hartford**

State Board of Education Meeting

October 8, 2025

(Approved November 5, 2025)

Pursuant to notice filed with the Secretary of the State and posted on the agency's website, the members the of State Board of Education (hereinafter "Board") held a meeting on Wednesday, October 8, 2025, in the Library/Media Center, at North Haven High School, 221 Elm Street, North Haven, Connecticut. Public access to the building allowed for public attendance at the meeting.

The meeting can be viewed here: <https://youtube.com/live/svRUUH2ZqcM>.

I. Call to Order

Vice Chairperson Erin Benham called the meeting to order at 4:31 p.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)
Paula S. Gilberto
Donald F. Harris, Jr.
Gladys B. Labas
Hansika Lenkala, Student Member
Dr. Alice Pritchard (CTECS designee, Ex Officio)
Kristen A. Record
Seth D. Zimmerman

Absent: Kelli-Marie Vallieres, Ex Officio

Present: Assistant Attorney General Darren P. Cunningham, counsel for the Connecticut State Board of Education for agenda item VIII.A.

Oath of Office

Attorney Michael P. McKeon, Commissioner of the Superior Court, administered the Oath of Office to newly appointed Board member Andrew J. Carlson, MD. A copy of the Oath of Office is enclosed in the official file of this meeting.

II. Public Participation

Vice Chair Benham announced that due to holding an evening meeting in a high school, there was a required hard stop of the meeting by 8:30 p.m. Vice Chair Benham further announced that Public Participation would be held for two (2) hours.

1. Luz Bueno, Darien, shared concerns related to her daughter's educational records and disparities at the district level. A copy of Ms. Bueno's written testimony is enclosed in the official file of this meeting.
2. Mark Sommaruga, Esq., attorney representing Capital Prep Schools, shared his objections to agenda item VIII.A., Capital Preparatory Schools' Petition for a Declaratory Ruling.
3. Lyla Fulgence, sixth grader at Capital Prep Harbor Middle School, spoke in favor of opening up Capital Prep Middletown.
4. Kason Foster, Capital Prep student, spoke in support of opening Capital Prep in Middletown.
5. Anita Ford Saunders, co-chair of Capital Prep Middletown Planning Committee, spoke in support of opening Capital Prep Middletown.
6. Dr. Michael Christie, a pastor in Middletown, spoke in support of Capital Prep Middletown.
7. Aisha LaTorre, a senior at Capital Prep Harbor Upper School, spoke in support of Capital Prep Middletown.
8. Laura Dumpley, Middletown, in support of opening Capital Prep Middletown.
9. Pastor Steven Vaughn, Middletown, spoke in support of opening Capital Prep Middletown.
10. Kauana Chiraski, a student at Capital Prep, spoke in support of the opening of Capital Prep Middletown.
11. Dr. Steve Perry, head of schools and founder of Capital Prep, spoke on an impartial hearing officer being appointed to address the Capital Prep Petition for Declaratory Ruling and in opposition of agenda item VIII.A., Capital Preparatory Schools' Petition for a Declaratory Ruling.
12. Amy Obas, a Capital Prep student, spoke in support of the opening Capital Prep Middletown.
13. Thomas B. Reyes, Sandy Hook, spoke in support of funding for the Danbury Charter School.
14. Steve Tracy, chair of the Planning Team for the Danbury Charter School, spoke in support of the opening of the Danbury Charter School.
15. Elhads Diallo, a Capital Prep student, spoke in support of the opening of Capital Prep Middletown.
16. Uyoisa Obunkor, a Capital Prep student, spoke in support of the opening of Capital Prep in Middletown.
17. Briana Javier, a Capital Prep student, spoke in support of Capital Prep Middletown.
18. Amari Martindale, a Capital Prep student, spoke in support of Capital Prep Middletown.
19. Tomás Reyes Jr., Oxford, spoke in support of funding for the Danbury Charter School.

20. Reverend Grace Reyes, Oxford, spoke in support of funding of the Danbury Charter School.
21. Isa LaTorre, a Capital Prep student, spoke in support of Capital Prep in Middletown.
22. Kayandra Smith, a Capital Prep student, spoke in support of Capital Prep in Middletown.
23. Samuel Abraham, a Capital Prep student, spoke in support of Capital Prep Middletown.
24. Neigeme Jones, a Capital Prep student, spoke in support of Capital Prep Middletown.
25. Maria Matos, vice president and chief programs officer of LEAD, spoke in support of funding for the Danbury Charter School.
26. July Milano, Danbury, spoke in support of the opening of the Danbury Charter School.
27. Braulia Guzman, spoke in support of the opening of the Danbury Charter School.
28. Lucas Pimementel, Danbury, and CEO of LEAD, spoke in support of funding for the Danbury Charter School.
29. Zonia Paulino, spoke in support of funding for the opening of the Danbury Charter School.
30. Iandra Lopez, spoke in support of the opening of the Danbury Charter School.
31. Ramona Santelises, state president of the Dominican-American Coalition of CT, Inc., spoke in support of funding to open the Danbury Charter School.
32. Adriana Mohammed, a Capital Prep student, spoke in support of the opening of Capital Prep Middletown.
33. Jonathan Soto, representing the Dominican-American Coalition of CT, spoke in support of the opening of the Danbury Charter School.
34. Mel Baptista, co-founder of the Brazilian Community Center of CT, spoke in support of the opening of the Danbury Charter School.
35. Delci Carvajal, spoke in support of the opening of the Danbury Charter School.
36. Attorney Lauren Koster, managing attorney for the Danbury Charter School Planning Team, spoke in support of her clients and shared her disagreement with agenda item VIII.A., Capital Preparatory Schools' Petition for a Declaratory Ruling.
37. John Taylor, CEO of Elevate Charter Schools, the management company for the Danbury Charter School, spoke in support of the petition for Capital Prep Middletown.
38. Jessica Roman, of New Haven, spoke in support of funding of the Danbury Charter School.
39. Arlene, spoke in support of funding for the Danbury Charter School.
40. Iris Vizcarrondo, a parent, spoke in support of funding for the Danbury Charter School.

Vice Chair Benham ended Public Participation at 6:31 p.m.

III. Executive Session

There was no executive session held.

Vice Chair Benham asked for a motion to move agenda item XI.A., Recognition of the 2025-2026 Educators Rising Student Cabinet and Aspiring Educators Program, to present on the agenda. Board Member Record moved, and Board member Burr seconded, that agenda item XI.A., be moved.

XI. Items for Discussion

A. Recognition of the 2025-2026 Educators Rising Student Cabinet and Aspiring Educators Program

Chief Talent Officer Dr. Shuana Tucker, Education Consultant Dr. Jessica Ocasio, and Elizabeth Sked, Education Issues Specialist, CEA, presented to the Board. They explained that the Educators Rising and Aspiring Educators Programs are a direct connection to the state's efforts to increase the diversity of Connecticut's educator workforce.

Dr. Ocasio presented on the Connecticut Educator Rising program pathway which provides students with early exposure, skill development, and mentorships for aspiring educators to bridge students in middle and high school to college to consider teaching as a vocation.

Elizabeth Sked, Education Issues Specialist, CEA, presented on her role as advisor to the State Aspiring Educator Program and two Aspiring Educators, Hannah Spinner, and Rebecca Singleton presented on their program experiences.

The Board members engaged in discussion.

VIII. Items Requiring Action

Vice Chair Benham introduced Assistant Attorney General Darren P. Cunningham as counsel for the Connecticut State Board of Education, for agenda item VIII.A.

A. Capital Preparatory Schools' Petition for a Declaratory Ruling

Vice Chair Benham asked for a motion on agenda item VIII.A., Capital Preparatory Schools' Petition for a Declaratory Ruling.

Board Member Burr moved, and Board Member Harris seconded, that pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes Sections 4-5, 4-166(a), and 4-176, the Connecticut State Board of Education hereby declares as follows with respect to the requested rulings set forth in Capital Prep's March 14, 2025, Petition for Declaratory Ruling.

1. Funding authority for charter schools rests solely and absolutely with the General Assembly under Connecticut General Statutes §10-66bb(a)(2).
2. Neither Connecticut General Statutes Section 10-66ee(k) nor any other provision of the Connecticut General Statutes creates or invests in the State Board of Education or the

Connecticut State Department of Education any funding authority, obligation, or right independent of or in addition to the General Assembly's sole and absolute funding authority under Connecticut General Statutes Section 10-66bb(a)(2).

3. Connecticut General Statutes Section 10-66ee(k) applies only to those schools that the General Assembly has expressly funded pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes Section 10-66bb(a)(2). Therefore, as the General Assembly did not fund Capital Prep, Section 10-66ee(k) is inapplicable to Capital Prep.

4. Connecticut General Statutes §10-66ee(k) is applicable if, and only if, the General Assembly specifically funds more than one charter school in any fiscal year pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes §10-66bb(a)(2), and then is limited solely to those charter schools that, unlike Capital Prep, the General Assembly has expressly funded.

5. The criteria upon which all charter-school applicants are rated pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes §10-66bb(c) pertain solely to the application for the initial certificate of approval under Section 10-66bb(a)(1) and do not mandate or otherwise control General Assembly funding decisions.

6. The criteria set forth in Connecticut General Statutes §10-66ee(k) applies only to schools that the General Assembly has specifically funded pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes §10-66bb(a)(2). Therefore, given that the General Assembly expressly declined to fund Capital Prep, it was not a charter school under Connecticut law and Section 10-66ee(k), including but not limited to the criteria set forth therein, does not apply to Capital Prep.

7. Having not been funded by the General Assembly pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes §10-66bb(a)(2), Capital Prep was not and is not a charter school under either Section 10-66bb(a)(2), Section 10-66ee(k), or any other provision of the Connecticut General Statutes, nor is it legally entitled to be deemed a charter school.

8. The General Assembly having expressly declined to fund Capital Prep pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes §10-66bb(a)(2), Capital Prep was not and is not entitled to any funding from either the State Board of Education or the Connecticut State Department of Education under either Section 10-66bb(a)(2), Section 10-66ee(k), or any other provision of the Connecticut General Statutes.

9. The State Board of Education and the Connecticut State Department of Education acted lawfully in declining Capital Prep's demand for funding.

In conjunction with the foregoing rulings, the State Board further directs that the Commissioner, through the Connecticut State Department of Education's Division of Legal and Governmental Affairs (DLGA), take the necessary actions:

Legal Director Mike McKeon, Legal and Governmental Affairs, presented to the Board.

Board members engaged with questions and discussion.

VOTE ON

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

Motion carried.

Board Member Donald Harris left the meeting at approximately 7:30 p.m.

IV. Consideration of Minutes:

A. September 3, 2025, State Board of Education Meeting

Board Member Record moved, and Board Member Burr seconded, that the Board adopt the minutes of the September 3, 2025, State Board of Education Meeting with the requested edit to be made.

Vice Chair Benham stated an edit that was required to the September 3, 2025, minutes. She noted that under Public Participation, speaker 3, John Gionfriddo, should be corrected to Paul Gionfriddo in the minutes for September 3, 2025.

VOTE ON

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

Motion carried unanimously.

V. Report of the Chair

Vice Chair Benham highlighted the following:

- Welcomed newly appointed member Andrew J. Carlson, MD, to the Board.
- Thanked North Haven High School for hosting the Blue Ribbon Celebration and the State Board of Education meeting.
- Highlighted the start of the Charter School Renewal Public Hearings.
- Attended an EES Council meeting.
- Highlighted Upcoming Event Dates
 - Teacher of the Year Announcement
 - November 21, 2025, CABE/CAPPS Convention
 - December 2, 2025, Teacher of the Year celebration at the Bushnell.

X. Committee Reports

A. Academic Standards and Assessment

Vice Chair Benham reported that the committee met on September 23, 2025, with updates on AI pilot and K-12 World Language Curriculum.

B. Accountability and Support

Committee Chair Benham reported that the committee met on September 10, 2025, with a review of the ASC and Commissioner's Network monitoring, and review of the charter school renewal process. The committee will next meet on November 12, 2025.

C. Finance, Audit, and Budget

Board Member Burr reported on behalf of Committee Chair Harris. Chief Strategic Planning Officer Keith Norton and team were acknowledged for their work, status updates, and efforts towards staffing. The committee will meet on November 18, 2025.

D. Legislation and Policy Development

Committee Chair Burr reported that the committee met today before the Board meeting with two presentations.

E. Connecticut Technical Education and Career System Board

Dr. Pritchard, Executive Director, reported that CTECS data reports 11,700 students in the system, which is 500 more than last year. She noted a slight uptick in special education and highlighted special education training across the state for teachers on October 9, 2025.

F. NASBE

Vice Chair Benham reported on the two Member Exchanges held since the last Board meeting, and thanked Board members Record and Labas for attending. She announced that NASBE's 2025 Friend of Education will be presented to Secretary Miguel Cardona.

G. SERC

Vice Chair Benham referenced her written report. She highlighted SERC's work with special education and noted SERC's availability to assist CTECS with special education.

V. Report of the Commissioner and Agency Update

Commissioner Russell-Tucker referenced her written report in the Board's Supplemental Folders.

- Welcomed Dr. Andrew Carlson.
- Thanked superintendents and board members for attending the 2025 Superintendent's Back-To-School Meeting.
- Thanked Board members who attended the Blue Ribbon Celebration.
- Highlighted joining National expert Hedy Cheng, Executive Director of Attendance Works, on WTNH to participate in an interview highlighting the third consecutive year of progress in our attendance efforts in CT.
- Announced EdSight's new Seal of Biliteracy Dashboard that will be presented at a future meeting.

Industry Recognized Credentials

The Commissioner invited Deputy Commissioner Charles Hewes to present. He reported that the SDE Team identified the state's first list of more than 300 industry recognized credentials that are currently available to students across the state. He highlighted that the intent of this is to make sure districts know what is available so they can design programming to support students in a postsecondary career opportunity in earning these credentials.

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 reported that in July 2025, the agency had created the Hartford Public Schools Accountability and Support Team that was comprised of team members from across the agency and that the Team will provide technical assistance to HPS in meeting the recommendations identified in the final reports of the New Solutions K12 and Public Works LLC. He summarized that the Team has held two meetings with the new HPS superintendent and CFO, and the final report is being processed.

Board Member Zimmerman raised a comment on discussing differential need across schools related to *Sheff*.

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 update of the ongoing work and day-to-day support of the district by the Technical Assistance Team, related to the 34 recommendations noted in the forensic audit. In addition to continuing work alongside the district related to their fiscal processes, he highlighted accomplishments such as getting teachers into classrooms - reducing vacancies from 120 down to 40; and the Commissioner's leadership in getting students access to busses. He concluded with next steps concentrated on supporting the Bridgeport Board of Education, with the assistance of CABE, around the board's governance and the development of a robust set of policies; and (2) the design and development of the operational budget.

Board members engaged in discussion.

Federal Update

The Commissioner presented updates on federal grant awards during the federal shutdown.

IX. Financial Matters

A. Fiscal Year 2025-26 Budget Reduction and Reallocation Options

Vice Chair Benham asked for a motion on agenda item IX.A. Board Member Zimmerman moved, and Board Member Burr seconded, that the State Board of Education approves the Fiscal Year 2026-27 Budget Options and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

Jessica Brunetti, Chief of Fiscal/Administrative Services presented on the reduction and reallocation options.

VOTE ON

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

Motion carried unanimously.

X. 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 X.A., Reappointment of Members of the Impartial Hearing Board Panel; and X. B., Approval of 2025-2026 Annual Audit Plan.

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

A. Reappointment of Members of the Impartial Hearing Board Panel

Resolved, That the State Board of Education, pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes § 10-186(b) and Sections 10-145d-611(h), 10-145d-612(h), 10-145d-613(f), 10-4-12(f), and 10-4-22(c)(3) of the Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies, and other applicable provisions of law, hereby reappoints the following individuals to conduct hearings and render decisions as an impartial hearing board, or in any other capacity to which they may be appointed in accordance with law, for the period November 1, 2025, through October 31, 2028:

Jane Ford Shaw
Melinda A. Powell
Patrick L. Kennedy

and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

B. Approval of 2025-2026 Annual Audit Plan

Resolved, that the State Board of Education adopts the Annual Audit Plan for the period of July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2026, and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

VOTE ON

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

Motions carried unanimously.

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

Vice Chair Benham adjourned the meeting at 8:00 p.m.

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