

**Connecticut State Board of Education
Hartford**

State Board of Education Meeting

December 3, 2025

Draft Minutes

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, December 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://youtu.be/oqJLIUHrzo>.

I. Call to Order

Vice Chairperson Erin Benham called the meeting to order at 9:35 a.m.

Present: Erin D. Benham, Vice Chairperson
 Samarth Basanth, Student Member
 Bonnie E. Burr
 Andrew J. Carlson
 Paula S. Gilberto
 Donald F. Harris, Jr.
 Gladys B. Labas
 Hansika Lenkala, Student Member
 Dr. John Maduko, Ex Officio
 Evan Pitkoff
 Dr. Alice Pritchard, designee for CTECS
 Kristen A. Record

Absent: Kelli-Marie Vallieres, Ex Officio
 Seth D. Zimmerman

II. Public Participation

1. Dr. Violet Jiménez Sims, Director of Academic Programming and Legislative Affairs, Connecticut Teacher Residency Program, Ushawanda Mithell, Director of Residency and Financial Management, Connecticut Residency Program, and Dr. Niralee Patel-Lye, Director of Recruitment, Connecticut Residency Program, each spoke on the programs aspects of building educator diversity and educator retention pathways and the need for funding sustainability of the program.
2. Tom Stringfellow, of Manchester, spoke on various topics.

3. Elizabeth Sked, Education Issues Specialist, CEA, spoke on the partnership and collaboration between the Aspiring Educators and Educators Rising Programs.

III. Executive Session

There was no executive session held.

IV. Consideration of Minutes:

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

Board Member Burr moved, and Board Member Labas seconded, that the Board adopt the minutes of the November 5, 2025, State Board of Education Meeting.

VOTE ON

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

Motion carried unanimously.

V. Report of the Chair

Vice Chair Benham highlighted the following:

- Attended the School Discipline Collaborative on November 19, 2025.
- Attended the CT Educators Rising Leadership Symposium on November 20, 2025.
- Thanked all the Board members who presided over charter school renewal hearings.
- Attended the CABE/CAPSS Convention held on November 21, 2025.
 - Highlighted the "Meeting with the State Board of Education" session workshop.
 - Thanked the Board members for their attendance and support of the SBE panel.
- Congratulated the Connecticut State Department of Education for being awarded the "Friend of Public Education Award" at the CABE/CAPSS Convention.
- Announced that the 2025 Teacher of the Year Ceremony was rescheduled to December 16, 2025.

X. Committee Reports

A. Academic Standards and Assessment

Vice Chair Benham reported that the committee will be meeting on January 13, 2026, and announced that Board Member Paula S. Gilberto has accepted to chair the Committee.

B. Accountability and Support

Committee Chair Benham reported that the committee will meet twice before the January 2026 SBE meeting on December 10, 2025, and January 7, 2026.

C. Finance, Audit, and Budget

Committee Chair Harris reported that the committee's last quarterly meeting was held on November 18, 2025. Mr. Harris thanked Chief Strategic Planning Officer Keith Norton for his continued outstanding leadership as the Interim Program Director.

D. Legislation and Policy Development

Committee Chair Burr reported that the committee met on November 5, 2025. She noted that the majority of the discussion was around the presentations and proposals of the CT Educator Preparation and Certification Board (CEPCB). She concluded that the committee was meeting today, at 1:00 p.m.

E. Connecticut Technical Education and Career System Board

Dr. Pritchard reported that she celebrated a one-year anniversary in her role at CTECS. Dr. Pritchard then provided highlights of her reflection of the past year: visiting all 20 schools, the fiscal progress made, grant-related issues, and the continued partnership with the CSDE.

F. Connecticut State Colleges and Universities

Dr. Maduko, stated that CSCU is serving nearly 100,000 learners across six institutions and mirrors K-12 here in CT; 95% of students are from CT; 80% of graduates remain, live, and work in CT. He highlighted the expansion of access by serving over 10,000 early college and dual enrollment students in partnership with the CSDE; nearly 2,000 students matriculated from high schools to our state universities.

G. NASBE

Vice Chair Benham reported that the next NASBE Member Exchange is on December 8, 2025, to cover AI in education. She highlighted that CT received recognition in a NASBE article about CT leading the country with honoring the Blue Ribbon schools.

G. SERC

Vice Chair Benham referenced her written report. She noted that earlier in the meeting she had referenced Evan McNight with the update on school discipline. She would like to share SERC information materials for events.

V. Report of the Commissioner and Agency Update

The Commissioner noted that her written report was in the Board's Supplemental Folders.

- Highlighted the 8th Annual Performance Matters Forum.
- Highlighted the CT Educators Rising Leadership Symposium.
- Hosted the Commissioner's Superintendent Advisory Panel to inform and support education policy and decisions. Noted that Commissioner Higgins, Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection, joined to share information and receive feedback on school safety initiatives.
- CSDE hosted China Delegation of Educators with a presentation on Connecticut's model curricula and design principles, and Connecticut's 6-16 educator pathways.
- Team CSDE supported the CT FoodShare Thanksgiving for All Drive.
- Held CSDE **All Staff Convening** to share achievements, provide federal updates and discuss agency work moving forward.
- Attended the CABE/CAPSS Annual Convention joined by CSDE leaders and SBE members.
- Accepted CABE's Friend of Public Education Award on behalf of the entire CSDE.

SHOUTOUTS!

Regional School Choice Office (RSCO)

Division Director for School Choice Robin Cecere presented that RSCO attended the 15th Annual South Windsor Gingerbread Festival held at NOMADS Adventure Quest as a way to be in the community and

raise brand awareness. She provided the Board with a copy of RSCO's family guide, and highlighted RSCO reaching and exceeding its first measurable benchmark under the Comprehensive School Plan of 2022. She announced that RSCO's School Choice Application opens December 3, 2025, and runs through February 6, 2026.

Update on Hartford Public Schools Fiscal Operations

The Commissioner invited Chief Strategic Planning Officer Keith Norton to present to the Board. Mr. Norton was joined by Chief Turnaround Officer Melissa Jenkins. Mr. Norton stated that as progress and recommendations are fulfilled, the work will turn into Turnaround work.

Mr. Norton shared that the agency had put together an Accountability and Support Team (AST) that represented almost every office in the Department to implement the recommendations identified by Public Works and New Solutions K12, and to provide HPS with technical support and assistance. Mr. Norton also noted that the AST has met with the superintendent Dr. Andraé Townsel and CFO Caitlin Richard to ensure district understands the function of the AST and the 61 recommendations for district improvement.

Actions to Address Fiscal and Grants Management

He highlighted that since June 2025, HPS has made a lot of progress in strengthening its fiscal and management processes. Under the leadership of HPS' new CFO, 14 of the 33 fiscal management recommendations, and four of the 13 grants management recommendations are completed.

Special Education

Mr. Norton reported that HPS is making progress towards improving its internal systems to monitor special education certified staff vacancies and service delivery to students. With the support of AST, the district has developed robust tools to monitor compliance and certified special education staff, and compensatory special education services.

Magnet Funding

Mr. Norton reported that the Executive Summary presented to the State Board of Education in November, has been shared with the Superintendent, Mayor, and Chair of the Board of Education. Upon completion of the final report, CSDE staff will begin the process of assessing the impact of the new budget framework.

Board members engaged in discussion.

Update Bridgeport Public Schools – Action to Address District Needs

The Commissioner invited Deputy Commissioner Synthia Sone-Moyano to present to the Board. Deputy Commissioner Sone-Moyano, was joined by Division Director Bryan Klimkiewicz, Chief of Fiscal/Administrative Services Jessica Brunetti, and Education Consultant Kari Sullivan-Custer, to present to the Board.

Deputy Commissioner Sone-Moyano reported that on November 19, 2025, the Technical Assistance Team and Public Works met with the BHS interim superintendent and executive cabinet to develop the 2026-27 superintendent budget. The meeting also addressed nine of the 34 recommendations.

Ms. Brunetti reported that on November 19, 2025, representatives from the City of Bridgeport, and Interim Superintendent Dr. Royce Avery, presented to the Municipal Finance Advisory Commission (MFAC) their five-year budget projections.

Special Education Complaint and Corrective Action

Division Director Bryan Klimkiewicz shared that on August 5, 2025, the Center for Children's Advocacy (CCA) submitted a systemic administrative complaint to the CSDE Bureau of Special Education regarding services to Bridgeport students. Mr. Klimkiewicz reported that during the course of the Bureau's fact-find investigation, it was discovered that students were impacted by staffing vacancies which resulted in corrective action for the district and requires BPS to develop compensatory services plans that will be monitored by the Bureau. He also reported that there was previous corrective action that had not been corrected by the district that impacted BPS's designation for IDEA grant funds.

Mr. Klimkiewicz concluded that during the summer 2025 and in advance of the CCA complaint, the CSDE and Team intervened directly with the district to address the more than 100 certified staff vacancies, of which there were 36 in special education. The CSDE, together with the Team and BPS, were able to reduce the total number of certified staff vacancies to 41 by the start of the 2025-26 school year.

Reduction of Chronic Absenteeism

Education Consultant Kari Sullivan-Custer reported that in October 2024, BPS's chronic absence rate was 32 percent, and as of October 21, 2025, that rate has been reduced to 22.6 percent. She highlighted that the success can be attributed to the strengthening of the BPS District and School Attendance Teams, implementation of a new tool to monitor monthly attendance by school, and the restoration of key positions responsible for implementing the CSDE's Learner Engagement and Attendance Program (LEAP).

Board members engaged in discussion.

Office of Dyslexia and Reading Disabilities (ODRD)

Athena McAlenney, Associate Education Consultant, and Lisa Gianni, Associate Education Consultant presented to the Board. They reported on ODRD's:

- Statewide Role and Responsibilities
- What Has Been Accomplished between 2024-2025
- What We're Hearing – How We're Responding
- Moving Forward Together: A Unified Path

Chief Talent Officer Dr. Shuana Tucker concluded the ODRD presentation by sharing a partnership with the Center for Education Policy, Analysis, Research, and Evaluation to conduct an external evaluation of the ODRD's Dyslexia Guidance, Resources, and Tools.

Board members engaged in discussion.

Data on Licensure and Certification

Chief Performance Officer Ajit Gopalakrishnan presented the report in two parts. Part I: How Educators Become First Certified in CT, and Part II: Praxis Bridge Overview.

Part I: How Educators Become First Certified in CT

1. CT Educator Preparation Program (EPP)
2. Enhanced Reciprocity
3. NASDTEC* Program
4. NASDTEC* Experience
5. Transcript/Experience

Part II: Praxis Bridge Overview

1. What is it?
2. When did this become available?
3. Is there a cost?
4. How does a candidate access Praxis Bridge?

Board members engaged in discussion.

School Safety Update

Division Director John Frassinelli, School Health, Nutrition, and Family Services presented. He informed the board that the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection (DESPP), Division of Emergency Management and Homeland Security (DEMHS) is the lead agency responsible for school safety and the recipient of the school security and safety plans. Mr. Frassinelli highlighted that in October the DESPP held a Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention Symposium at the State Capitol with a focus around prevention of violence in schools.

VIII. Items Requiring Action

A. Adoption of the Connecticut English Learner/Multilingual Statewide Framework

Vice Chair Benham asked for a motion on agenda item VIII.A. Board Member Burr moved, and Board Member Record seconded, that the State Board of Education adopts the Connecticut English Learner and Multilingual (EL/ML) Learner Framework.

Chief Academic Officer Irene Parisi, Education Consultant for English Learner and Multilingual Learner, Dr. Megan Alubicki Flick, and Director of Equity and Languages, Dr. Maribel Olivero, presented.

Vice Chair Benham informed the Board that this report came before the Academic Standards and Assessment Committee. She highlighted the amount of work and the number of people brought in from the state to work on this Framework.

Board Members engaged in discussion.

VOTE ON

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

Motion carried unanimously.

B. Adoption of State Board of Education Committee Appointment: Andrew J. Carlson

Vice Chair Benham asked for a motion on agenda item VIII.B. Board Member Harris moved, and Board Member Burr seconded, that the State Board of Education, pursuant to Article II, Section 4, of its Bylaws, approves the following assignment to the State Board of Education standing committees and appoints Andrew J. Carlson to serve on the Finance, Audit, and Budget Committee, and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

VOTE ON

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

Motion carried unanimously.

C. Adoption of State Board of Education Committee Appointments: Evan Pitkoff

Vice Chair Benham asked for a motion on agenda item VIII.C. Board Member Labas moved, and Board Member Harris seconded, that the State Board of Education, pursuant to Article II, Section 4, of its Bylaws, approves the following assignments to the State Board of Education standing committees and appoints Evan Pitkoff to serve on the Academic Standards and Assessment Committee and the Finance, Audit, and Budget Committee, and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

VOTE ON

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

Motion carried unanimously.

VII. Financial Matters

There were no Financial Matters on the agenda.

IX. Consent Agenda

There were no Consent Agenda matters on the agenda.

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

Vice Chair Benham adjourned the meeting at 11:54 a.m.

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