

**Connecticut State Board Of Education
Hartford**

**Minutes
State Board of Education Retreat**

August 20, 2025
(Approved September 3, 2025)

Pursuant to notice filed with the Secretary of the State and posted on the agency's website, the members of State Board of Education (hereinafter "Board") held a Retreat on Wednesday, August 20, 2025, at the Norwich Free Academy, Edwin H. Land Library (located in the Latham Science and Information Center), 305 Broadway, Norwich, Connecticut.

Public access to the building allowed for public attendance at the meeting.

I. Call to Order

Vice Chair Benham called the Retreat to order at 9:58 a.m.

Present: Erin D. Benham, Vice Chairperson
Samarth Basanth, Student Member (newly appointed)
Bonnie E. Burr
Paula S. Gilberto
Donald F. Harris, Jr.
Gladys B. Labas
Hansika Lenkala, Student Member (newly appointed)
Dr. Aynsley Diamond (designee for Dr. John Maduko, Ex Officio)
Dr. John Maduko, Ex Officio
Dr. Alice M. Pritchard (designee for Dr. Christine Benz, Ex Officio)
Kristen A. Record
Kelli-Marie Vallieres, Ex Officio
Seth D. Zimmerman

Absent:

Vice Chair Benham welcomed Board members and State Department of Education (SDE) leadership staff and reviewed the Retreat objectives for the day. She opened with an introduction of Paolo DeMaria, President and CEO of the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE). Mr. DeMaria virtually attended the meeting.

Commissioner Russell-Tucker welcomed the Board members, the SDE staff, and Mr. Paolo DeMaria (NASBE). The Commissioner noted the objectives for review and understanding of the Comprehensive Plan for Education 2023-2028.

The Commissioner thanked the Head of School, Nathan Quesnel of Norwich Free Academy, for hosting the State Board of Education. Mr. Quesnel welcomed the Board to NFA and provided an overview of the school.

The Commissioner welcomed newly appointed Interim Chancellor Dr. John Maduko, Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CSCU) system, as an ex officio member on the State Board.

Commissioner Russell-Tucker provided an introduction of the facilitator Dr. Ingrid M. Canady, Executive Director, State Education Resource Center (SERC).

Introductions and Member Relationship Building

Dr. Canady introduced the qualities of a facilitator to bring about outcomes for the Retreat. She provided a historical summary on the statutory creation and purpose of SERC.

Dr. Canady opened the Retreat with an exercise activity on the "Nine Dimensions of Me." The goal being to be held accountable for responsibilities.

Commissioner Russell-Tucker spoke on the Update on Bridgeport Public Schools Action to Address District Needs.

Board Member Roles and Opportunities

Mr. DeMaria presented to the Board on effective Boardsmanship and understanding the role of a Board member, etiquette at meetings, and attendance at Board member engagements beyond the Board meetings. Discussion ensued regarding the structures necessary for an effective governance body that remains focused on learning standards, including the relationship between policy setting role of the Board leadership and support structures provided by the Department.

Mr. DeMaria emphasized the concept of the Board being a team that has goals, roles, processes, and the need to have a relationship. He provided examples of roles and responsibilities that fall under different buckets of (i) Must Do, (ii) Should Do, (iii) Good to Do, and (iv) Optional.

Vice Chair Benham led discussions on the Board activities, e.g., committee meetings, invitations to the SBE, school visits, presiding over charter school renewal hearings.

Vice Chair Benham led a review on calendar events that required Board member attendance. She highlighted the Bridgeport Public Schools 2025 Convocation as the next event for Board support.

The Board recessed at 12:30 p.m. and reconvened at 1:15 p.m.

Unpacking Ethics and FOIA Requirements

Mike McKeon, CSDE Director of Legal and Governmental Affairs presented guidance information to Board members based on the Freedom of Information Commission and State Ethics for the

members to have an understanding of their roles. He shared that he was also the Ethics Liaison for the Department.

Agency Organizational Structure and Comprehensive Plan Implementation

Commissioner Russell-Tucker provided an overview of the following for understanding of the organizational structure of the Department and the leadership staff that serve in various roles:

- Department Responsibilities
- CT Education Landscape of School Districts
- School and Programs, Certified Educators and Noncertified Staff
- Students
- Organization Chart of the CSDE and the Commissioner's Office
- CSDE Offices and the CSDE Leadership Team

The Organizational Chart was presented in a PowerPoint format and as each office was highlighted, that leadership chief presented on the purpose and mission, office structure, scope of work, and highlighted projects of their office.

Legislative Process

Chief of Staff and Legislative Liaison Laura Stefon presented to the Board on the legislative process of budget and bill proposal timelines, Connecticut General Assembly demographics, partisan offices and nonpartisan offices, long sessions (odd years) and short sessions (even years), introducing legislation, public meetings, and committee meetings. She spoke on moving bills to the Board. She concluded with the tracking of all bills related to the Department during the sessions.

Vice Chair Benham adjourned the Retreat at 3:15 p.m.

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