

# **Connecticut State Board of Education Hartford**

Accountability and Support Committee

**Tuesday, April 28, 2026**

450 Columbus Blvd  
Plaza North, Meeting Room C & D  
Hartford, Connecticut

**Meeting Minutes**

**Approved on: May 20, 2026**

## **I. Call to Order**

Pursuant to the notice filed with the Secretary of the State, Committee Chairperson Erin D. Benham, called the meeting to order at 3:38 p.m.

### **Committee**

#### **Members Present:**

Donald F. Harris, Jr.  
Kristen A. Record  
Dr. Seth D. Zimmerman  
Erin D. Benham

### **Committee**

#### **Members Absent:**

### **CSDE Staff Present:**

Dr. Melissa Jenkins  
Dr. Charles Hewes  
Jennifer Webb  
Greg Dresko  
Leslie Navarrete

**Guests Present:**

- Dr. Jose Ortiz, Executive Director of Turnaround, Bridgeport Public Schools
- Margaret Hughes, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction, Bridgeport Public Schools
- Christine Kasten, Principal, Barnum School, Bridgeport

**II. Approval of Minutes**

Zimmerman moved, and Record seconded, that the Committee approves the minutes of February 4, 2026, Accountability and Support Committee meeting.

**Vote:**

**In Favor:** Harris, Jr., Zimmerman, Benham, and Record  
**Abstained:** 0  
**Opposed:** 0  
**Absent:**

**III. Commissioner’s Network: Year 3 Overview and Year 4 Extension Request:**

**Barnum School, Bridgeport**

Chairperson Benham recognized the meeting agenda item and opened the meeting to Dr. Melissa Jenkins, Chief Turnaround Officer, CSDE, and Jennifer Webb, Bureau Chief, CSDE. Ms. Webb, provided an overview of the work to date with Barnum School (Barnum), Bridgeport. Dr. Jenkins and Ms. Webb welcomed Dr. Jose Ortiz, Executive Director of Turnaround, Bridgeport Public Schools; Margaret Hughes, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction, Bridgeport Public Schools; and Christine Kasten, Barnum School Principal, to provide a progress update.

Ms. Webb noted that Barnum is seeking approval for a one-year, Year 4 extension in the Commissioner’s Network — the first Year 4 request of this cycle, as all other current extension requests are for Year 5. Ms. Webb reminded the Committee that schools may request an extension beyond their initial three-year term when they can demonstrate meaningful progress toward the goals outlined in their turnaround plan, while also requiring additional time to fully implement key strategies, strengthen sustainability, and ensure that improvements are durable over time.

Assistant Superintendent Margaret Hughes expressed gratitude for the support of the Commissioner’s Network and noted the personal significance of this work. She highlighted that Barnum exited turnaround status this year, crediting the collective effort of the students, staff, families, and district leadership under Principal Kasten’s leadership. Ms. Hughes described Principal Kasten as a focused, resilient, and committed turnaround leader dedicated to high-quality outcomes for every student.

Ms. Hughes deferred to Principal Christine Kasten to provide a progress update on Barnum School. Principal Kasten noted that she joined Barnum in 2020 as assistant principal, participated in the original turnaround planning year, and has been responsible for plan implementation.

She shared highlights on Barnum's implementation and progress of academic systems, continuing to strengthen community and partnership development, data and accountability, and leadership, academic supports and achievements of English Learners/Multilingual Learners (ELs/MLs).

Principal Kasten reported that Barnum developed an instructional framework defining high-quality instruction across content areas, implemented a master schedule to maximize instructional time, aligned interventions and student support services including ESL and resource time, and established cohesive coaching systems with dedicated mathematics and literacy coaches. On community and partnership development, Principal Kasten shared that the school increased parent involvement at school events and expanded community partnerships, including a partnership with Aquarian Mill River Wetlands serving multiple grade bands. She acknowledged that Barnum's Accountability Index decreased from the planning year to Year 1 and reported that the school's accountability index has shown steady improvement from Year 1 through Year 3.

She reported that Barnum exited turnaround and Comprehensive Support and Improvement status this past year and is now identified as a Category 3 school. Principal Kasten noted recent leadership transitions, including the departure of Barnum's assistant principal, who was selected to lead another school in Bridgeport. She went on to share that as of the meeting date, Barnum has one unfilled position with a candidate identified and expressed confidence in reduced staff turnover in the coming year. Additionally, she reported that the school anticipates approximately 40 students to exit EL/ML status, attributing this outcome to a shift from pull-out instruction to a push-in co-teaching model.

Principal Kasten then turned to priorities for a potential Year 4, highlighting differentiation and support for diverse learners, particularly students with disabilities, who represent approximately one-third of the student population, and ELs/MLs, who represent approximately 40 percent of the student population. She noted chronic absenteeism as an additional priority area, sharing that the school is currently at 34.5 percent with a target of below 30 percent. She also identified Tier 2 and Tier 3 behavioral supports and restorative practices as priorities for students with significant disciplinary needs.

Chairperson Benham opened the floor for comments and questions from the Committee. The Committee engaged in substantive discussion with the Barnum team on several topics. Committee members inquired about the impact of teacher turnover and unfilled positions on the sustainability of systems and coaching. Principal Kasten acknowledged that turnover has been a challenge in prior years, particularly at the middle school level, and noted progress in stabilizing staffing, including participation in residency programs and cross-certification workshops. The discussion turned to differentiation, with a question raised as to whether challenges were concentrated in a particular grade band. Principal Kasten described the challenge as multi-pronged, given the school's self-contained program, inclusion initiatives, and multilingual learner population spanning Pre-K through Grade 8. She noted progress in shifting toward push-in co-teaching and increasing inclusion time for students with disabilities.

Committee members also inquired about strategies employed to address chronic absenteeism. Principal Kasten described a range of strategies including family communication campaigns, nudge texts during inclement weather, parent meetings with individualized attendance data, student

incentive programs, and a half-day participation initiative. She identified transportation, childcare on half-days, and immigration-related concerns among the primary barriers.

Ms. Webb added that Barnum showed significant reductions in chronic absenteeism in the first months of the school year, approximately 12 percent in September and 10 percent in January, before winter weather reversed progress. The Committee further noted a disconnect between strong growth measures and lower proficiency levels. Ms. Webb and Greg Dresko, CSDE consultant, attributed this to a significant increase in students with disabilities and ELs/MLs, including a 76 percent increase in those student populations over multiple years, as well as Barnum's hosting of a self-contained program of approximately 100 students.

Mr. Dresko affirmed that Barnum's data reflects steady, non-undulating improvement and that the intentionality of Principal Kasten's instructional walk-through focus, including differentiation for multilingual learners and use of questioning strategies, reflects ongoing, purposeful improvement work.

The Committee thanked the Commissioner's Network school team for Barnum. Chairperson Benham expressed that she looked forward to seeing the Barnum team at the State Board of Education meeting on May 13, 2026, at which the SBE will vote on the approval of the Commissioner's Network Year 4 Extension Request.

#### **IV. Adjourn**

The meeting was adjourned at 4:14 p.m. Zimmerman moved to adjourn, and Record seconded the motion. The next Accountability and Support Committee meeting will be held on May 20, 2026.

Prepared by: Leslie Navarrete