

**Connecticut State Board of Education  
Hartford**

**State Board of Education Meeting**

**January 14, 2026**

**Draft**

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, January 14, 2026, 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/97iv7OxadLE>.

**I. Call to Order**

Vice Chairperson Erin Benham called the meeting to order at 9:37 a.m.

Present:     Erin D. Benham, Vice Chairperson  
                 Samarth Basanth, Student Member  
                 Bonnie E. Burr  
                 Andrew J. Carlson  
                 Dr. Aynsley Diamond, designee for Interim Chancellor Dr. John Maduko, Ex Officio  
                 Paula S. Gilberto  
                 Donald F. Harris, Jr.  
                 Hansika Lenkala, Student Member  
                 Dr. John Maduko, Ex Officio  
                 Evan Pitkoff  
                 Dr. Alice Pritchard, designee for CTECS  
                 Kristen A. Record  
                 Kelli-Marie Vallieres, Ex Officio  
                 Seth D. Zimmerman

Absent:     Gladys B. Labas

**II. Public Participation**

1. Aimee Turner, President, Connecticut Council of Administrators of Special Education, spoke on agenda item XI.B., Connecticut State Department of Education Special Education Systems Review: WestEd Final Report.
2. Tara Mientus, a member of Decoding Dyslexia CT, shared concerns regarding how educators are prepared in CT to teach literacy, and the Office of Dyslexia and Reading Disabilities audit framework process. A copy of Ms. Mientus' written statement is in the official file of this meeting.

3. Attorney Andrew Feinstein, spoke on agenda item XI.B., Connecticut State Department of Education Special Education Systems Review: WestEd Final Report. A copy of Attorney Feinstein's written statement is in the official file of this meeting.
4. Katherine Drock, parent, former educator, and a graduate of Hartford Public Schools, spoke on agenda item XI.B., Connecticut State Department of Education Special Education Systems Review: WestEd Final Report.
5. Tom Stringfellow, of Manchester, spoke on various topics.
6. Brandalyn Wilson Williams, Vice Chair and parent representative of the Connecticut State Advisory Council for Special Education, spoke on agenda item XI.B., Connecticut State Department of Education Special Education Systems Review: WestEd Final Report.

### **III. Executive Session**

There was no executive session held.

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

#### **A. December 3, 2025, State Board of Education Meeting**

Board Member Burr moved, and Board Member Zimmerman seconded, that the Board adopt the minutes of the December 3, 2025, State Board of Education Meeting.

#### **VOTE ON**

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

Motion carried unanimously.

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

Vice Chair Benham highlighted the following:

- Attended the 2026 Teacher of the Year Ceremony at the Bushnell on December 16, 2026.
- Attended a CAPSS press conference on workforce development with Dr. John Maduko and Dr. Kelli-Marie Vallieres on January 13, 2026.
  - Dr. Vallieres highlighted workforce initiatives that connected associations from different sectors all around CT.
  - Dr. Maduko, noted that it was good to have cross-sector colleagues and partners across the state doing this work.

Vice Chair Benham asked for a motion to move agenda item, XI.A., Recognition of the 2026 Teacher of the Year and 2026 Teacher of the Year Finalists, to accommodate the teachers and superintendents attending the meeting. Board Member Pitkoff moved, and Board Member Record seconded, that agenda item XI.A. be moved on the agenda.

## **XI. Items for Discussion**

### **A. Recognition of the 2026 Teacher of the Year and 2026 Teacher of the Year Finalists**

Associate Education Consultant Ashley Wright, Talent Office, and Education Service Specialist Victoria Malvey, Talent Office, presented. Each teacher joined at the table with their superintendent.

Vice Chair Benham read aloud the bios of each teacher into the minutes of the meeting as follows:

#### **2026 Connecticut Teacher of the Year Finalists**

**Ryan Heath:** Pond Hill and Parker Farms Elementary Schools (Wallingford)

Superintendent: Dr. Danielle Bellizzi, Wallingford Public Schools

Ryan is an educator of multilingual learners specializing in teaching bilingual Spanish-speaking students in grades 3–5 at Pond Hill and Parker Farms Elementary Schools. He leads student-run news broadcasts and develops cultural exploration videos that highlight student voices and the diverse languages represented across his schools. These initiatives provide authentic opportunities for students to collaborate, take leadership roles, and showcase their learning in ways that connect directly to the broader school community. Ryan also has built meaningful relationships with organizations such as Integrated Refugee and Immigrant Services (IRIS) and the Spanish Community of Wallingford (SCOW) to bridge connections between students, families, and vital community resources.

**Joseph Meyer:** Glastonbury High School (Glastonbury)

Superintendent: Dr. Alan B. Bookman, Glastonbury Public Schools

Joey teaches Latin at Glastonbury High School, where he has inspired students for 21 years. At Glastonbury, Joey helped establish the school's Advisory program, training more than 100 student facilitators to foster peer connections during monthly homerooms. He has co-chaired the school's NEASC leadership self-study, co-advises the Classics Club, and has been recognized with the Essence Award for exemplifying Glastonbury High School's core values. Beyond his classroom, Joey has served in leadership roles with the Classical Association of Connecticut and contributed to the design of ACTFL's Latin Interpretive Reading Assessment, which is used nationwide to measure Latin proficiency. He frequently presents and publishes on equity and empathy in Latin instruction and the importance of student voice and connection.

**Antwanette Serrano:** Elizabeth Green School (Newington)

Superintendent: Maureen Brummett, Newington Public Schools

Antwanette teaches third grade at Elizabeth Green School in Newington, where she has dedicated 26 years to inspiring young learners. She earned her undergraduate and master's degrees in Reading and Elementary Education from Central Connecticut State University and now shares the "magic of books" with her students every day. Beyond her classroom, Antwanette promotes Social Emotional Learning through her original children's books, *Mindful Mason* and *Empathetic Emma*, which teach empathy, kindness, and resilience. Her work has been featured in Newington Life and highlighted by the Connecticut Education Association for going "the extra mile every day."

## **2026 Connecticut Teacher of the Year**

**Brian Betesh:** Rogers Park Middle School (Danbury)

Superintendent: Dr. Kara Casimiro, Danbury Public Schools

The 2026 Connecticut Teacher of the Year is Brian Betesh, a 6th grade Social Studies teacher at Rogers Park Middle School in Danbury. Brian has been teaching for 18 years and is a proud graduate of Danbury Public Schools who has dedicated his career to giving back to the community that helped shape him.

Brian believes middle school is about more than grades or test scores; it's about creating memorable experiences that inspire students to collaborate, innovate, and lead. This philosophy has guided him in creating several student-driven initiatives. Together with his students, he co-founded Park 21, a club dedicated to improving school culture and elevating the middle school experience for everyone involved. He also co-created SEVEN, a project-based learning class where students design and implement projects that make a real impact on their community.

Brian and his students also created a podcast titled Rogers That! which has recorded over 100 episodes. The podcast connects his students with leaders, professionals, and Rogers Park alumni to explore potential career paths and has helped to build meaningful partnerships with the local community. To further promote creativity and innovation, he also designed and created the ROARcording Studio, a dedicated podcasting and media space, and The Bella Patterson Innovation Lab, named in honor of a former student, to support hands-on, project-based learning experiences at Rogers Park Middle School. As the school's DonorsChoose Ambassador, Brian has supported teachers in securing over \$500,000 in resources for Rogers Park, ensuring students and staff have the tools they need to succeed. Brian's teaching philosophy is simple: every student has the potential to do big things and his role as an educator is ultimately to create opportunities for them to shine.

## **X. Committee Reports**

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

Committee Chair Gilberto reported that the committee met on January 13, 2026, and welcomed new committee member Evan Pitkoff. The meeting focused on two key priorities - Curriculum Teacher Leader Fellowship Program, and industry recognized credentials.

### **B. Accountability and Support**

Committee Chair Benham reported that the committee last met on January 7, 2026, and will next meet on February 4, 2026.

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

Committee Chair Harris reported that the committee's last quarterly meeting was held on November 18, 2025, and the next meeting will be held on February 24, 2026.

### **D. Legislation and Policy Development**

Committee Chair Burr reported that the committee met on December 3, 2025. The committee reviewed and discussed the 2026 Legislative Proposals, and the CT Educator Preparation and Certification Board (CEPCB) proposed revision of educator certification. 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 had the opportunity to showcase CTECS on January 12, 2026, at the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Connecticut Regional Sector Partnership Convening that was hosted by the Office of Workforce Strategy. She highlighted what CTECS is doing around work-based learning.

**F. Connecticut State Colleges and Universities**

Dr. Maduko reported on CSCU's CT Automatic Admissions Program (CAAP). He highlighted the ways the CAAP Program simplifies the enrollment process for participating institutions of higher education. He concluded that since December, there has been an increase of 3,700 applications.

**G. NASBE**

Vice Chair Benham thanked Ms. Record, Dr. Carlson, and Dr. Labas for attending NASBE Zoom calls. She reported that NASBE is very interested in the work in CT and is looking at how CT started the AI Pilot Program. Ms. Record shared that she and Dr. Labas, and Ms. Gilberto, have been part of the NASBE CurriculumHQ Action Group that focuses on high-quality instructional materials (HQIM). She concluded that the next steps are to find ways that NASBE can highlight HQIM.

**G. SERC**

Vice Chair Benham referenced her written report and invited Division Director Bryan Klimkiewicz to present on the partnership with the State Education Resource Center (SERC) under the leadership of Dr. Ingrid Canady.

Mr. Klimkiewicz reported that SERC is a critical partner on the work that is done on a day-to-day basis supporting our students with disabilities to improve outcomes for students with disabilities across the state. He highlighted that SERC assists the state with expertise and priorities that are aligned with the State Board of Education Plan.

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

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

The Commissioner referenced the one-page that summarized the core strategic priorities of the Board's Five-Year Comprehensive Plan, *Every Student Prepared for Learning, Life, and Work Beyond School*. She highlighted that activities are laid out under the relevant Board strategic priorities.

The Commissioner highlighted the following:

- Aspiring Educators Scholarship Program applications now open for Spring 2026 for students interested in a career in education.
- Convened the Commissioner's Roundtable for Family and Community Engagement.
- The CSDE launched a 2026 family literacy celebration.
- Delivered remarks at the Governor's Prevention Partnership School-Based Mentoring Conference, The Power of Connection: Mentoring for Engagement, Academic Success, & Workforce Readiness.
- In partnership with Rock and Roll Hall of Famer Stevie Van Zandt's TeachRock, the CSDE launched a new high school elective, An American History of Rock and Soul.
  - Chief Academic Officer Irene Parisi presented on "Course in a Box," in partnership with TeachRock.

- Chief Academic Officer Irene Parisi reported on Career and Technical Student Organizations (CTSOs).

### **Data Dashboards Update – Earnings of CT Graduates and Relation to Board Priority**

Chief Performance Officer Ajit Gopalakrishnan reported that we have updated the data with a couple of additions. Postsecondary Labor Market Outcomes is an available dashboard that gives the outcomes of high school graduates from 2007 through 2019.

### **Update on Hartford Public Schools Fiscal Operations**

Chief Strategic Planning Officer Keith Norton presented to the Board. He highlighted that at the December 3, 2025, SBE meeting, the Board was updated on HPS's actions to address the 61 recommendations derived from the March 2025, Public Works Fiscal Services Review Executive Summary of the Final Report, and the May 2025, New Solutions K-12 Review Executive Summary of the Final Findings Report.

Mr. Norton reported that the agency's Accountability and Support Team has updated the list of recommendations to include 3 additional recommendations derived from the November 5, 2025, Financial Analysis of Hartford Magnet School Operations, authored by CSDE's Office of Internal Audit in collaboration with the CSDE's Legal Office.

### **Actions to Address Fiscal and Grants Management**

He reported that Recommendations 1-46 were derived from the Public Works report on financial operations.

### **Special Education**

He reported that Recommendations 47-61 were derived from the New Solutions K12 report on Special Education delivery services.

### **Magnet Funding**

He reported that Recommendations 62-64 were derived from Magnet utilization report.

Board members engaged in discussion.

### **Update Bridgeport Public Schools – Action to Address District Needs**

Deputy Commissioner Charles Hewes presented to the Board. He reported that there has been significant focus on support for financial and human resources procedural development with the district.

### **Financial and Human Resources Improvement**

He reported that in December 2025, the Technical Assistance Team and Public Works supported BPS to:

- develop an Annual Budget Calendar
- work on the procedural components of financial and human resource systems within the district
- work on the superintendent's 2026-2027 proposed budget
- assist the district with building the structures necessary to respond to the Forensic Audit

### **Facilities and Maintenance**

The BBE approved the Building Operations Five Year (FY27-31) Capital Plan.

Board Governance/Oversight Improvement

The readiness of the BBE to initiate a search for a superintendent is dependent upon how the BBE will operate and function as a governing agency.

Board members engaged in discussion.

Vice Chair Benham asked for a motion to move agenda item, XI.B., Connecticut State Department of Education Special Education Systems Review: WestEd Final Report. Board Member Record moved, and Board Member Zimmerman seconded, that agenda item XI.B. be moved on the agenda.

**XI. Items for Discussion**

**B. Connecticut State Department of Education Special Education Systems Review: WestEd Final Report**

Commissioner Russell-Tucker provided an introduction and noted that there were 94,174 PreK-12 students who are identified as students with disabilities in Connecticut. She reported that having heard the concerns of stakeholders, the CSDE initiated, launched and engaged WestEd to conduct a comprehensive, independent evaluation of the Department's special education infrastructure, processes, support, and accountability systems.

The Commissioner stated that "this was us looking at ourselves internally" to uncover and know where the challenges were. She then provided an introduction of the WestEd team to present the final report.

Rorie Fitzpatrick, Vice President, Center for Education Systems, WestEd, and Sarah Barzee, Senior Director, State Education Services, WestEd, provided a comprehensive overview of their final report related to research, findings and recommendations.

Board members engaged in discussion.

**VIII. Items Requiring Action**

**A. Legislative Proposals**

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 these 2026 Legislative Proposals and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

Chief of Staff/Legislative Liaison Laura Stefon introduced the agency's 2026 Legislative Proposals.

VOTE ON

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

Motion carried unanimously.

## **B. Adoption of CEPCB's Proposed Regulations (2026)**

Vice Chair Benham asked for a motion on agenda item VIII.B. Board Member Harris moved, and Board Member Record seconded, that in accordance with Section 10-150c(b)(1) of the Connecticut General Statutes, the State Board of Education ["SBE"] hereby approves the Proposed Regulatory Revisions submitted by the Connecticut Educator Preparation and Certification Board and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

Jennifer Rodriguez, Chair, Connecticut Educator Preparation and Certification Board (CEPCB), joined by Deputy Commissioner Sinthia Sone-Moyano, presented.

VOTE ON

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

Motion carried unanimously.

## **C. Consideration of Legislative Amendment – Educator Certification Oversight and Board Member Recusal**

Vice Chair Benham asked for a motion on agenda item VIII.C. Board Member Record moved, and Board Member Burr seconded, that pursuant to Section 10-150c(b)(1) of the Connecticut General Statutes, and in accordance with the December 3, 2025, recommendation of the State Board of Education's Legislation and Policy Development Committee, the State Board of Education hereby rejects the Proposed Legislative Amendment – Educator Certification Oversight and Board Member Recusal submitted by the Connecticut Educator Preparation and Certification Board and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

Vice Chair Benham requested Legislation and Policy Development Committee Chair Burr and Legal Director Mike McKeon provide background and context for Board members with regards to the report coming before the board without the recommendation of the LPDC.

Jennifer Rodriguez, Chair, Connecticut Educator Preparation and Certification Board (CEPCB), joined by Deputy Commissioner Sinthia Sone-Moyano, presented.

Board members engaged with questions.

VOTE ON

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

Motion carried unanimously.

**D. Adoption of Proposed Legislative Language: Reinstate Transcript Experience Pathway**

Vice Chair Benham asked for a motion on agenda item VIII.D. Board Member Harris moved, and Board Member Burr seconded, that in accordance with Section 10-150c(b)(1) of the Connecticut General Statutes, the State Board of Education ["SBE"] hereby approves the Proposed Legislative Language: Reinstate Transcript Experience Pathway submitted by the Connecticut Educator Preparation and Certification Board and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

Jennifer Rodriguez, Chair, Connecticut Educator Preparation and Certification Board (CEPCB), joined by Deputy Commissioner Sinthia Sone-Moyano, presented.

Board members engaged with questions.

**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 Members moved, and Board Members seconded the motion to adjourn.

Vice Chair Benham adjourned the meeting at 1:05 p.m.

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