

# Connecticut State Board of Education Hartford

## State Board of Education Meeting

February 11, 2026

### Minutes

(Approved March 4, 2026)

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, February 11, 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/eX1xfrjAD48>.

#### **I. Call to Order**

Pro Tem Donald Harris called the meeting to order at 9:31 a.m.

Present: Erin D. Benham, Vice Chairperson (attended virtually)  
Samarth Basanth, Student Member  
Bonnie E. Burr  
Andrew J. Carlson  
Paula S. Gilberto  
Donald F. Harris, Jr.  
Hansika Lenkala, Student Member  
Dr. John Maduko, Ex Officio  
Evan Pitkoff  
Kristen A. Record  
Seth D. Zimmerman\*

Absent: Gladys B. Labas  
Dr. Alice Pritchard, designee for CTECS  
Kelli-Marie Vallieres, Ex Officio

#### **II. Public Participation**

1. Kathy Marlor, a teacher, parent of a child with dyslexia, and a member of Decoding Dyslexia CT, spoke on the CSDE's December email to stakeholders regarding compliance measures and audit procedures, and requested the CSDE develop the compliance measures and audit procedures to align with the Dyslexia Task Force recommendations and legislation.
2. Tara Mientus, a teacher, parent of a student with dyslexia, and a member of Decoding Dyslexia CT, spoke regarding Decoding Dyslexia CT's launch of a survey that asked stakeholders for feedback on students with dyslexia within the state. A copy of Ms. Mientus' written statement is in the official file of this meeting.

#### **III. Executive Session**

There was no executive session held.

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

##### **A. January 14, 2026, State Board of Education Meeting**

Board Member Burr moved, and Board Member Carlson seconded, that the Board adopt the minutes of the January 14, 2026, State Board of Education Meeting.

##### **VOTE ON**

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

Motion carried unanimously.

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

Pro Tem Donald Harris read Vice Chair Benham's report that highlighted the following:

- Gladys Labas, Kristen Record and Erin Benham attended February's NASBE Member Exchange.
- Kristen Record, Gladys Labas and Paula Gilberto are also involved with the HQIM group.
- Kristen Record participated in the Education Summit last month held at the State Capitol.
- Dr. Gladys Labas was in Chicago being inducted by the National Association for Bilingual Education (NABE) to the Bilingual Education Multilingual Education Hall of Fame, Class of 2026.
- Notice has been sent to all districts that the Student Application for the 2026-2027 school year to apply for student board membership is open.

Pro Tem Harris announced that the CSDE's former Deputy Commissioner Desi Nesmith has recently become the new CEO of the CREC district.

##### 2026 Connecticut Education Issue Summit

Vice Chair Benham asked to have Board Member Record present on 2026 Connecticut Education Issue Summit held at the State Capitol. Ms. Record reported that it was co-sponsored by CIBE, CAPSS, CEA, and AFT, and was directed to legislators and local boards of education to talk about issues related to K-12 education. Ms. Record participated in a panel on educator workforce needs and a panel on improving educational outcomes.

#### **X. Committee Reports**

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

Committee Chair Gilberto reported that the committee met on January 13, 2026, and that the next meeting is scheduled for March 10, 2026. She encouraged members to inform Dr. Hewes and Irene Parisi, or herself, of matters they want to see before this committee.

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

Pro Tem Committee Chair Record reported that the committee last met on February 4, 2026, and will next meet on April 28, 2026.

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

Committee Chair Harris reported that the committee's next meeting will be held on Tuesday, February 24, 2026.

**D. Legislation and Policy Development**

Committee Chair Burr reported that the committee met on January 14, 2026, with a presentation from CAPSS Executive Director Fran Rabinowitz, Dr. Miguel A. Cardona, Cardona Solutions, and Superintendent Dr. Christine L. Carver, Bethel Public Schools. The committee also heard from the CT Educator Preparation and Certification Board (CEPCB) on their work and actions. She concluded that the committee was meeting today at 1:00 p.m.

**E. Connecticut Technical Education and Career System Board**

In Dr. Pritchard's absence, Pro Tem Harris referred to her report as being in the Supplemental Folders. At Dr. Pritchard's request, a video was shown on the forging of a new pathway to education and the workforce with the partnership between the technical high schools and the community colleges for college credit. Pro Tem Harris announced that two students Anita Budge and Alexandra Beale from Oliver Wolcott have been selected as featured speakers at the 2026 LEAD Conference in Washington, DC.

**F. Connecticut State Colleges and Universities**

Dr. Maduko spoke of meeting the challenges of changes in the federal landscape, as well as the start of legislative session, in addition to the need for increased funding in education necessary to meet the evolving needs of students.

**G. NASBE**

Ms. Record reported on the NASBE Member Exchange. She highlighted Vice Chair Benham has been reappointed as the NASBE Northeast Director. Also, she, Paula Gilberto, and Gladys Labas will meet with NASBE CEO about HQIM and how NASBE can leverage what we are doing in our state. Board Member Gilberto provided a report on HQIM.

**G. SERC**

Pro Tem Harris reported that the Vice Chair Benham's written report was in the Supplemental Folders and highlighted the four flyers that were also enclosed.

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

The Commissioner referenced that her written report was in the Board's Supplemental Folders. She highlighted that the activities are laid out in alignment with the board priorities.

Enrollment and Staff Data

The Commissioner invited Chief Performance Officer Ajit Gopalakrishnan to the table. Mr. Gopalakrishnan reported on the new student enrollment number of 497,764. He also reported on the Certified FTE staff and the Non-Certified FTE staff. The Commissioner confirmed that all the dashboards were updated.

The Board members engaged with questions.

Rural Health Transformation Program

The Commissioner stated that CT was awarded \$154 million from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) that is aimed at improving healthcare access in rural areas of the state. She invited Division Director John Frassinelli, School Health, Nutrition, and Family Services to present. He

informed the board that this was five-year grant with multiple agencies involved with the focus on rural health districts. The CSDE application includes plans to develop a model to strengthen mental and behavioral health systems across identified rural school districts.

#### CT Curriculum Teacher Leader Fellowship

The Commissioner spoke on elevating our framework and pointing out an initiative for teacher leadership. She invited Chief Academic Officer Irene Parisi to the table. Ms. Parisi reported that there are currently 145 teacher leaders across 60 districts. The fellowship is designed to identify and support teachers as leaders in the area of high-quality curriculum leadership skills.

The Commissioner noted work on professional learning, coaching, and a technical assistance program on assessments and sensible assessments for our districts.

The Commissioner highlighted the following:

- Joined leaders from the Connecticut Technical Education and Career System (CTECS), CT State, and the Office of Workforce Strategy for the signing of a Memorandum of Agreement between CTECS and CT State expanding dual-credit opportunities for students at CTECS schools.
- Joined Governor Lamont, West Hartford Superintendent Paul Vicinus, local leaders, and community partners at Smith STEM School in West Hartford to highlight a \$12.5M investment that expands access to free school meals.
- Chief Academic Officer Irene Parisi attended the inauguration of CT's 2026 Kid Governor Tessa Hallinan at the Old State House.
- Attended Governor Lamont's 2026 Opening Day Address to the General Assembly.

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

Chief Strategic Planning Officer Keith Norton reported that on February 4, 2026, the CSDE Accountability and Support Team met with HPS Superintendent Dr. Andrae Townsel and members of his executive cabinet to discuss the district's efforts towards fulfilling the 64 recommendations derived from Public Works, New Solutions K12, and the Office of Internal Audit's magnet school analysis. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss coordination between HPS and AST teams to align support for the district.

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

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

#### Financial and Human Resources Improvement

- ❖ On January 29, 2026, Interim Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Royce Avery presented the Superintendent's 2026-27 Proposed Budget to the Bridgeport Board of Education (BBE).
- ❖ On February 3, 2026, the Commissioner of Education met with the Interim Superintendent to discuss items identified by the CSDE, the Technical Assistance Team, and Public Works that may result in additional cost efficiencies within the Superintendent's Budget.
- ❖ On February 4, 2026, the BBE Operations Committee met to discuss the budget.
- ❖ On February 9, 2026, the full BBE met and adopted a budget increase of approximately 36 percent over FY26. The increase reflects both the Superintendent's Budget requests and the restoring of various positions reduced since FY13.

#### Facilities and Maintenance

The district has made progress in the area of nutrition. Restoring and adequately utilizing all the funding.

### School Climate

The district has made much success with their District Attendance Team in addressing chronic absenteeism.

### Regular and Special Education

There has been focus on some of the special education providers in the district. The Technical Assistance Team visits and makes contact with external providers of special education to ensure that the district is monitoring the educational programming for students and is maximizing the contracted language of the services being provided.

### Operational Efficiency and Effectiveness of the Bridgeport Board of Education

The Bridgeport Board of Education has created a search committee for the new superintendent. It is the expectation that the board is publicly representing their readiness to attract high-quality candidates.

Board members engaged in questions.

### Update on Special Education

Division Director Bryan Klimkiewicz provided a Special Education Systems Review update based on the WestEd Final Report shared at the January 14, 2026, meeting. The Commissioner noted that this was the first update since the report from WestEd was released. Mr. Klimkiewicz noted the system involved a vast collection of data with four strategic areas:

- Vision
- Improving Infrastructure
- Instructional Impact
- Accountability and Improvement

He then highlighted the "Actions to Date" under each strategic area.

- Meetings with Public Consulting Group, the vendor that supports the CT-SEDS System on a usability study.
- Submission of the CSDE's report related to special education to the federal Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).
- Posting for a special education attorney position.

### Governor's Bill Proposals

Chief of Staff/Legislative Liaison Laura Stefon presented on SB 138, An Act Implementing the Recommendations of the Department of Education, as the agency bill of proposals that were approved by the Board at its January 14, 2026, meeting. Ms. Stefon then presented on the Governor's three bills.

- HB – 5035 – An Act Requiring Schools Districts to Ban Cell Phones in the Classroom
- HB - 5033 – An Act Implementing the Governor's Budget Recommendations
- HB – 5034 – An Act Reducing Testing Burdens and Enhancing the Math Curriculum

Chief Performance Officer Ajit Gopalakrishnan joined Ms. Stefon at the table to present on Project Pathways under HB 5034. Mr. Gopalakrishnan presented on a new professional learning, coaching, and technical assistance program called, "Student-Centered Assessment for Learning (SCALE): Project Pathways. He concluded by presenting the three phases.

- Phase – I District Assessment Insight
- Phase 2 -SCALE Coach Cohorts

- Phase 3 - Scaling Assessments for Learning

The Commissioner ended her report.

\*[Board Member Seth Zimmerman arrived at approximately 10:42 a.m.]

## **VIII. Items Requiring Action**

### **A. Approval of Commissioner’s Network Extension Year 5 for Hamden Middle School, Hamden**

Pro Tem Donald Harris asked for a motion on agenda item VIII.A. Board Member Burr moved, and Board Member Zimmerman seconded, that, pursuant to Section 10-223h of the Connecticut General Statutes, the State Board of Education approves the continued participation of Hamden Middle School, in Hamden, Connecticut in the Commissioner’s Network for an additional and final year commencing July 1, 2026, and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action, including, but not limited to, expending such funds as may be necessary to execute and implement the foregoing.

Chief Turnaround Officer Dr. Melissa Jenkins, and Bureau Chief Jennifer Webb, together with school officials Erin Bailey, Assistant Superintendent, and Scott Trauner, Principal, presented.

VOTE ON

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

Motion carried unanimously.

Board members engaged with questions.

### **B. Adoption of CEPCB’s Proposed Regulations Recommended to be Reinstated as Revised**

Pro Tem Donald Harris asked for a motion on agenda item VIII.B. Board Member Burr 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 hereby approves the proposed reinstatement of the regulations as revised and recommended 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), presented.

VOTE ON

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

Motion carried unanimously.

### **C. Adoption of CEPCB’s 2026 Legislative Proposal Regarding Sunsetting Regulations**

Pro Tem Donald Harris asked for a motion on agenda item VIII.B. Board Member Burr 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 hereby approves the Connecticut Educator Preparation and Certification Board’s proposed amendment of Public Act 24-41, Section 51, and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

Jennifer Rodriguez, Chair, Connecticut Educator Preparation and Certification Board (CEPCB), presented.

#### **VOTE ON**

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

Motion carried unanimously.

### **VII. Financial Matters**

Chiefs of Fiscal and Administrative Services Roger Persson and Jessica Brunetti presented on the Governor’s proposed budget.

Board members engaged with questions.

### **IX. Consent Agenda**

There were no Consent Agenda matters on the agenda.

### **XI. Items for Discussion**

**A. Implementation of State Board of Education Comprehensive Plan: Strategic Priority:** *Create opportunities for all students to explore multiple career pathways through coordinated and rigorous programs that are developed in partnership with institutions of higher education and local/regional employers, and that align with economic opportunity and advance students in careers of their choice.*

Deputy Commissioner Charles Hewes, Chief Strategic Planning Officer Keith Norton, Director of Workforce Development and Career Readiness Karen Amaker, and Chief Performance Officer Ajit Gopalakrishnan, presented. Mr. Norton opened the presentation of the report with a Student Spotlight via video and alternated with various student spotlights throughout the report, including:

- Board Goal and Indicators
- Foundational Investments of awarding grants to higher education institutions to support dual credit and no-cost enrollment
- Impact: Growth in Dual Enrollment

- Strategic Alignment: Access to Workforce and IRCs
- Strategic Alignment: Access to Higher Education and the CT State Model Agreement
- Adult Education and Ability to Benefit (ATB)
- Modernized Career Clusters

Board members engaged in discussion.

## **B. State Board of Education Conversion Report**

In 2024, the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) contracted with SERC to carry out the responsibilities established in Section 121 for PA 24-81 and make recommendations to the Commissioner to develop a plan to:

- convert the State Board of Education from being the department head of the Department of Education, as defined in section 4-5 of the general statutes, to an advisory board within the department, and
- empower the Commissioner of Education to become the department head for the Department of Education

Chief of Staff/Legislative Liaison Laura Stefon, CSDE, Executive Director Dr. Ingrid Canady, SERC, and Associate Director Marjorie Davis, SERC, presented.

Ms. Stefon opened with an introduction of historical context for this report.

Dr. Canady presented on SERC's charge to develop a publication based on research and evaluation and highlighted that the Conversion Report was based on that research. Dr. Canady further detailed the approach and methodology to (i) research all 50 states to determine which of those states has the state board of education as an advisory board, and which states had the Commissioner as the head, and (ii) examine the statutory structure of every model of governance. Dr. Canady concluded that they looked at the unique position of CT.

Ms. Davis presented on the analysis that went into producing the report. They analyzed all the benefits and challenges of a Single-Head Governance Structure. They concluded the report with Recommendations.

The Board members engaged with questions.

Pro Tem Donald Harris asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Board Member Zimmerman moved, and Board Member Record seconded the motion to adjourn.

Pro Tem Harris adjourned the meeting at 12:45 p.m.

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