

## Connecticut State Board of Education Hartford

### State Board of Education Meeting

March 4, 2026

### 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, March 4, 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/i1R-mOsovPg>.

#### I. Call to Order

Pro Tem Donald Harris called the meeting to order at 9:30 a.m.

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

Absent: Dr. John Maduko, Ex Officio  
Kelli-Marie Vallieres, Ex Officio

#### II. Public Participation

1. Dr. Jeffrey Vance, Interim Director, School of Education, University of Bridgeport, spoke in support of agenda item X.A., Continuing Approval of University of Bridgeport Educator Preparation Programs.
2. Dr. Laura Morello, Assistant Professor and Program Director, Educator Preparation Program, School of Education, University of Bridgeport, spoke in support of agenda item X.A., Continuing Approval of University of Bridgeport Educator Preparation Programs. A copy of Dr. Morello's handouts are in the official file of this meeting.

3. Dr. Kerry Jones, Assistant Professor, University of Bridgeport, spoke in support of agenda item X.A., Continuing Approval of University of Bridgeport Educator Preparation Programs.
4. Elizabeth Sked, Education Issues Specialist, CEA, spoke in support of agenda item VIII.A., Approval of Emergency Educator Certification Endorsements for the 2026-27 School Year.
5. Dr. Ann Marie Mulready spoke on her opposition to House Bill 5217 and changing the role of the CT State Board of Education to an advisory body.

### **III. Executive Session**

Pro Tem Donald Harris stated that the Board would go into executive session and asked for a motion. Board Member Record moved and Board Member Burr seconded, that the Board move into executive session.

At approximately 9:49 a.m., the Board went into executive session.

Present in executive session were Vice Chair Erin Benham (virtual), Pro Tem Donald F. Harris, Jr., Board Members Samarth Basanth, Bonnie Burr, Andrew J. Carlson, Paula S. Gilberto, Gladys B. Labas, Hansika Lenkala, Evan Pitkoff, Alice M. Pritchard, Kristen A. Record, and Seth D. Zimmerman. Also, present were Legal Director Mike McKeon, Chief of Staff/Legislative Liaison Laura Stefon, and Staff Assistant Aldith Dewar.

At approximately 10:37 a.m., the Board reconvened the regular meeting.

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

#### **A. February 11, 2026, State Board of Education Meeting**

Board Member Burr moved, and Board Member Zimmerman seconded, that the Board adopt the minutes of the February 11, 2026, State Board of Education Meeting.

#### **VOTE ON**

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

Motion carried unanimously.

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

Vice Chair Benham reported that Dr. Andrew Carlson, Hansika Lenkala, and Samarth Basanth attended their confirmation hearings on February 19, 2026.

### **X. Committee Reports**

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

Committee Chair Gilberto reported that the March 10, 2026, meeting was canceled due to shortage time-sensitive action items. She encouraged Board members to submit areas of interest with respect to this committee.

**B. Accountability and Support**

Committee Chair Benham reported that the committee did not have a meeting scheduled for March and will next meet on April 28, 2026.

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

Committee Chair Harris reported that the committee's February 24, 2026, meeting was canceled due to inclement weather, and the meeting was rescheduled for Wednesday, March 11, 2026.

**D. Legislation and Policy Development**

Committee Chair Burr reported that the committee met on February 11, 2026. She concluded that the committee was meeting today at 1:00 p.m.

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

Dr. Pritchard reported with an update of the lottery for the incoming 9<sup>th</sup> graders. She reported that CTECS has a 94% acceptance rate and students who were not extended an offer are placed on a waitlist.

**F. Connecticut State Colleges and Universities**

Vice Chair Benham reported that there was no CSCU report for this month.

**G. NASBE**

Vice Chair Benham reported on two NASBE meetings since the last meeting. The first focused on HQIM with Ms. Gilberto and Ms. Record attending. The second was the Member Exchange that was attended by Dr. Pitkoff, Dr. Labas, and Ms. Record. She highlighted that there were a lot of questions on AI in all the breakout sessions, and the other key topic was curriculum.

**H. SERC**

Vice Chair Benham noted minimal changes from last month, resulting in no report; and a new update is expected for the April meeting.

Pro Tem Donald Harris asked the permission of the Board for a motion to move agenda item, X., Consent Agenda to be presented immediately after the Report of the Commissioner. Board Member Record moved, and Board Member Labas seconded, that agenda item X. be moved to after the Report of the Commissioner.

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

The Commissioner referenced her written report was in the Board's Supplemental Folders and highlighted the following:

- ❖ That the CSDE has partnered with SERC and the RESC Alliance to provide updated state guidance for Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), a framework of models that include tiers of instruction and other kinds of support.
- ❖ Joined Governor Lamont, Manchester Mayor Jay Moran, Superintendent of Manchester Public Schools Matt Geary, and local and state leaders at Manchester High School to highlight the Governor's proposed investments in student well-being, attendance, and literacy.
- ❖ Joined Governor Lamont, New Haven Mayor Justin Elicker, Superintendent of New Haven Public Schools Madeline Negron, and local and state leaders at Wilbur Cross High School in New Haven

to highlight the Governor's proposed bill to enact a statewide, bell-to-bell cell phone ban for K-12 students.

The Commissioner shared her appreciation of staff in the agency for their 24/7 behind the scenes work during the legislative session.

#### Key Priorities for Discretionary Grantmaking – (U.S. Department of Education)

The Commissioner noted that at a recent roundtable U.S. Assistant Secretary of Education Kirsten Baesler shared federal funding priorities for discretionary grants:

- Evidence-Based Literacy
- Expanding Education Choice
- Meaningful Learning
- Career Pathways and Workforce Readiness

The Commissioner highlighted how the federal priorities are aligned to CT's engaged priorities and focus areas.

#### **District Spotlight on Workforce and Career Readiness**

Commissioner Russell-Tucker invited Jeffrey R. Newton, Superintendent, East Lyme Public Schools, 2026 Superintendent of the Year, Thomas W. Giard III, Superintendent, Waterford Public Schools, and Henry E. Kydd III, Principal, East Lyme High School, to the table. Deputy Commissioner Hewes introduced that the Superintendents would present on the work that they are doing in their districts relative to workforce and career readiness.

Mr. Newton highlighted that East Lyme's pathways program has established over 30 creative partnerships allowing students to expand interest and opportunities outside of college. Mr. Kydd highlighted some community partnerships that have expanded opportunities for students at East Lyme High School.

Mr. Giard shared that similar to East Lyme, Waterford has developed reliable pathways through manufacturing and they are also looking at crosscutting clusters. Mr. Giard highlighted a partnership between Waterford High School and East Lyme High School sharing that for the last two school years, Waterford High School has been sending students to East Lyme High School nearly every day to take some of their CTE classes in the area of EMT, and East Lyme High School is sending students to Waterford High School to take advantage of the automotive and logistics courses.

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

Chief Strategic Planning Officer Keith Norton reported that there has been significant work done and highlighted three areas.

#### Improved Special Education and General Education Supports

On February 17, 2026, the CSDE Accountability and Support Team (AST) met with members of the superintendent's executive cabinet to discuss the district's plan for strengthening core instruction and multitiered systems of support (MTSS). On February 20, 2026, a meeting was held with HPS special education leadership to review progress addressing special education staff vacancies and the fulfillment of special education compensatory time owed.

#### Fiscal and Grants Management

On February 20, 2026, Deputy Commissioner Charles Hewes, Chief Turnaround Officer Melissa Jenkins, and CSDE staff responsible for managing federal and state grants met with HPS Chief

Financial Officer Caitlin Richard and her leadership team to provide a status update on each grant and strategize how to strengthen grant program management.

#### Staff Shortages

On February 25, 2026, Chief Talent Officer Shuana Tucker met with the HPS Human Resources leadership to address the recommendations regarding staffing shortages and to help with staff retention.

#### **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.

#### Fiscal and Human Resources Procedures and Decision-Making

In follow up to the Commissioner's February 3, 2026, meeting with the Interim Superintendent to share a list of items identified by the CSDE, the Technical Assistance Team, and Public Works for additional cost efficiencies within the district's proposed fiscal year (FY) 2027 budget, there are weekly meetings to look at all cost efficiencies to find funding. The district is prioritizing four areas that account for large budget line-item increases in recent years.

#### Regular and Special Education

There has been focus on some of the external special education providers in the district with a focus on making site visits and contact with the external providers. The district has conducted eight site visits in the last month using a uniform checklist to look at the services being provided.

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

On February 13, 2026, Deputy Commissioner Dr. Charles E. Hewes, sent a letter to BBE Chair, Jennifer Perez outlining the specific expectations of the BBE to have solid governance and approved updated Bylaws and administration policies in place before posting for a permanent superintendent.

Board members engaged in questions.

#### **Update on Special Education Systems Review**

The Commissioner invited Division Director Bryan Klimkiewicz and Katherine Matz, Special Education Bureau Chief, to the table. It was noted that the Special Education Systems Review Update is to ensure transparency of effective accountability and improvements to the WestEd Final Report that was released at the January 14, 2026, meeting.

Mr. Klimkiewicz reported that Special Education has a dispute resolution system with options for families that include special education administrative complaints, mediation, and due process hearings. Mr. Klimkiewicz presented data on state complaints for the period of July 1, 2025, through February 27, 2026, with outcomes that included findings of non-compliance and timelines.

The Board members engaged with questions.

#### **Report on the Effectiveness of the Alliance District Program**

The Commissioner invited Chief Performance Officer Ajit Gopalakrishnan to the table. Mr. Gopalakrishnan reported that the report was required by legislation on the effectiveness of Alliance Districts and to make recommendations. He presented on the Alliance District Program's historical background, fiscal facts on ECS funding, summary of findings, and recommendations.

Board Members engaged with questions.

The agenda was taken to Consent Agenda, X.

## **X. Consent Agenda**

Pro Tem Harris asked if there was a Board member wishing to remove an item from Consent. Hearing none, he asked for a motion on agenda items X.A., Continuing Approval of Sacred Heart University Educator Preparation Programs; X.B., Continuing Approval of University of Bridgeport Educator Preparation Programs; and X.C., Approval of the 2026-27 Concussion and Head Injury Annual Review for Coaches.

Board Member Burr moved, and Board Member Record seconded, that the State Board of Education approves the Consent Agenda.

### **A. Continuing Approval of Sacred Heart University Educator Preparation Programs**

**Resolved,** That the State Board of Education (SBE), pursuant to Section 10-145d-9(g)(1)(A) of the Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies, grants full approval to Sacred Heart University (SHU) for the period March 4, 2026, through March 31, 2033, for the purpose of certifying graduates from SHU in the following areas and directs the Commissioner to take necessary action.

<b><u>Program</u></b>	<b><u>Grade Level</u></b>	<b><u>Program Level</u></b>	<b><u>Program Type</u></b>
Elementary Education	PK-6	Initial	Undergraduate/Graduate
Secondary Grades			
English	4-12	Initial	Undergraduate/Graduate
History/Social Studies	4-12	Initial	Undergraduate/Graduate
Mathematics	4-12	Initial	Undergraduate/Graduate
General Science	4 -12	Initial	Undergraduate/Graduate
Biology	4-12	Initial	Undergraduate/Graduate
Chemistry	4-12	Initial	Undergraduate/Graduate
Spanish	4-12	Initial	Undergraduate/Graduate
Music	PK-12	Initial	Undergraduate/Graduate
Comprehensive Special Education	PK-12	Initial	Graduate
Remedial Reading/Language Arts	1-12	Advanced	Graduate
Reading/Language Arts Consultant	PK-12	Advanced	
Speech/Language Pathology <sup>1</sup>	PK-12	Advanced	Graduate
Intermediate Administration and Supervision	PK-12	Advanced	Graduate
Superintendent of Schools	PK-12	Advanced	Graduate
School Counseling	PK-12	Advanced	Graduate

### **B. Continuing Approval of University of Bridgeport Educator Preparation Programs**

**Resolved,** That the State Board of Education (SBE), pursuant to Section 10-145d-9(g)(1)(A) of the Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies, grants full approval to the University of Bridgeport (UB) for the period March 4, 2026, through March 31, 2033, for the purpose of certifying graduates from UB in the following areas and directs the Commissioner to take necessary action.

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<sup>1</sup> Accredited by Council on Academic Accreditation Audiology|Speech Pathology

<b><u>Program</u></b>	<b><u>Grade Level</u></b>	<b><u>Program Level</u></b>	<b><u>Program Type</u></b>
Elementary Education	PK-6	Initial	Graduate
Middle Level Areas:			
English	4-8	Initial	Graduate
History/Social Studies	4-8	Initial	Graduate
Mathematics	4-8	Initial	Graduate
Science	4-8	Initial	Graduate
Secondary Areas:			
English	4-12	Initial	Graduate
History and Social Studies	4-12	Initial	Graduate
Mathematics	4-12	Initial	Graduate
Biology	4-12	Initial	Graduate
Chemistry	4-12	Initial	Graduate
Earth Science	4-12	Initial	Graduate
General Science	4-12	Initial	Graduate
Physics	4-12	Initial	Graduate
Business	4-12	Initial	Graduate
Music	PK-12	Initial	Graduate
Remedial Reading/Language Arts	1-12	Advanced	Graduate
Reading/Language Arts Consultant	PK-12	Advanced	Graduate
Intermediate Administration or Supervision	PK-12	Advanced	Graduate

**C. Approval of the 2026-27 Concussion and Head Injury Annual Review for Coaches**

**Resolved,** That the State Board of Education, pursuant to Subsection (b)(2) of Section 10-149b of the Connecticut General Statutes, approves the 2026-27 Concussion and Head Injury Annual Review for Coaches, and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

VOTE ON

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

Motions carried unanimously.

**VIII. Items Requiring Action**

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

Pro Tem Donald Harris asked for a motion on agenda item VIII.A. Board Member Labas moved, and Board Member Pitkoff seconded, that, pursuant to Section 10-223h of the Connecticut General Statutes, the State Board of Education approves the continued participation of McDonough Middle School, Hartford, 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 Dr. Andraé Townsel, Superintendent, and Marjorie Rice, Principal, presented.

Board members engaged in discussion.

VOTE ON

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

Motion carried unanimously.

**B. Approval of Emergency Educator Certification Endorsements for the 2026-27 School Year**

Pro Tem Donald Harris sked for a motion on agenda item VIII.B. Board Member Burr moved, and Board Member Labas seconded, that the State Board of Education adopts the recommendation from the Connecticut State Department of Education to extend, for the 2026-27 school year only, implementation of the following temporary certification endorsements, as allowable under Sec. 10-145d-619 of the Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies, Emergency Generalist, PK-8 (#201), Emergency Generalist, 4-12 (#202), and Emergency Teacher of English Language Learners, PK-12 (#204) to allow educators who continuously hold during the 2026-27 school year an appropriate teaching certificate with verified completion of the TEAM Program to be eligible for Emergency Authorization at the request of the local education agency (LEA)/district, and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

Chief Talent Officer Shuana Tucker, and Education Consultant Kaylan Ricciardi, presented.

The Board members engaged with questions.

VOTE ON

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

Motion carried unanimously.

**C. Adoption of CEPCB's 2026 Proposal Regarding Sunsetting Regulations**

Pro Tem Donald Harris asked for a motion on agenda item VIII.C. 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 revisions to the implementing regulations under Section 10-145d of the Connecticut General Statutes as 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, Labas, Pitkoff, Record  
                  Opposed:        0

Abstained 0  
Absent: Zimmerman

Motion carried unanimously.

**D. Adoption of CEPCB’s Legislative Language - Initial Certification via Alternate Routes**

Pro Tem Donald Harris asked for a motion on agenda item VIII.D. Board Member Burr moved, and Board Member Labas 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 Section 10-145bb(a)(2) of Connecticut General Statutes, 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, Labas, Pitkoff, Record  
Opposed: 0  
Abstained 0  
Absent: Zimmerman

Motion carried unanimously.

**E. CEPCB’s Legislative Proposal – Reissuance of Initial Certification with Time Served**

Pro Tem Donald Harris asked for a motion on agenda item VIII.E. Board Member Burr moved, and Board Member Labas 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

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

Motion carried unanimously.

**IX. Financial Matters**

There were no financial matters to present.

**XI. Items for Discussion**

**A. 2024-2025 Student Discipline in Connecticut Public Schools**

Chief Performance Officer Ajit Gopalakrishnan and Division Director John Frassinelli, School Health, Nutrition, and Family Services, presented the annual report on the analyses of data trends in student disciplinary behaviors in Connecticut public schools. Mr. Gopalakrishnan introduced the disciplinary data generated from student level data, and Mr. Frassinelli explained the types of violations, suspensions, and sanctions, and the grouping of districts into tiers that are used to identify districts in order to provide systems of support and targeted action planning.

Members of the Board engaged in discussion.

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

Pro Tem Harris adjourned the meeting at 12:37 p.m.

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