

**Connecticut State Board of Education
Hartford**

State Board of Education Meeting

April 1, 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, April 1, 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://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QHBza6G6TQ4>.

I. Call to Order

Pro Tem Donald Harris called the meeting to order at 9:32 a.m.

Present: Erin D. Benham, Vice Chairperson (virtual)
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
Seth D. Zimmerman

Absent: Samarth Basanth, Student Member
Kristen A. Record
Dr. John Maduko, Ex Officio
Kelli-Marie Vallieres, Ex Officio

Governor's Proclamation for the Month of the Military Child

Pro Tem Donald Harris requested that Board Member Bonnie Burr read aloud the Governor's Proclamation into the record of the minutes as follows:

State of Connecticut, By His Excellency Ned Lamont, Governor: an Official Statement

Whereas, the armed forces of the United States of America have served our nation with courage and dedication; and

Whereas, the State of Connecticut, recognizes the sacrifices made by our military service members and their families; and

Whereas, military children demonstrate strength and resilience as they navigate frequent relocations, school transitions, and periods of separation from a parent; and

Whereas, military-connected students often attend multiple school systems during their academic careers and may face challenges related to enrollment, placement, and graduation; and

Whereas, the State of Connecticut, a member of the Military Interstate Children's Compact Commission since 2008, supports equitable educational transitions for these students, now

Therefore, I, Ned Lamont, Governor of the State of Connecticut do hereby officially proclaim the month of April 2026, as the Month of the Military Child and April 22nd, 2026, as *Purple Up For Military Kids Day!*

In the State of Connecticut - in recognition of and in deep appreciation for the service and sacrifice of our military members, their families, and most importantly, their children.

Signed by Governor Ned Lamont.

II. Public Participation

1. Terrence Collins spoke in support of his request for waiver of certification regarding agenda item VIII.E., Consideration of Certification for Terrence Collins #305 Elementary Education, PreK-6.
2. Erin Kobyluck, Library Media Teacher, Integrated Day Charter School, spoke in support of agenda item VIII.B., Renewal of State Charter: Integrated Day Charter School, Norwich.
3. Joseph Sokolovic, Vice Chair of the Bridgeport Board of Education, stated that he was speaking in his individual capacity, on the impact of fiscal decisions on outcomes and educational mandates. A copy of Mr. Sokolovic's written statement is in the official file of this meeting.
4. Jovonn Sokolovic continued to read aloud the public participation statement of Joseph Sokolovic.
5. Representative Derell Wilson, State Representative for the 46th District, and staff member of Integrated Day Charter School, spoke in support of agenda item VIII.B., Renewal of State Charter: Integrated Day Charter School, Norwich.
6. Sharon Voroschak, member of the Ansonia Board of Education, spoke on IDEA and ECS funding. A copy of Ms. Voroschak's written statement is in the official file of this meeting.

III. Executive Session

There was no executive session held.

IV. Consideration of Minutes:

A. March 4, 2026, State Board of Education Meeting

Board Member Burr moved, and Board Member Pitkoff seconded, that the Board adopt the minutes of the March 4, 2026, State Board of Education Meeting.

VOTE ON

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

Motion carried unanimously.

V. Report of the Chair

Vice Chair Benham reported that Dr. Evan Pitkoff attended his confirmation hearing on March 17, 2026.

X. Committee Reports

A. Academic Standards and Assessment

Committee Chair Gilberto reported that the next meeting will be on May 19, 2026. She referenced that a request of the committee was to calendar out appropriate, relevant, and timely agenda items that relate to the committee's charge.

B. Accountability and Support

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

C. Finance, Audit, and Budget

Committee Chair Harris reported that the committee's held its quarterly meeting on March 11, 2026. The committee received updates on the Open Choice Program, a school systems special review, single audits, ECS review, and the Governor's budget proposal. He extended a continued appreciation to Chief Strategic Officer Keith Norton.

D. Legislation and Policy Development

Committee Chair Burr reported that the committee met on March 4, 2026, and Jen Rodriguez, Board Chair, CEPBC, shared some proposals that her group has been working on. Ms. Burr stated that the committee was meeting today at 1:00 p.m.

E. Connecticut Technical Education and Career System Board

Dr. Pritchard provided an update on identified resources for CTECS to begin hiring paraeducators, and have initiated the necessary state classification process and discussions with the teacher unions. She announced that CTECS has a new Assistant Superintendent of Pupil Services, Josh Robinson.

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 that both Dr. Pitkoff and Dr. Carlson would be attending the NASBE 2026 New Member Institute being held in July.

H. SERC

Vice Chair Benham referenced the SERC report in the Supplemental Folder. She highlighted the email invitation that had been sent regarding SERC's *Dismantling Systemic Racism: 2026 Conference on Race, Education & Success*, on Friday, May 8, 2026, in New Haven.

Pro Tem Donald Harris asked the permission of the Board for a motion to move agenda item, VIII.F., 2026 Paraeducator Recognition Day & Anne Marie Murphy Paraeducator of the Year Semifinalists Recognition, to this present position on the agenda. Member Burr moved, and Board Member Zimmerman seconded, that agenda item VIII.F. be moved to before the Report of the Commissioner.

VIII. Items Requiring Action

F. 2026 Paraeducator Recognition Day & Anne Marie Murphy Paraeducator of the Year Semifinalists Recognition

Pro Tem Harris asked for a motion on agenda item VIII.A. Board Member Labas moved, and Board Member Gilberto seconded the 2026 Recognition of Paraeducators.

Pro Tem then turned the presentation over to Chief Talent Officer Dr. Shuana Tucker, and Education Consultant Dr. Jessica Ocasio, Talent Office.

Paraeducator leaders Shellye Davis, co-chair the Para Advisory Council, Divisional V.P. for PSRPS AFT-CT, and President of the Hartford Federation of Paraeducators, together with Tricia Santos, co-chair Para Advisory Council, Staff Representative AFSCME Council 4, were invited to the table.

Dr. Ocasio introduced the Paraeducator representatives. Each paraeducator spoke about being a paraeducator.

2026 Paraeducator Recognition of the Year Semifinalists

- **Danielle Franklin:** Poquonock School (Windsor)
- **Cynthia Salas:** Nathan Hale Arts Magnet School (New London)
- **Jillane Grieco:** John Barry Elementary School (Meriden)
- **Kimberly Fahey:** Northeast Academy Arts Magnet School (Groton)
*Ms. Fahey was unable to attend the meeting.

2026 Anne Marie Murphy Paraeducator of the Year Award Honoree

- **Vanessa Taylor:** Putnam Elementary School (Putnam)

Dr. Ocasio concluded that the paraeducators at the table were a tiny sampling of the paras working in our schools each and every day supporting students, teachers, and their peers.

Pro Tem Harris then read aloud the resolution into the record of the minutes as follows:

Whereas, National Paraprofessional Appreciation Day is celebrated annually on the first Wednesday of April; and

Whereas, Paraeducators are instrumental in supporting students in the various aspects of the educational process; and

Whereas, Paraeducators collaborate with teachers and related service providers to support the diverse needs of students; and

Whereas, Paraeducators take pride in their profession and are dedicated to supporting their students, families, and school communities; and

Whereas, Paraeducators welcome opportunities to engage in professional learning to build upon their existing skills and knowledge of best practices pertinent to their specific roles; and

Whereas, Paraeducators recognize the importance of their role in maximizing student engagement to ensure students experience positive outcomes; now therefore be it

Resolved, That the Connecticut State Board of Education extends its gratitude and appreciation to all Connecticut Paraeducators for their dedication and service to the students and families of the State of Connecticut.

VOTE ON

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

V. Report of the Commissioner and Agency Update

The Commissioner referenced her written report and highlighted the following:

- ❖ Joined more than 400 Aspiring Educators – middle and high school students from over 20 districts across Connecticut at the *6th Annual Educators Rising Connecticut State Conference* at Southern Connecticut State University.
- ❖ Presented at the *School Discipline Collaborative*, an event that brings together community partners, leaders, and educators.
- ❖ Presented at the *Commissioner’s Roundtable on Family and Community Engagement* in Education virtual meeting.
- ❖ Provided welcome remarks at the first in-person convening of the *Connecticut Curriculum Teacher Leader Fellowship* that was hosted by the Academics Office.
- ❖ Delivered luncheon remarks at the *46th Annual Connecticut Association for Adult and Continuing Education (CAACE) Conference*.
- ❖ Provided welcome remarks at the 2026 Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS) Spring Conference – “Leading Transformational Learning: Shaping the Future.”

- ❖ Participated as panelist along with Alabama State Superintendent Eric Mackey and State Board Member Kevin Ellis, District 9, Texas Board of Education, at *The State of the States: Bipartisanship in Education Today* event at the *SXSW EDU 2026 Conference*.
- ❖ Attended and participated in the Council of Chief State School Officer’s 2026 Legislative Conference along with CSDE Deputy Commissioner Charles Hewes and joined Alabama State Superintendent Eric Mackey and Wisconsin Superintendent of Public Instruction Jill Underly as a panelist at the Legislative Conference’s Special Event: *State Leadership for Student Outcomes*.

Carpe Noctem InvenTeam – Berlin High School

The Commissioner invited Chief Academic Officer Irene Parisi and the Berlin High School Carpe Noctem InvenTeam to present on their innovative project. The InvenTeam is a student led STEM innovation team.

Chief Parisi recognized Berlin’s leadership team (i) superintendent Brian Benigni, (ii) principal Katie Amenta, (iii) teacher and mentor Christopher Wisniewski, and (iv) supportive colleagues in the room Adam Leonard, Jim Arnold, and Kara Watson.

Members of the InvenTeam are:

• Ava Barbagallo	• Michelle Liu
• Hanna Bednarczyk	• James Massirio
• Monika Burbula	• Marco Mongillo
• Sydelle Holland	• Kaylin Stein
• Steven Junker	• Angela Topintzis

The students were awarded a grant from the Lemelson-MIT InvenTeams program to help launch their research and create an invention designed to help insectivorous bats improve their odds of surviving White-Nose Syndrome.

The students defined and presented the problem of White-Nose Syndrome, a deadly fungal disease that causes bat deaths across North America, and their invention designed to kill the fungus. The InvenTeam built a prototype and filed a patent application with the U.S. Patent & Trademark Office.

The Board members engaged in questions, and congratulated and commended the students on the impressive level of their work.

North Hartford Ascend: A “Cradle-to-Career” Pathway for School Success

Paul H. Dworkin, MD, presented on the North Hartford Ascend program with an overview of the program, which is five-year grant from the U.S. Department of Education’s Promise Neighborhoods Program that was launched in January 2022, and is overseen by Connecticut Children’s.

The program is designed to improve the academic and developmental outcomes of children living in certain communities by creating a pipeline of support services, and opportunities for children from birth, to postsecondary education and career attainment. The goal of Ascend is partnering with the community to build integrated and coordinated services and supports that will be universally available to children and families in the North Hartford Promise Zone.

Update on Hartford Public Schools Fiscal Operations

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

Staffing Shortages

On March 25, 2026, Deputy Commissioner Sinthia Sone-Moyano and Chief Talent Officer Shuana Tucker met with HPS's new Executive Director, Christopher Weiss to assist HPS in strengthening its teacher retention strategy.

Improved Special Education and General Education Supports

On February 11, 2026, the CSDE issued a letter to Dr. Jennifer Hoffman, HPS Assistant Superintendent for Special Education and Pupil Services, sharing concerns reported by parent advocacy groups that students with disabilities enrolled in the iGoal and STEP programs were receiving fewer hours of instruction than regular education students.

Caissa K12

On March 23, 2026, Michael P. McKeon, Director of Legal and Governmental Affairs, sent a letter to Dr. Andraé Townsel, Superintendent regarding the Hartford Board of Education's retention of Caissa K12 to recruit students to Hartford Public Schools including students currently enrolled in Sheff magnet schools and public schools through the Open Choice program. The letter outlined that certain aspects of this engagement are at odds with the Board's obligations under the Comprehensive School Choice Plan ("CCP").

Fiscal and Grants Management

On March 5, 2026, Superintendent Dr. Andraé Townsel and HPS Chief Financial Officer Caitlin Richard presented to the Municipal Accountability Review Board (MARB) a projected \$22 million fiscal year (FY) 2026 deficit. At the same time, state-level preliminary analysis of financial information provided by HPS indicates a small surplus. The conflicting financial representations necessitate an immediate expansion of the State's intervention beyond the initial three-pronged review to include a rigorous independent financial audit of HPS's fiscal position.

The Board engaged in discussion.

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

A review of BHP'S current budget has identified an estimated \$6 million in cost efficiencies, as well as \$2 million in reimbursements and collections. On March 23, 2026, the mayor posted his budgetary contribution of \$5 million.

The CSDE, Team, and Public Works are monitoring closely 44 vacancies as of March 27, 2026, to ensure BPS is as close to fully staffed as possible for the start of the 2026-27 school year. Public Works is assisting BPS to strengthen the procedures for onboarding new employees, and the Team is assisting BPS with strategies to retain new certified staff.

School Climate

CSDE has been working closely with BPS's District Attendance Review Team (DART) to reduce student chronic absenteeism rates. There has been some notable progress with the focus on engaging families to support students to attend school.

Operational Efficiency and Effectiveness of the Bridgeport Board of Education

On March 23, 2026, the Bridgeport Board of Education approved a second set of Series 9000 policies adding to their progress towards reviewing and updating all BBE bylaws to align with Connecticut model bylaws for boards of education. In a letter, Board Chair Jennifer Perez provided an update on their progress of bylaws, evaluations and administrative policies. The BBE plans to postpone the superintendent search and extend the contract with the current interim superintendent.

Regular and Special Education

The CSDE, the Technical Assistance Team, Public Works, and other professional development organizations are partnering to assist the district to plan and coordinate high-quality professional learning opportunities for certified and non-certified staff in advance of the 2026-27 school year.

Board members engaged in questions.

Update on Special Education Systems Review

The Commissioner invited Division Director Bryan Klimkiewicz, Special Education, to the table.

Mr. Klimkiewicz reported an update on the Special Education 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 March 27, 2026, with outcomes that included findings of non-compliance and timelines.

The Board members engaged with questions.

VIII. Items Requiring Action

A. Renewal of State Charter: Explorations, Winsted

Pro Tem Donald Harris asked for a motion on agenda item VIII.A. Board Member Gilberto moved, and Board Member Zimmerman seconded, that the State Board of Education, pursuant to subsection (g) of Section 10-66bb of the Connecticut General Statutes, renews the charter of Explorations Charter School from July 1, 2026, through June 30, 2029, subject to the conditions and recommendations set forth in the Commissioner's April 1, 2026, memorandum to the State Board of Education, and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

Chief Turnaround Officer Dr. Melissa Jenkins, and school officials Jill Johnson, Executive Director and Principal, and Sarah Hayes, Governing Council Chairperson, presented.

VOTE ON

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

Motion carried unanimously.

B. Renewal of State Charter: Integrated Day Charter School, Norwich

Pro Tem Donald Harris asked for a motion on agenda item VIII.B. Board Member Burr moved, and Board Member Labas seconded, that pursuant to subsection (g) of Section 10-66bb(g) of the Connecticut General Statutes, the State Board of Education renews the charter of

Integrated Day Charter School from July 1, 2026, through June 30, 2031, subject to the Commissioner's April 1, 2026, memorandum to the State Board of Education, and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

Chief Turnaround Officer Dr. Melissa Jenkins, and school officials Debby Allard, Executive Director, and Brandon Hyde, Governing Council Vice Chair, presented.

VOTE ON

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

Motion carried unanimously.

C. Adoption of CEPCB's 2026 Proposed Revision of RCSA Section 10-145d-615

Pro Tem Donald Harris asked for a motion on agenda item VIII.C. 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 10-145d-615 of the Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies, 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, Zimmerman
Opposed: 0
Abstained 0
Absent: Pitkoff, Record

Motion carried unanimously.

D. Adoption of CEPCB's Proposed Statutory and Regulatory Revisions Establishing Alternative Pathway to Professional Educator Certificate

Pro Tem Donald Harris asked for a motion on agenda item VIII.D. Board Member Zimmerman 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 hereby approves the Connecticut Educator Preparation and Certification Board's proposed amendment of Section 10-145b 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, Zimmerman
Opposed: 0
Abstained 0
Absent: Pitkoff, Record

Motion carried unanimously.

E. Consideration of Certification for Terrence Collins #305 Elementary Education, PreK-6

Pro Tem Donald Harris asked for a motion on agenda item VIII.E. Board Member Burr moved, and Board Member Labas seconded, that having carefully reviewed Terrence Collins' request that the State Board of Education waive the Praxis II Elementary Mathematics Subtest for issuance of an Initial Educator Certificate endorsed for Elementary Education, PreK-6 (#305), the State Board has determined that Mr. Collins has not demonstrated the combination of education and experience that is the equivalent of the education and experience required under Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.) Section 10-145bb(b) and therefore denies his request for such waiver.

Education Consultant Dr. Kaylan Ricciardi, presented.

The Board engaged in discussion on clarification of the resolution and pathway options available for Mr. Collins.

VOTE ON

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

Motion carried unanimously.

IX. Financial Matters

The Commissioner asked Laura Stefon, Chief of Staff/Legislative Liaison, to provide an update on the budget. Ms. Stefon reported on the total amount of new funding for education.

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., The Condition of Education in Connecticut 2024-25; and X.B., Approval of the Sudden Cardiac Arrest Awareness Annual Review for Coaches and Parent and Legal Guardian Sudden Cardiac Arrest Awareness Informed Consent Form.

Board Member Gilberto moved, and Board Member Zimmerman seconded, that the State Board of Education approves the Consent Agenda.

A. Condition of Education in Connecticut 2024-25

Board Member Zimmerman did not want to pull from the Consent Agenda, but he encouraged members to look at Figure 2 regarding education funding. Board Member Pitkoff also noted that he did not want to pull from the Consent Agenda, but the topic was worthy of further discussion.

Commissioner Russell-Tucker confirmed that she would bring the discussion back to the next Board meeting.

Resolved, That the State Board of Education, pursuant to Section 10-4(b) of the Connecticut General Statutes, receives *The Condition of Education in Connecticut* (2024-25) and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

B. Approval of the Sudden Cardiac Arrest Awareness Annual Review for Coaches and Parent and Legal Guardian Sudden Cardiac Arrest Awareness Informed Consent Form

Resolved, That pursuant to Section 10-149f of the Connecticut General Statutes, the State Board of Education approves the Connecticut State Department of Education's Sudden Cardiac Arrest Awareness Annual Review for Coaches and the Sudden Cardiac Arrest Awareness Parent and Legal Guardian Informed Consent Form and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

VOTE ON

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

Motions carried unanimously.

XI. Items for Discussion

There were no items for Discussion.

Pro Tem Harris asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting, Board Member Gilberto moved, Board Member Labas seconded, that the meeting be adjourned.

Pro Tem Harris adjourned the meeting at 1:07 p.m.

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