

IV.A.

Connecticut State Board of Education Hartford

State Board of Education Meeting

May 13, 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, May 13, 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=DNqokKFH0rk>.

I. Call to Order

Vice Chairperson Erin Benham called the meeting to order at 9:34 a.m.

Present: Erin D. Benham, Vice Chairperson
Bonnie E. Burr
Andrew J. Carlson
Dr. Aynsley Diamond, designee for CSCU
Paula S. Gilberto
Donald F. Harris, Jr.
Gladys B. Labas
Dr. Alice Pritchard, designee for CTECS
Kristen A. Record
Seth D. Zimmerman

Absent: Samarth Basanth, Student Member
Hansika Lenkala, Student Member
Evan Pitkoff
Kelli-Marie Vallieres, Ex Officio

II. Public Participation

1. Michael Carlo, spoke on his daughter's experiences with the College Board exam.
2. Colleen Artymiak, spoke on CT's Right to Read Act and her concerns with American Reading Company being on the approved list.

3. Dr. Andraé Townsel, Superintendent and CEO, Hartford Public Schools, spoke about HPS having a long-standing structural deficit, the promotion of the Hartford Promise, and on the Sheff Open Choice grant funding.
4. Latanya Baskin, spoke in support of her request for waiver of certification regarding agenda item VIII.C., Consideration for Approval of Certification for LaTanya Baskin **#165** Comprehensive Special Education, PreK-12.
5. Joslyn DeLancey, Vice President of the Connecticut Education Association, spoke in support of agenda item XI.A., Educator Evaluation and Support Council Update.
6. Shontá Browdy, Chair, Hartford Board of Education, spoke regarding underfunded schools, magnet schools, and on charter schools.
7. Dr. Avery Royce, Interim Superintendent, Bridgeport Public Schools (BPS), acknowledged Commissioner Russell-Tucker, Dr. Charles Hewes, the Technical Assistance Team, and Public Works LLC for the leadership and guidance provided to BPS.
8. 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.

III. Executive Session

There was no executive session held.

IV. Consideration of Minutes:

A. April 1, 2026, State Board of Education Meeting

Board Member Burr moved, and Board Member Zimmerman seconded, that the Board adopt the minutes of the April 1, 2026, State Board of Education Meeting.

VOTE ON

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

Motion carried unanimously.

V. Report of the Chair

- Vice Chair Benham reported that she and the Commissioner were both appointed by the Governor to serve on the Connecticut Pathways Commission.
- Attended two school site visits to Waterford High School and East Lyme High School for a display on collaboration of pathways, and was joined by Mr. Harris, Dr. Labas, Dr. Vallieres, Deputy Commissioner Hewes, Chief Keith Norton, and Chief Irene Parisi.

- Ms. Record reported on attending the 10th Annual SERC's *Dismantling Systemic Racism: 2026 Conference on Race, Education & Success*, held on Friday, May 8, 2026, in New Haven. Dr. Gladys Labas and Samarth Basanth, student member also attended.
- Attended the Educators Rising Signing Day, along with the Commissioner.

X. Committee Reports

A. Academic Standards and Assessment

Committee Chair Gilberto reported that the next meeting will be on May 19, 2026.

B. Accountability and Support

Committee Chair Benham reported that the committee met on April 28, 2026, and will meet on May 20, 2026.

C. Finance, Audit, and Budget

Committee Chair Harris reported that the committee held its quarterly meeting on May 6, 2026. The committee reviewed the Internal Audit Plan for Fiscal Year 2026-2027 to be presented to the Board at a subsequent meeting. 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 April 1, 2026, and reviewed the Relay Graduate School of Education's decision not to seek reauthorization. Ms. Burr stated that the committee was assured that Relay would be doing a teach-out of all the remaining state students.

E. Connecticut Technical Education and Career System Board

Dr. Pritchard highlighted that the administration and legislature provided CTECS budget resources to expand adult education programming. She concluded that she was excited to be part of the Connecticut Pathways Commission.

F. Connecticut State Colleges and Universities

Dr. Aynsley Diamond reported on the launch of the commencement season - May 16th through May 28, 2026.

G. NASBE

Vice Chair Benham thanked the members who have been attending the NASBE Exchange. She reported that the next Member Exchange will be June 1, 2026.

H. SERC

Vice Chair Benham referenced the SERC report in the Supplemental Folder and noted the success of the SERC's 10th Annual *Dismantling Racism Conference*.

V. Report of the Commissioner and Agency Update

The Commissioner referenced her written report and highlighted the following:

- ❖ Spoke at the Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity, and Opportunity's annual literacy forum, *Every Voice, Every Reader: Advancing Literacy for Multilingual Learners* and noted that Dr. Melissa Hickey, and Dr. Maribel Olivero were presenters at the event.
- ❖ Hosted annual CSDE Commissioner's Teacher Roundtable.
- ❖ Attended the Annual Educators Rising Signing Day and *Teacher Registered Apprenticeship Program* Graduation, honoring a growing talent pipeline that supports future educators along with SBE Vice Chair Benham, CT Department of Labor Commissioner Dante Bartolomeo and staff from the Talent Office.
- ❖ Provided remarks at the 2026 Workforce Summit: Reimagining Career Pathways.
- ❖ Hosted Governor Lamont at the CSDE offices as part of a series of agency visits to see firsthand the important work happening.
- ❖ Developed and shared a video in honor of *Teacher Appreciation Week* to show the gratitude we hold for Connecticut teachers.
- ❖ Launched the 5th Annual *School Staff Appreciation Digital Backpack* program.
- ❖ Joined Governor Lamont, Lieutenant Governor Susan Bysiewicz, and other state leaders to announce the establishment of the Blue-Ribbon Commission on K-12 Education Funding and Accountability.

Agency Update

The Commissioner invited Deputy Commissioner Charles Hewes and the members of the Technical Assistance Team to table to present on BPS.

Update Bridgeport Public Schools – Action to Address District Needs

Deputy Commissioner Charles Hewes introduced the two teams that are in direct support of BPS with CSDE leadership: (i) David Erwin, (ii) David Abbey, and (iii) Ed Arum, and virtually Dr. JoAnn Cox and Betty Ressel of Public Works LLC.

Dr. Hewes highlighted a letter of communication, the *Bridgeport Education Update*, from the CSDE with the Commissioner's Message to Bridgeport families, educators, and community members.

Technical Assistance Team

Team leader David Erwin provided an overview of the Technical Assistance Team who began working with the CSDE and BPS leadership in February 2025. He introduced his Team colleagues David Abbey, focusing on Special Education, and Ed Arum, focusing on financial operations.

The Technical Assistance Team presented on the actions addressed by the Team and CSDE staff over the past 16 months to support the district with:

- Budget Process
- Special Education Services
- Staffing and Instructional Support Systems
- Board Governance and School Operations

Public Works LLC

Dr. JoAnn Cox and Ms. Betty Ressel presented. Dr. Cox introduced that Public Works was hired to provide BPS with technical assistance to address the 34 recommendations based on the forensic audit of BPS by CliftonLarsonAllen LLP (CLA). Dr. Cox and Ms. Ressel provided a status report on BPS's progress towards addressing the 34 recommendations. They summarized that BPS has completed 10 recommendations and was actively working on 21.

Update on Hartford Public Schools Fiscal Operations

Chief Strategic Planning Officer Keith Norton referenced the HPS report in the Board's packet.

Fiscal and Grants Management

Mr. Norton presented that at the April 1, 2026, SBE meeting the CSDE had alerted the SBE of the agency's concern regarding the conflicting representations of the financial status of HPS for Fiscal Year 2026. He noted that since that time, the CSDE entered into agreement with CliftonLarsonAllen LLP (CLA) to conduct a compilation of forecasted statement of revenue and expenditures followed by a forensic audit of HPS's FY 2024, FY 2025, and FY 2026 budgets. Mr. Norton concluded that the SBE will continue to be updated monthly regarding the independent financial audit of HPS's fiscal position.

The Board engaged in questions.

Update on Special Education Systems Review

The Commissioner provided an update. She reported that the CSDE has executed a contract with WestEd to work with the CSDE on the findings and recommendations provided in the initial *Special Education Systems Review: WestEd Final Report*. WestEd will provide the SBE with a status update at a future board meeting.

2026 Legislation Session Update

The Commissioner invited Chief of Staff and Legislative Liaison Laura Stefon to present a summary the legislative session and status of legislative bills. Ms. Stefon reported on the number of bills that were introduced and the number of bills that passed and did not pass. Ms. Stefon provided a status on the agency bills and presented on selected bills of interest to the Board.

The Board members engaged in questions.

Mental Health Awareness Month Update

Division Director John Frassinelli, School Health, Nutrition, and Family Services, presented. He opened with the 2025 CT School Health Survey, known as the Youth Risk Behavior Survey, a national survey conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In CT, the survey was completed by 3,800 high school students in about 50 schools and encompassed 126 questions in three categories: (1) Safety, (2) Wellness, and (3) Suicidality. Mr. Frassinelli highlighted the following CSDE Mental Health Initiatives:

- Student Support Series for School Mental Health Staff
- School Mental Health Resource Kits
- Handle with Care
- School-Based Diversion Initiative
- Suicide Prevention and Crisis Response

The Condition of Education in Connecticut 2024-25: Data Trends and Educational Priorities

Chief Performance Officer Ajit Gopalakrishnan noted that the Condition of Education report is required by legislation. He presented an overview of the key highlights in the report that was approved by the Board on April 1, 2026.

The Board members engaged in questions.

VIII. Items Requiring Action

A. Approval of Commissioner’s Network Extension Year 4, Barnum School, Bridgeport

Vice Chair Benham asked for a motion on agenda item VIII.A. Board Member Gilberto moved, and Board Member Burr seconded, that, pursuant to Section 10-223h of the Connecticut General Statutes, the State Board of Education approves the continued participation of Barnum School, Bridgeport, in the Commissioner’s Network for an additional 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, and school officials Dr. Avery Royce, Interim Superintendent, Margaret Hughes, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction, and Christine Kasten, Principal, presented.

VOTE ON

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

Motion carried unanimously.

B. Renewal of State Charter: Achievement First Hartford Academy, Hartford

Vice Chair Benham asked for a motion on agenda item VIII.B. Board Member Labas moved, and Board Member Burr seconded, that pursuant to Section 10-66bb(g) of the Connecticut General Statutes, the State Board of Education renews the charter of Achievement First Hartford Academy from July 1, 2026, through June 30, 2029, subject to the Commissioner’s May 13, 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 Sueleidy Cruz, Principal, Achievement First Hartford Academy Elementary School, Jessica Alhasnawi, Principal, Achievement First Hartford Summit Middle School, Laneka Thomas, Principal, Achievement First Hartford High School, and Erwin Hurst, Sr., Governing Board Chair, presented.

VOTE ON

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

Motion carried unanimously.

C. Consideration for Approval of Certification for LaTanya Baskin #165 Comprehensive Special Education, PreK-12

Vice Chair Benham asked for a motion on agenda item VIII.C. Board Member Record moved, and Board Member Labas seconded, that pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.) Section 10-145bb(b), the State Board of Education determines that LaTayna Baskin presents a combination of education and experience that is the equivalent of the education and experience required under Section 10-145bb(b) and thereby waives the requirements set forth in C.G.S. Section 10-145bb(a) and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action to issue an Initial Educator Certificate endorsed for Comprehensive Special Education, PreK-12 (#165).

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

VOTE ON

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

Motion carried unanimously.

D. Consideration for Approval of Certification for James Murphy #305 Elementary Education, PreK-6

Vice Chair Benham asked for a motion on agenda item VIII.D. Board Member Record moved, and Board Member Zimmerman seconded, that pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.) Section 10-145bb(b), the State Board of Education determines that James Murphy presents a combination of education and experience that is the equivalent of the education and experience required under Section 10-145bb(b) and thereby waives the requirements set forth in C.G.S. Section 10-145bb(a) and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action to issue an Initial Educator Certificate endorsed for Elementary Education, PreK-6 (#305).

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

VOTE ON

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

Motion carried unanimously.

IX. Financial Matters

Chief of Staff and Legislative Liaison Laura Stefon presented an overview summarizing the budget funding for Fiscal Years 26 and 27 for the Department.

X. Consent Agenda

Vice Chair Benham asked if there was a Board member wishing to remove an item from Consent. Hearing none, she asked for a motion on agenda items IX.A., Continuing Approval of University of New Haven, Speech and Language Pathology Program.

Board Member Labas moved, and Board Member Harris seconded, that the State Board of Education approves the Consent Agenda.

A. Continuing Approval of University of New Haven, Speech and Language Pathology Program

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 continuing program approval for the period May 13, 2026, through May 31, 2031, to the University of New Haven for the purpose of recommending candidates for the Connecticut initial educator certificate in the following endorsement area and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

Program	Grade Level	Program Level	Program Type
Speech/Language Pathology	PK-12	Advanced	Graduate

VOTE ON

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

Motion carried unanimously.

XI. Items for Discussion

A. Educator Evaluation and Support Council Update

Chief Talent Officer Dr. Shuana Tucker, and Education Consultant Sharon Fuller, along with teacher May Yordon, American Federation of Teachers, presented an update on the evolving support system known as Educator Evaluation and Support (EES) Council.

Dr. Tucker presented on the Year 1 Implementation of EES Council, led by Education Consultant Sharon Fuller and Dr. Jessica Ocasio with the engagement of a broad range of stakeholders.

Ms. Fuller presented on the Year 2 Implementation EES Council and the participation of various Council Members and concluded with advocacy as the "Next Steps for EES Council Members."

The Board members engaged in questions.

Vice Chair Benham asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting, Board Member Burr moved, Board Member Zimmerman seconded, that the meeting be adjourned.

Vice Chair Benham adjourned the meeting at 1:19 p.m.

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