Connecticut State Board of Education
Hartford

State Board of Education Meeting

October 7, 2026

D R A F T

Pursuant to notice filed with the Secretary of the State and posted on the agency's website, the members the of State Board of Education (hereinafter "Board") held a meeting on Wednesday, October 7, 2026, in the Vernon E. Cleaves Agriculture Science & Technology Center, at Lyman Hall High School, 70 Pond Hill Road, Wallingford, Connecticut. Public access to the building allowed for public attendance at the meeting.

The meeting can be viewed here:
https://www.youtube.com/live/EXi2lnY1mJg?si=KK443g3aN_XPyLuT

I. Call to Order

Vice Chairperson Erin Benham called the meeting to order at 4:13 p.m.

Present: Erin D. Benham, Vice Chairperson
Bonnie E. Burr
Andrew J. Carlson
Shepard Fisher, Student Member, Student Member
Paula S. Gilberto
Donald F. Harris, Jr.
Gladys B. Labas
Evan Pitkoff
Shruti Shah, Student Member, Student Member
Kristen A. Record
Seth D. Zimmerman*

Absent: Dr. Alice M. Pritchard, designee for CTECS
Dr. Aynsley Diamond, designee for CSCU
Kelli-Marie Vallieres, Ex Officio

II. Public Participation

1. Joseph Solovick, vice chair of the Bridgeport Board of Education, stated that he was speaking today in his individual capacity, on the impact of fiscal decisions on outcomes and educational mandates.

2. Shontá Browdy, chairperson, Hartford Board of Education, spoke regarding CLA findings of the forensic audit for HPS, improvement priorities for HPS, and clarification note that HPS had issue with the audit process over good faith partnership, and concluded that HPS welcomes the support of the CSDE.

3. Corrie Betts, president of the Greater Hartford NAACP, spoke on education equity and equal access to quality education, and the state having the responsibility to ensure that Hartford Public Schools have the resources and support necessary to educate our children.

III. Executive Session

There was no executive session held.

IV. Consideration of Minutes:

A. September 2, 2026, State Board of Education Meeting

Board Member Burr moved, and Board Member Pitkoff seconded, that the Board adopt the minutes of the September 2, 2026, State Board of Education Meeting.

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

Motions carried unanimously.

V. Report of the Chair

Vice Chair Benham thanked Superintendent Danielle Bellizzi, Interim Principal Dr. Kenneth Daly, Director Kristen Mappa, ASTE Director, and all the student who provided an ASTE Tour of the Vernon E. Cleaves Agriculture Science & Technology Center.

Vice Chair Benham highlighted the following:

- Thanked the Board members presiding over the nine charter school public hearings.
- CT Grown for Kids Week invitation extended to Board Member Bonnie Burr.
  - CT Grown for CT Kids Week Kick- Off Event, held on October 5, 2026, to celebrate farm to school efforts and partners, held at Toffolon Elementary School, Plainville.
  - Board Member Burr attended the event. She highlighted the Department of Agriculture, UCONN Extension, and the school districts doing the work to get locally grown goods into their cafeterias.

[Board Member Zimmerman arrived at approximately 4:27 p.m.]

- Reported that CT Career Pathways Commission is at the draft recommendations stage.
  - Noted that Dr. Zimmerman was a special guest presenter at the October 1, 2026, meeting.
  - Dr. Zimmerman spoke on his experience with the Commission.
- Reported event dates for the Board members to hold in calendars.
  - October 20, 2026, and October 23, 2026 for the announcements of the CT Paraeducator of the Year and the CT Teacher of the Year.
  - November 20, 2026, the CABE/CAPSS Conference – November 20, 2026, with the Workshop to meet with State Board of Education.
  - December 2, 2026, Teacher of the Year Ceremony at the Bushnell.

VI. Committee Reports

A. Academic Standards and Assessment

Committee Chair Gilberto reported that the committee met on September 29, 2026, and received updates on Newcomer Guidance and Instructional Coaching Framework, and finalized dates for 2027 quarterly meetings.

B. Accountability and Support

Committee Chair Benham reported that the committee will meet on October 29, 2026, where Bridgeport Public Schools will come before the committee. She reminded Board members that all members are welcome to attend.

C. Finance, Audit, and Budget

Committee Chair Harris reported that the committee held its quarterly meeting on August 25, 2026, and that the next meeting will be on November 24, 2026.

D. Legislation and Policy Development

Committee Chair Burr reported that the committee met on September 2, 2026, and reviewed CEPCB's proposed Professional Educator Scholarship Program, and will have further discussion at the November 4, 2026, meeting.

E. Connecticut Technical Education and Career System Board

Vice Chair Benham reported there was no report for CTECS for this meeting.

F. Connecticut State Colleges and Universities

There was no report to present for CSCU.

G. NASBE

Vice Chair Benham opened by highlighting a NASBE Board of Directors meeting, where President Paolo DeMaria complimented the CSBE for being a board that clearly works well with the staff, the department, and they all work as one.

- Vice Chair Benham thanked the Board members who have been attending the NASBE Member Exchange.
- Vice Chair Benham thanked Dr. Carlson for providing research reporting materials in response to NASBE'S EdTech Advisory Group.
- Vice Chair Benham reported that three Board members will attend NASBE 2026 Annual Conference in Baltimore, Maryland, from October 26, 2026, to October 28, 2026.

H. SERC

Vice Chair Benham referenced the SERC Report in the Supplemental Folders, and encouraged members to review the report of all the good works going on at SERC.

VII. Report of the Commissioner and Agency Update

Commissioner Russell-Tucker welcomed everyone to the meeting and extended appreciation to Lyman Hall High School for hosting and the great work of the ASTE Center.

- Hosted the *2026-2027 Superintendent Back-to-School* at the CT Science Center, on September 15, 2026.
  - Presented a video clip that highlighted the speakers as Lieutenant Governor Bysiewicz, DESPP Commissioner Ronnell Higgins, Executive Director Fran Rabinowitz, CAPPS, CT Superintendent of the Year Jeffrey Newton, and Keynote speakers Jeremy Anderson, CEO of the National Math and Science Initiative, and Amanda Jarrell Billiot, Vice President of HR, Talent, and Organizational Health at Pratt & Whitney/RTX.
- Joined Governor Lamont in Plainville for a press conference highlighting the *High-Quality Special Education Incentive Grant Program*.
- Provided welcome marks at the *Bureau of Special Education's Back-to-School Meeting* and was joined by Governor Lamont and Lieutenant Governor Bysiewicz with special education leaders, advocates, stakeholders, and students.
- Provided video remarks to the *2026 English Learner/Multilingual Learner Education Summit* held at Southern Connecticut State University.
  - Provided an acknowledgement of Dr. Gladys Labas attending.
- Presented at the Connecticut Association of School Business Officials (CASBO) Annual Workshop and was joined by Chief Performance Officer Ajit Gopalakrishnan, and Chief of Fiscal/Administrative Services Jessica Brunetti.
- Joined Secretary Wojcik, Commissioner Bartolomeo, and Chief Workforce Officer Dr. Vallieres to deliver opening remarks at the Coleridge Data Summit on the importance of data-sharing and collaboration among state agencies.
- Presented the "Report on the Effectiveness of the Alliance District Program" to the Education Committee at the Alliance District Report Form, and was joined by Chief Performance Officer Ajit Gopalakrishnan and Chief Turnaround Officer Melissa Jenkins.
- Announced the Teacher Registered Apprenticeship Program (T-RAP) with $2 million to connect aspiring teacher apprentices to districts.

Shoutouts!

- Commissioner Russell-Tucker was the honored with the *2026 Excellence in Education Equity Award* at the 10th Anniversary Celebration & Excellence Brunch of the National Coalition of 100 Black Women (NCBW) on September 13, 2026.

  Vice Chair Benham congratulated the Commissioner.

Commissioner Russell-Tucker referenced her written report in the Board's Supplemental Folders.

Agency Update

The Commissioner introduced the importance of grants being tied to the Board's Plan and the Focus Areas of our work by continuing to leverage additional resources and getting out to districts. She invited the Team members to present.

Department State Grants Update

- Connecticut's High-Dosage Tutoring (HDT) Program – Awards $2 Million
  Chief Academic Officer Irene Parisi presented. She highlighted that the Department was awarded a total of $2 million to 42 local education agencies recipients from a competitive grant process that supports and accelerates student foundational learning of mathematic skills.

- Connecticut High-Quality Special Education Incentive Grant Program – Awards $10.6
  Division Director Bryan Klimkiewicz, Bureau of Special Education presented. He highlighted that 41 special education programs across Connecticut are receiving $10.6 million in state competitive grants to strengthen in-district special education programs, and at the press conference in Plainville, they heard from South Windsor Schools and Plainville Public Schools. Mr. Klimkiewicz acknowledged and thanked partners at SERC for its help with the application process.

- Special Education Expansion and Development (SEED) Grant – Year 2
  Division Director Bryan Klimkiewicz, Bureau of Special Education presented. He highlighted that $30 million was allocated for the SEED grant is in its second year, is calculated based on a formula, and the SEED grants funds can only be used for special education purposes.

- Learner Engagement and Attendance Program (LEAP) - $7 Million
  Division Director John Frassinelli, School Health, Nutrition, and Family Services, presented. He provided an overview of the start of LEAP in 2021 with American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, and with the success of the program, the Governor and the Legislature approved a state budget line-item of $7 million, and $6.2 million in state grants are being awarded to 29 school districts to improve student attendance and engagement.

  - FOX 61 News – LEAP Segment
    The Commissioner noted that Vice Chair Benham had requested that the FOX-61 News LEAP Segment be played. Vice Chair Benham stated that it provided a good summary of the LEAP program.

The Commissioner stated that she wanted to update the Board about the work that is going on around additional funding from the Legislature and Governor that is not from the regular funding that goes to the districts.

The Commissioner announced that the press release event occurred earlier today for the federal funding of $15 Million in 21st Century Community Learning Center Grants to Expand After-School Opportunities.

- CSDE Announces $15 Million in 21st Century Community Learning Center Grants to Expand After-School Opportunities
  Division Director John Frassinelli, School Health, Nutrition, and Family Services, presented on the (21st CCLC) grants that provide approximately $5 million annually for three years to support 25 programs that offer after-school academic enrichment, student supports, and other learning opportunities.

Statewide Multi-Agency Suicide Prevention Efforts
Division Director John Frassinelli, School Health, Nutrition, and Family Services, presented. He shared the teen suicide statistics in CT for 2024, 2025, and to date for 2026. He highlighted the interrelationship of chronic absenteeism, staying in school, and the rational for the Board having a position state and policy guidance regarding social media usage and access to the internet.
Mr. Frassinelli reported that:

- The organizations that comprise of the State Suicide Response Team and how the members respond to the identification of suicides or untimely deaths, and noted that the CSDE is usually the member that reaches out directly to the school to know what resources are needed.

- State Prevention Efforts with state and local advisory boards that look at prevention and prevention.
- CSDE Prevention Efforts and partnerships, highlighting the Columbia Suicide Severity Rating Scale as the suicide risk assessment tool, and students with school IDs must have the 988, which is the equivalent of a 911 call for suicide prevention and suicide crisis. He emphasized that 988 can be texted.

The Commissioner directed the next Agency Update will be "Update on Bridgeport Public Schools Action to Address District Needs" and invited Deputy Commissioner Charles Hewes to present.

Update Bridgeport Public Schools – Action to Address District Needs
Deputy Commissioner Charles Hewes referenced the report in the Board's Supplemental Folders. He provided updates on the following three matters:

Fiscal and Human Resources Procedures and Decision-Making
Dr. Hews reported on the progress of the District to implement the Sustainability Plan developed by Public Works that reflects the 34 recommendations that identified in the 2025 Forensic Audit conducted by CliftonLarsonAllen (CLA). Then he reported that the Bridgeport Public Schools' (BPS) finance staff have coordinated training to integrate some critical financial management software and budgeting software in a multi-phased plan to build capacity of district and school staff in the use of both systems.

General and Special Education Instruction
Dr. Hewes reported that during September, the CSDE, Hill for Literacy, and BPS spent a significant amount of time to establish a district leadership team, plan for the training of educators, and ensure all student-data systems were operational.

Operational Efficiency and Effectiveness of the Bridgeport Board of Education (BBE)
Dr. Hewes reported on the BBE continues to focus on its operational governance of efficiency and effectiveness and have recently focused on a self-assessing its performance as a board, and will use its self-assessment results in a workshop hosted by the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE) for goal setting.

The Board engaged with questions.

Vice Chair Erin Benham restated that Bridgeport Public Schools would presenting at the October 29, 2026, Accountability and Support Committee meeting.

The agenda returned to the Agency Update.

Administrative Report to the Governor
Commissioner Russell-Tucker presented that the report provides an overview of the Department's outgoing work, recent accomplishments, labor initiatives, and that it is an important record of progress and priorities across the agency. She concluded that the report is submitted to the Governor's Office, printed by Department of Administrative Services, and becomes a key reference resource into statewide operational efforts.

Affirmative Action Update
Commissioner Russell-Tucker shared that on September 9, 2026, the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities (CHRO) approved the State Department of Education's 2026 Affirmative Action Plan.

Vice Chair Benham noted to the Board that the updates on Hartford Public Schools were typically included with the Report of the Commissioner.

Vice Chair Benham asked for a motion to move agenda item XI.A., Update on Hartford Public Schools Fiscal Operations, to this point of the agenda. Board Member Record moved, and Board member Burr seconded, that agenda item XI.A., be moved.

XI. Items for Discussion

A. Update on Hartford Public Schools Fiscal Operations

Deputy Commissioner Charles Hewes, and Chief Strategic Planning Officer Keith Norton presented at the table, with the CliftonLarsonAllen LLP (CLA) team representatives, the vendor contracted by the CSDE to conduct a forensic audit of HPS, virtually attending and presenting on the findings and recommendations of the Fiscal Year 2024 and Fiscal Year 2025 budgets for Hartford Public Schools (HPS).

Kristen Fiore and Folashade Abiola-Banjac of CLA, presented on CLA's forensic audit summary of HPS. CLA opened with an executive summary statement of the forensic audit results that CLA did not identify evidence of fraud or misappropriation of District assets.

CLA further presented on the scope, purpose, focus of work, methods for data collection for work performed and analysis, principal findings, why deficits persist, internal control assessment, results of key findings, the obstacles CLA encountered that presented limitations on the extent data could be analyzed, and concluded with recommendations of priority actions for HPS to (i) strengthen budget management, and (ii) strengthen governance, and a path forward with immediate priorities to building long-term financial sustainability.

Board members engaged with questions and discussions on staffing for FY24 and FY25, and the status of the FY26 forensic audit.

At this time, the Commissioner announced and acknowledged the departure of the CSDE's Chief Strategic Planning Officer Keith Norton from the agency. Mr. Norton provided comments to his colleagues on having the honor and privilege to have worked with such dedicate education professionals.

IX. Financial Matters

There were no Financial Matters to present.

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 item X.A. Board Member Burr

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

A. Approval of Proposed Contracts for Whole School Management Services Between Achievement First, Inc., a charter management organization, and Elm City College Preparatory, Inc., Amistad Academy, Inc., Achievement First Bridgeport Academy, Inc., and Achievement First Hartford Academy, Inc., state charter schools

Resolved, That the State Board of Education, pursuant to Section 10-66tt of the Connecticut General Statutes, approves the contracts for whole school management services between Achievement First, Inc. a charter management organization, and Elm City College Preparatory, Inc., Amistad Academy, Inc., Achievement First Bridgeport Academy, Inc. and Achievement First Hartford Academy, Inc. state charter schools, and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

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

Motion carried unanimously.

VIII. Items Requiring Action

A. Adoption of Amendment to 10-145d-619 Endorsements for Education Positions Having Unique Requirements Peculiar to an Assignment

Vice Chair Benham asked for a motion on agenda item VII.A. Board Member Labas moved, and Board Member Harris 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-619 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, Gilberto, Harris, Labas, Pitkoff, Record, Zimmerman
	Opposed:	0
	Abstained	0
	Absent:	0

Motion carried unanimously.

B. Proposed Revision of Sec. 10-145d-458 Professional Educator Certificate Requirements

Vice Chair Benham asked for a motion on agenda item VII.A. Board Member Burr moved, and Board Member Zimmerman 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 revision to Section 10-145d-458 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, Gilberto, Harris, Labas, Pitkoff, Record, Zimmerman
	Opposed:	0
	Abstained	0
	Absent:	0

Motion carried unanimously.

C. Adoption of Revisions to Public Act 24-41 Section 51

Vice Chair Benham asked for a motion on agenda item VII.A. 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, Gilberto, Harris, Labas, Pitkoff, Record, Zimmerman
	Opposed:	0
	Abstained	0
	Absent:	0

Motion carried unanimously.

Vice Chair Benham asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Board Member Zimmerman moved, and Board Member Labas seconded the motion to adjourn.

Vice Chair Benham adjourned the meeting at 6:25 p.m.

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