IV.A.

Connecticut State Board of Education
Hartford

State Board of Education Meeting

September 2, 2026
Draft

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, September 2, 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=RAPeYFoJL9E.

I. Call to Order

Vice Chairperson Erin Benham called the meeting to order at 9:39 a.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 Dr. Alice M. Pritchard, designee for CTECS* Shruti Shah, Student Member, Student Member Kristen A. Record Seth D. Zimmerman*
Absent:	Dr. Aynsley Diamond, designee for CSCU Kelli-Marie Vallieres, Ex Officio

Oath of Office
Attorney Michael P. McKeon, Commissioner of the Superior Court, administered the Oaths of Office to the two newly appointed 2026-27 student members (i) Shepard Fisher, and (ii) Shruti Shah.

II. Public Participation

1. Rachael DaCunto, of North Brandford, spoke to advocate for herself in support of agenda item, VIII.A. Consideration for Approval of Certification for Rachael DaCunto #042 Art, PreK-12. A copy of Ms. DaCunto's written statement is in the official file of this meeting.

2. Dr. Niralee Patel-Lye, Managing Director of Recruitment, Retention, and Partnerships at the CT Teacher Residency Program (CT TRP), spoke on CT TRP's milestone achievement of attaining CAEP (Council for Exceptional Children) accreditation and recognition as a CAEP-accredited program, and highlighted CAEP's assessment of CT TRP'S intentional approach to diversifying the educator workforce.

3. Ushawnda Harris, Managing Director of Residency and Financial Management for the CT Teacher Residency Program (CT TRP), spoke to highlight the demographics of the CT TRP candidates, and presented certification data of their alumni to demonstrate CT TRP's progress in creating pathways into a teaching profession, and the importance of data beyond assessment results and focus on outcomes.

4. Dr. Violet Jiménez Sims, Managing Director of Programming and Legislative Affairs, CT Teacher Residency Program (CT TRP), spoke to highlighted the CT TRP's first CAEP accreditation cycle, that candidates are getting certified, getting into classrooms, and staying in the profession.

Public Participation ended.

III. Executive Session

There was no executive session held.

IV. Consideration of Minutes:

A. June 3, 2026, State Board of Education Meeting

Board Member Burr moved, and Board Member Harris seconded, that the Board adopt the minutes of the June 3, 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

Vice Chair Benham asked for motions on agenda items IV.B., and IV.C, at this time. Board Member Gilberto moved, and Board Member Burr seconded the motions for IV.B. and IV.C.

B. August 5, 2026, Special State Board of Education Meeting

Board Member Gilberto moved, and Board Member Burr seconded, that the Board adopt the minutes of the August 5, 2026, Special State Board of Education Meeting.

C. August 5, 2026, State Board of Education Retreat

Board Member Gilberto moved, and Board Member Burr seconded, that the Board adopt the minutes of the August 5, 2026, State Board of Education Retreat.

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 highlighted the following:

- Attended CT's Second Annual Blue Ribbon Schools Recognition Ceremony on Tuesday, June 9, 2026, at Conard High School in West Hartford.
- Attended four meetings of the CT Career Pathways Commission.
  - Noted that Commissioner Russell-Tucker, Dr. Pritchard, and Dr. Vallieres also served as members.
- Presented at the CABE's Summer Leadership Conference on August 6, 2026.
  - Served on a panel with Superintendent Dr. Kara Casimiro, Danbury Public Schools, and noted is also on the Career Pathways Commission.
- Attended the SBE Retreat, held on August 5, 2026, at H.C. Wilcox Technical High School in Meriden.
  - Shared that the two newly appointed students had attended the Retreat.
  - Thanked Dr. Alice Prichard for coordinating the H.C. Wilcox hosting for the SBE.
  - Thanked Principal Duffy for hosting and for the Tour at H.W. Wilcox.
- Attended the LEAP Special Five-Year Celebration CT Program on August 19, 2026.
  - She thanked the Board members who attended for their support.
- Reminded Board members of the CABE Board of Directors Meeting to be held on September 9, 2026.
- Reminded the Board of the 2026 Superintendent Back-to-School Meeting on Tuesday, September 15, 2026, at the Science Center in Hartford.

Update to Report of the Chair

Prior to adjourning the Board meeting, Vice Chair Benham provided two updates to her report.

- Thanked the Board members for their contribution to completing the charter school hearings schedule for 2026-27.
- Reminded the Board members that the October meeting is scheduled as an evening meeting, and tentatively at an Ag Science school.

VI. Committee Reports

A. Academic Standards and Assessment

Committee Chair Gilberto reported that the next meeting would be held on September 29, 2026, which was the rescheduled date as September 15, 2026, had conflicted with the scheduled Superintendent Back-to-School event.

B. Accountability and Support
Committee Chair Benham reported that the committee met on June 17, 2026, where Hartford Public Schools came before the committee, and will meet on September 16, 2026.

C. Finance, Audit, and Budget
Committee Chair Harris reported that the committee held its quarterly meeting on August 25, 2026. The committee reviewed the Internal Audit Plan for Fiscal Year 2026, current audit activity and other financial matters, and extended a continued appreciation to Chief Strategic Officer Keith Norton.

D. Legislation and Policy Development
Committee Chair Burr reported that from the committee's last meeting, the legislative proposals came to the full Board. Ms. Burr directed that the committee would be meeting following the close of this meeting.

E. Connecticut Technical Education and Career System Board
Vice Chair Benham noted that Dr. Pritchard would be arriving later in the meeting.

F. Connecticut State Colleges and Universities
There was no report to present for CSCU.

G. NASBE
Vice Chair Benham opened by highlighting that Drs. Carlson, Labas, and Pitkoff had attended the NASBE 2026 New Member Institute in July, and each then shared their experience of attending the NMI.

- Vice Chair Benham reported that the NASBE High School Transformation Member Exchange Series, was attended by Ms. Record and Dr. Labas. Ms. Record and Dr. Labas reported on the first session on the "Portrait of a Graduate."

- Vice Chair Benham thanked the Board members who have been attending the NASBE Exchange, and reported that the next Member Exchange will be on September 14, 2026.

[Dr. Alice Prichard arrived at the meeting at approximately 10:07 a.m.]*

- Vice Chair Benham announced NASBE's New Student Member Institute starting on September 24, 2026, and noted that the two student members have engaged with NASBE.

- Vice Chair Benham announced NASBE'S EdTech Advisory Group and that questions come up about CT guidelines.

Vice Chair Benham acknowledged the arrival of Dr. Pritchard during Committee Reports and returned for the CTECS report.

E. Connecticut Technical Education and Career System Board
Dr. Pritchard highlighted that CTECS opened to students on August 28, 2026, with the exception of Kaynor Tech delayed by washout. She highlighted what happens to get a whole school district operational.

H. SERC
Vice Chair Benham referenced her written report, and highlighted over the 132 topics of districts activities that SERC is engaged throughout the state.

[Board Member Seth Zimmerman arrived at approximately 10:09 a.m.]*

V. Report of the Commissioner and Agency Update

The Commissioner welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the 2025-2026 school year.

- Introduced the CSDE's new logo and branding theme for 2026-2027 that we are all part of CT's Mission Control to "*Empower Every Learner's Journey*."
  - Noted that we focused our mission to Empower Every Learner's Journey.
  - Referenced that the motivation and inspiration for our theme was the Artemus II Mission.
  - Shared that the design showed the flight path from Johnson Space Center to around the moon and back and that it had NASA's stamp of approval.
- Welcomed the two new student members.
- Highlighted that the Board passed the updated *Position Statement and Policy Guidance: Personal and Purposeful Technology Use in Connecticut Schools*, at the August 5, 2026, special meeting.
- Announced with Governor Lamont, that CT receiving $10.6 million in state grants under CT's newly established High-Quality Special Education Incentive Grant Program.
- Joined Governor Lamont, Lieutenant Governor Bysiewicz, Attendance Works founder and CEO Hedy Cheng, Representative Toni Walker, SBE Vice Chair Erin Benham, state and district leaders, and CSDE's Kari Sullivan for the Five-Year Celebration Event of the LEAP Program on August 19, 2026.
- Joined Governor Lamont, Lieutenant Governor Bysiewicz, and local and state leaders at the recognition of six 2026 Connecticut's Blue Ribbon Schools Recognition Ceremony at Conard High School in West Hartford, on Tuesday, June 9, 2026.
- Held press conference on the release of the CT 2025-206 Statewide Assessment and Attendance Results on August 31, 2026, with four districts in attendance..
  - Naugatuck, Norwalk, Somers, and Woodstock school districts attended.
- Joined Lieutenant Governor Bysiewicz, CT Department of Labor Commissioner Bartolomeo, and partners from education, workforce, government, and the CT National Guard at Newington High School to highlight the *Connecticut Career Path Guide* and the opportunities it creates for students to explore careers.

Shoutouts!

- Presented at CABE's Summer Leadership Conference – August 6, 2026.
- Statewide Assessment and Attendance Results Press Conference – August 31, 2026.
- High-energy Unveiling of the 2026-2027 Education Theme, "*Empower Every Learner's Journey,*" on August 27, 2026.
- LEAP Five-Year Celebration of Connecticut' Learner Engagement and Attendance Program, on August 19, 2026.
- State Chiefs Leading: Elevating Learning and Literacy Outcomes.

- Joined colleagues from Virginia, Colorado, Indiana for the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading's "GLR Week" session.

- A Tale of Two States: Reducing Chronic Absenteeism: Commissioner Russell-Tucker and Kari Sullivan joined Interim Superintendent of Norwalk Public Schools Sandra Faioes, and state and local leaders from Georgia to explore how both states are accelerating and scaling district-level progress in addressing chronic absenteeism, on July 30, 2026.

Commissioner Russell-Tucker noted that her written report was in the Board's Supplemental Folders.

Agency Update

The Commissioner announced that for the consideration of time of Superintendent Heather Borges and two students, the Agency Update would start with the 2026 Leadership & Innovation Fellowship at America's Youth AI Festival and invited Chief Academic Officer Irene Parisi the table. Chief Parisi provided an introduction of the three-day workshop held in Boston, MA in July to create a national AI policy for responsible use in public schools.

2026 Leadership & Innovation Fellowship at America's Youth AI Festival
Superintendent Heather Borges, Stratford Public Schools, together with the two Connecticut Student Senator delegates, Bena Mejia Romero, Stratford High School, and Anthony Darbilli, Bunnell High School, presented.

Bena Mejia Romero and Anthony Darbilli were the selected student senators representing CT at the Day of AI national fellowship residency at the America's Youth AI Festival in Boston, MA to draft a model K-12 AI policy for public schools. Each student senator shared their experiences of debating, collaborating, and policy-making with fellow student senators to accomplish the passage of a national student AI policy. Student Senator Romero was on the Student Subcommittee focused on ensuring that students having a voice in AI policies and are given clear, fair, and age-appropriate guidance on how to use AI responsibly in their education. Student Senator Darbilli was on the Administration Subcommittee focused on developing clear guidelines and procedures for how schools can implement responsible, equitable, and effective AI policies.

The Board engaged in comments, questions, and discussion on AI.

Agency Update

Commissioner Russell-Tucker announced that Deputy Commissioner Dr. Charles Hewes has taken on a new role for Fiscal Intervention and Oversight for Districts and invited Dr. Hewes to present on the Oversight Flow Chart.

Fiscal Intervention and Oversight Pursuant to Public Act 26-68
Deputy Commissioner Charles Hewes presented on the fiscal intervention process and submission requirements for a CT local or regional board of education to apply for intervention starting with local or regional board of education's submission of an application to the Commissioner of Education.

Board members engaged in questions and discussion.

Commissioner Russell-Tucker confirmed that the submission of the approved plan to the State Board of Education for approval was a new responsibility for the State Board of Education.

Update on Hartford Public Schools Fiscal Operations
Chief Strategic Planning Officer Keith Norton joined Deputy Commissioner Hewes to present to the Board. Mr. Norton summarized that HPS intervention started with the SBE's vote that authorized action concerning Hartford Public Schools Financial Management and the three-prong review.

On April 17, 2026, the CSDE entered into an agreement with CliftonLarsonAllen (CLA) who conducted a compilation of forecasted statement of revenues and expenditures for Fiscal Year 2026 to determine a FY 26 budget deficit and was presented to the SBE at the June 3, 2026, meeting. On June 5, 2026, CLA began the forensic audit of FY24 and FY25, and FY26 will be audited after HPS officially closes its ledger for the year.

Mr. Norton further reported that in mid-August 2026, HPS Chief Financial Officer announced her resignation, which was the first of the 64 recommendations from the CSDE's three-pronged approach, and that HPS has posted the position of CFO, and that the CFO's absence further impacts CLA'S ability to complete the FY24 and FY forensic audit.

Deputy Commissioner Hewes opened with a follow-up reference to 64 recommendations for HPS. He reported that HPS is also an Opportunity District that is monitored by and meets with our Turnaround Office and CDT Team. He reported that he and Dr. Jenkins met with Superintendent Dr. Andraé Townsel to coordinate AST and CDT meeting schedules for the 2026-27 academic year and discuss indictors of successful implementation of the 64 recommendation. Dr. Hewes highlighted that HPS had established a district improvement team to monitor student learning outcomes and scale the implementation of the Connecticut Literacy Model (CTLM).

Vice Chair Benham raised a discussion on staffing, staff development, and staff retention, and on and the involvement of the teachers.

The Board engaged in fiscal projection questions on FY 25 and FY 26.

Commissioner Russell-Tucker invited School Choice Division Director Robin Cecere to the Table, and she spoke the compilation of the existing information provided from HPS.

The Board engaged in discussion on the closing of HPS books for the FY26 audit.

Update on Bridgeport Public Schools
Deputy Commissioner Charles Hewes referenced the report in the Board's Supplemental Folder and presented an overview of the CSDE intervention commencing with the January 22, 2025, Special State Board of Education meeting, that authorized the Commissioner to take action in order to support the district of Bridgeport.

He reported that on July 30, 2026, meeting with Interim Superintendent Dr. Royce Avery to combine the Public Works sustainability plan with plans focused on action and outcomes. Dr. Hewes highlighted the BPS chart that outlined the variety of Focus Areas, Actions, Outcomes, that were designed to establish measurable indicators of district progress. He highlighted that the CSDE is supporting BPS to scale the implementation of the Connecticut Literacy Model (CTLM) in kindergarten through grade 6.

Dr. Hewes reported that as the Commissioner's designee, he had been meeting with members of the superintendent search committee to conduct the search for a permanent superintendent for Bridgeport Board of Education (BBE) to support selection of a candidate that will best meet the needs

of the students of Bridgeport and the community. He concluded that the CSDE will continue to be monitor the BBE's implementation of their bylaws and governance practice.

The Board members engaged in questions on posting dates and the search committee.

The Commissioner highlighted that the CSDE continues to work with the Technical Assistance Team who is still on the ground.

Update on Special Education Systems Review

Division Director Bryan Klimkiewicz, Special Education, that the Bureau of Education has been working throughout the summer,. and highlighted its partnership with the State Education Resource Center (SERC) and the Regional Educational Service Centers (RESC Alliance) with professional development and technical assistance offerings.

He provided an overview of the four Focus areas of evaluation activities related to the WestEd report and their recommendations. Mr. Klimkiewicz highlighted the following activities: (i) the kick-off of the Bureau of Special Education's 23rd Annual Back to School Conference, (ii) the launch, together with the Talent Office, of the Paraeducator Preparation Academy, and (iii) the statewide federal grant opportunities with the CT's newly established High-Quality Special Education Incentive Grant Program, (iv.) CT receiving the highest Federal Designation from OSEP (Office of Special Education Programs) of "Meets Requirements," (v) shared the news of additional capacity and support at the CSDE for Special Education to oversee our dispute resolution processes, and (vi) the New Pilot Program: IEP Facilitation.

Bureau Chief Katherine Matz, Special Education, presented on activities related to the complaint infrastructure on process mapping that connects workflow collaboration with SERC, and talent mapping activities facilitated by WestEd. Ms. Matz concluded that we are moving forward with our CT SEDS Usability Study.

The Commissioner highlighted that the start date for the attorney for Special Education.

On behalf of the Legal Office, Director of Legal and Governmental Affairs Mike Mckeon, commended and expressed gratitude to the Commissioner for the attainment of the special education attorney position.

State Assessment Results

Chief Performance Officer Ajit Gopalakrishnan provided an overview on the end of year state assessments of English Language Arts, Math, and Science. He reported an overall improvement statewide in ELA, mathematics, and science in all student groups and in all grades, and in attendance. Chronic absenteeism rates continue to decline and reached its lowest year-to-date rate.

Chief Gopalakrishnan and the Commissioner both referenced the Hartford Courant headline article: *Opinion: Investing in what works for Connecticut students is building on progress*.

The Board members engaged in questions and discussion.

The Commissioner interposed to provide acknowledgement of appreciation to Kari Sullivan Custer, as the "boots in the ground" around the CSDE's attendance efforts, and extended thankfulness for all her work.

Educator Vacancy Update
Chief Performance Officer Ajit Gopalakrishnan reported that data is collected twice a year in August and February. He clarified that the vacancies are based on budgeted positions that districts are actively trying to fill. He then provided a demonstration to maneuver and dig into the data of buckets of Special Education Teachers, All Other Techer, Special Servies, Special Education Paraeducators, and All Other Paraeducators.

Mr. Gopalakrishnan highlighted the increase of paraeducator vacancies in the local school districts and referenced initiatives to get paraeducators in the district space.

The Board engaged with questions.

Racial Imbalance Study
Commissioner Russell-Tucker provided a summary of the current status of the Racial Imbalance report that notified the districts, which was paused until July 1, 2028, and that the Department did not receive any resources for a Racial Imbalance Study.

The Commissioner announced that the Department had identified funding for the Racial Imbalance Study and that it had already started with the Center for Connecticut Education Research Collaboration (CCERC) working with the Performance Office.

Federal Funding Updates
Commissioner Russell-Tucker provided an update on the receipt of federal grants to Connecticut. She highlighted Connecticut being awarded $10 million grant to strengthen early literacy supports for kindergarten through grade 3. She further referenced a couple of competitive grants that CT has applied for and is currently waiting for the outcomes. The Commissioner concluded that the Institute of Education Sciences is conducting a national study of Special Education spending, and that CT was of the states where districts were randomly selected to participate in this study.

VIII. Items Requiring Action

A. Consideration for Approval of Certification for Rachael DaCunto #042 Art, PreK-12

Vice Chair Benham asked for a motion on agenda item VII.A. Board Member Labas moved, and Board Member Harris seconded, that pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes (C.G.S.) Section 10-145bb(b), the State Board of Education determines that Rachael DaCunto 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 Art, PreK–12 (#042).

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

Board engaged in questions.

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

Motion carried unanimously.

B. Consideration for Approval of Material Change to Odyssey Community Charter School, Manchester

Vice Chair Benham asked for a motion on agenda item VIII.B. Board Member Labas moved, and Board Member Gilberto seconded, that the State Board of Education, pursuant to Section 10-66ss of the Connecticut General Statutes, approves the March 3, 2026, charter amendment proposal for a material change submitted by Odyssey Community School to increase its maximum approved enrollment from 417 to 630 students, an increase of 213 seats, through a three-year phased implementation. The State Board of Education directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

Deputy Commissioner Charles Hewes and Chief Turnaround Officer Dr. Melissa Jenkins, and school official Executive Director Sally Dastoli, presented.

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

Motion carried unanimously.

IX. Financial Matters

A. Current Services and Capital Budget Requests for the FY2028 and FY2029 Biennium

Vice Chair Benham asked for a motion on agenda item IX.A. Board Member Burr moved, and Board Member Harris seconded, that the State Board of Education approves the Current Services and Capital Budget Requests for Fiscal years 2027-28 and 2028-29 and directs the Commissioner to take the necessary action.

Chief Fiscal Officer Jessica Brunetti presented on the current services and capital budget requests and highlighted a couple of major budgetary considerations under current services.

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

Motion carried unanimously.

X. Consent Agenda

Vice Chair Benham asked if there was a Board member wishing to remove an item from Consent. Board Member Pitkoff requested to make comment and removed X.A. and X.B. from the Consent.

Vice Chair Benham asked for a motion on agenda items X.C., Approval of 2026-2027 Annual Audit Plan. Board Member Gilberto moved, and Board Member Zimmerman seconded.

C. Approval of 2026-2027 Annual Audit Plan

Resolved, that the State Board of Education adopts the Annual Audit Plan for the period of July 1, 2026, through June 30, 2027, 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.

A. Continuing Approval of Capital Region Education Council Educator Preparation Programs

Vice Chair Benham asked for a motion on agenda items X.A., Continuing Approval of Capital Region Education Council Educator Preparation Programs. Board Member Pitkoff moved, and Board Member Gilberto seconded.

Board Member Pitkoff presented his question and comments of validation on the focus of the program and success rate.

B. Appointments to CSDE Educator Preparation Provider (EPP) Program Approval Review Committee

Vice Chair Benham asked for a motion on agenda items X.B., Continuing Approval of Capital Region Education Council Educator Preparation Programs. Board Member Pitkoff moved, and Board Member Labas seconded.

Board Member Pitkoff provided comments on the candidates resumes and voiced a consideration factor for future selection appointments.

Chief Talent Officer Dr. Shuana Tucker, and Education Consultant Lauren Tafrate, were present at the Table.

Dr. Tucker responded to Vice Chair Benham's inquiry for comments by stating that they try their best to diversify the pool and have representation from across the date.

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

Motion carried unanimously.

XI. Items for Discussion

There were not Items for Discussion to present.

Prior to adjourning the meeting, Vice Chair Benham provided two updates to her Report of the Chair.

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

Vice Chair Benham adjourned the meeting at 12:27 p.m.

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