

THE COMMISSIONER'S ROUNDTABLE FOR FAMILY AND
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN EDUCATION
Hartford

Draft Minutes of Meeting
(Subject to Revision)
October 26, 2020

I. Call to Order

Ms. Ingrid Canady, Executive Director, State Education Resource Center, called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. The meeting was held online.

Members present:

Jeffrey Bianco, Co-Chair, Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN)
Connecticut
Rahisha Bivens, Parent, New Haven
Jeana Bracey, Director of School and Community Initiatives, Child Health and
Development Institute
Susan Brill, Parent, New Canaan
Miguel Cardona, Commissioner, Connecticut State Department of Education
Mary Lou DiPaola, ESL Teacher, New Haven Board of Education (Representing
Connecticut Federation of Educational and Professional Employees)
Paula Gilberto, CEO, United Way of Central and Northeastern Connecticut (Representing
United Way of Connecticut)
Subira Gordon, Executive Director, ConnCAN
David Hopkins, President and CEO, Urban League of Greater Hartford
Sheila Kearney, NAACP
Bianka Kortlan-Cox, Vice President for Legislation and Public Policy, Connecticut
Association for the Gifted
Andreas Lolis, Student, State Student Advisory Council on Education
Jennifer Lussier, Parent Consultant, Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center
Michele O'Neill, Educational Issues Specialist, Connecticut Education Association
Diana Planas, Parent Leadership Training Institute Coordinator, Bridgeport Child
Advocacy Coalition
Evelyn Robles-Rivas, Supervisor of Language and Community Partnerships, Meriden
Public Schools (Representing Connecticut Association of Latino Administrators and
Superintendents)
John Taylor, Executive Director, Booker T. Washington Academy (Representing
Northeast Charter Schools Network)
Donna Thompson-Bennett, Director, National Parent Leadership Institute
Mirellise Vazquez, Executive Director, Tauck Family Foundation (Representing
Connecticut Council on Philanthropy)

Members absent:

Zulma Costas, Parent, Hartford Parent University

Shenell Ellerbe, Board of Directors, African Caribbean American Parents of Children with Disabilities (AFCAMP)
Jennifer Falotico, Vice President for Membership, Connecticut Parent Teacher Association
Matt Folan, Superintendent of Schools, Department of Children and Families
Matthew Geary, Superintendent of Schools, Manchester Public Schools (Representing Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents)
Patrice McCarthy, Deputy Director and General Counsel, Connecticut Association of Boards of Education
Nikitoula Menounos, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning, Connecticut Technical High School System
David Scata, Director of Education, Mohegan Tribe
Kris Sodhi, State Council for Educational Opportunities for Military Children
Yalitza Senquiz, Parent, Waterbury
Audra Talbot, Parent, The Advocacy Office of Audra Talbot
Athena Wagner, Outreach Coordinator, State of Black Connecticut Alliance/Connecticut Parents' Union
Beresford Wilson, Director, FAVOR
Lisa Zawilinski, Chair, Department of Education, University of Hartford (Representing Deans of Schools of Education)

Guests:

Jennifer Benevento, AFT Connecticut
Dena Booker, Stamford Public Schools
Paige Bray, University of Hartford
Ingrid Canady, State Education Resource Center
Julie Church, East Haven Public Schools
Jackie Coleman, Hartford Foundation for Public Giving
Carol O'Donnell, Connecticut Early Childhood Funders Collaborative
Andrea Goetz, Beacon Health Options
Greg Glidden, State Education Resource Center
Cheryl Hilton, Southington Women for Progress Equity
Marc Jaffe, Children's Learning Centers of Fairfield County
Jessica Lavorgna, Windsor Locks Public Schools
Betsy LeBorious, Capitol Region Education Council
Anne Mead, Danbury Public Schools
Joanna Meyer, Partnership for Early Education Research
Kyrinda Richardson, Urban League of Greater Hartford
Linda Riddick-Barron, Waterbury Public Schools
Paula Smith, Mohegan Tribe
Tonya LaPlante, Connecticut Technical High School System
Teresa Merisotis, AFT Connecticut
Susan Heller Williams, Connecticut Education Association

State Agency Staff:

Judy Carson, Connecticut State Department of Education
John Frassinelli, Connecticut State Department of Education

Bryan Klimkiewicz, Connecticut State Department of Education
Desi Nesmith, Connecticut State Department of Education
Irene Parisi, Connecticut State Department of Education
Glen Peterson, Connecticut State Department of Education
Charlene Russell-Tucker, Connecticut State Department of Education

II. Welcome and Introductions

Ms. Charlene Russell-Tucker, Deputy Commissioner, Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) welcomed the group and introduced the [agenda and objectives of the meeting](#).

III. Emergent Critical Issues in Education

Commissioner Cardona discussed current student attendance rates during school reopening. CSDE has instituted [new data collection programs](#) to evaluate and monitor student attendance and participation trends that are essential to student achievement, whether students are learning in-person or in a hybrid or remote model. While remote learning options are available, the Commissioner stressed that there is no substitute for in-person learning and Connecticut has been striving to keep schools open. Since reopening began for the 2020-21 academic year, COVID-19 transmission has been a rare event inside of school buildings. Commissioner Cardona said that this is likely due to the high-level of planning and compliance with mitigation strategies designed to prevent transmission. With rising rates, it is important for communities to adhere to mitigation strategies so that schools can continue to offer in-person learning as long as possible.

Commissioner Cardona announced that Deputy Commissioner Desi Nesmith is joining the leadership of the Roundtable, which will now be known as the Commissioners' (plural) Roundtable. The leadership of the Roundtable was broadened to provide the group with engagement from the Division of Academics and Innovation in addition to the continuing leadership of Deputy Commissioner Charlene Russell-Tucker and the Division of Student Supports and Wellness.

IV. Information from the Deputies Regarding School Reopening

Mr. Nesmith described a three-pronged plan to ensuring equitable access to continued education. The first prong is to provide devices for students with the greatest need. CSDE surveyed school districts and learned that 80,000 devices were needed to support students in remote learning. Over the summer CSDE worked with the Governor's Office to purchase 82,000 devices. These devices were in addition the 60,000 devices provided earlier through the [Learn from Home Task Force](#). The second prong of the plan is to ensure that students can connect to the internet. CSDE provided 12,700 hot spots and cable vouchers. This effort is ongoing and prioritized for high-need districts. The third prong is to provide a repository of high-quality curriculum and learning materials in response to the need that arose for free and safe online and offline resources to support student learning, social emotional well-being and engagement during in-school class cancellations.

Ms. Irene Parisi, Chief Academic Officer, CSDE, described this new repository, called the [CT Learning Hub](#). It is a free centralized platform to provide students, teachers and families with universally available, multilingual, quality content in order to advance equitable access and support the professional learning and resources for the development of continuous blended

learning models. Ms. Parisi noted that in addition to content specifically for teachers and students, the site features a Parent Learning Hub that provides links to resources that support health, nutrition and well-being, and community services. CSDE will continue to populate the Learning Hub with high-quality learning and engagement materials.

Ms. Russell-Tucker introduced topics related to social emotional learning including resources for students, families and staff on trauma informed approaches and mental health. She reported that CSDE issued a request for proposals (RFP) for [Statewide Social-Emotional Universal and Supplemental Screening Assessments](#). Mr. Glen Peterson, Division Director, Office of Student Supports and Organizational Effectiveness, described behavioral health and trauma supports available through [Connecticut's Project AWARE](#), a collaborative project led by CSDE, Connecticut Department of Children and Families, and the Child Health and Development Institute. Mr. John Frassinelli, Division Director, Office of Student Supports and Organizational Effectiveness, discussed a collaboration between CSDE and the Department of Social Services to review Medicaid funding and its potential to expand support for school staff who provide behavioral health services. Commissioner Cardona talked about the integral role of social emotional learning (SEL) for students as well as school staff, not only during COVID-19 but also as a core belief in education. He noted that his administration has identified SEL as a priority for supporting students' academic, social and emotional development and CSDE is actively providing a number of resources and guidance for districts.

Mr. Bryan Klimkiewicz, Special Education Division Director, CSDE, discussed guidance that CSDE recently received from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs regarding [implementation of services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\) in the current COVID-19 environment](#), and from the Office of Civil Rights regarding [Questions and Answers for K-12 Public Schools in the Current COVID-19 Environment](#). Mr. Klimkiewicz also discussed the [CSDE's Learning Model IEP Implementation Plan form](#) (page 2) for documenting the delivery of special education and related services that may be affected by a district's response to the pandemic. CSDE is working with school districts and as well as families to meet these requirements with attention to maintaining least restrictive environments (LRE) for children with disabilities.

V. Listening to Roundtable Members: Challenges and Solutions for Reopening Schools during COVID-19

Ms. Canady invited participants to share their perspectives regarding the challenges and solutions they identified in the reopening of schools during COVID-19. They were asked to write down one challenge they have noted and two possible solutions to that challenge. The topics the group discussed included public funding to support child care for parents during remote learning schedules, outreach to community partners to assist parents who do not speak English with navigating online learning platforms, maintaining academic integrity, and utilization of project-based learning as an option for increasing student engagement.

VI. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 2:30 p.m.

The following CSDE guidance documents and resources were shared in the chat box during the meeting:

- [Addendum 4: Interim Guidance for Decision-Making Regarding the Use of In-Person, Hybrid \(Blended\), or Remote Learning Models;](#)
- [Addendum 5: Interim Guidance for Responding to COVID-19 Scenarios in Connecticut School Districts;](#)
- [Addendum 6: Reopening: Educating Students with Disabilities;](#)
- [Addendum 10: Reframing and Reopening: School Discipline Amidst COVID-19 Guidance; COVID-19 Resources for Families;](#) and
- [SEL Resources in the CT Learning Hub.](#)