

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

**Draft Minutes of Meeting**  
(Subject to Revision)  
January 23, 2020

**I. Call to Order**

Ms. Ingrid Canady, Executive Director, State Education Resource Center, called the meeting to order at 9:45 a.m. The meeting was held at the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, 10 Columbus Boulevard, 8<sup>th</sup> Floor, Hartford.

Members present:

Miguel Cardona, Commissioner, Connecticut State Department of Education  
Zulma Costas, Parent, Hartford Parent University  
Mary Lou DiPaola, ESL Teacher, New Haven Board of Education (Representing  
Connecticut Federation of Educational and Professional Employees)  
Matt Folan, Superintendent of Schools, Department of Children and Families  
Subira Gordon, Executive Director, ConnCAN  
David Hopkins, President and CEO, Urban League of Greater Hartford  
Bianka Kortlan-Cox, Vice President for Legislation and Public Policy, Connecticut  
Association for the Gifted  
Jennifer Lussier, Parent Consultant, Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center  
Michele O'Neill, Educational Issues Specialist, Connecticut Education Association  
Ciara Ortiz-Diaz, Student, The Sound School, New Haven (Representing the Connecticut  
State Student Advisory Council on Education)  
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)  
David Scata, Director of Education, Mohegan Tribe  
Yalitza Senquiz, Parent, Waterbury  
Audra Talbot, Parent, The Advocacy Office of Audra Talbot  
Donna Thompson-Bennett, Director, National Parent Leadership Institute  
Athena Wagner, Outreach Coordinator, State of Black Connecticut Alliance/Connecticut  
Parents' Union  
Lisa Zawilinski, Chair, Department of Education, University of Hartford (Representing  
Deans of Schools of Education)

Members absent:

Jeffrey Bianco, Co-Chair, Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN)  
Connecticut  
Jeana Bracey, Director of School and Community Initiatives, Child Health and  
Development Institute

Commissioner's Roundtable

January 23, 2020

Minutes - Page 2 of 4

Clifford Dudley, Principal, Orchard Hills School, Milford Public Schools (Representing Connecticut Federation of School Administrators)  
Shenell Ellerbe, Board of Directors, African Caribbean American Parents of Children with Disabilities (AFCAMP)  
Jennifer Falotico, Vice President for Membership, Connecticut Parent Teacher Association  
Mario Florez, Managing Director of Social Emotional Learning, UP Education Network (Representing the Commission on Women, Children and Seniors)  
Matthew Geary, Superintendent of Schools, Manchester Public Schools (Representing Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents)  
Paula Gilberto, CEO, United Way of Central and Northeastern Connecticut (Representing United Way of Connecticut)  
Mariam Khan, Student, Hamden High School (Representing the Connecticut State Student Advisory Council on Education)  
Matthew Mauriello, Student, Hamden High School (Representing the Connecticut State Student Advisory Council on Education)  
Nikitoula Menounos, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning, Connecticut Technical High School System  
Chemay Morales-James, Educational Equity Coach, My Reflection Matters and Bridge to Success (Representing Commission on Equity and Opportunity)  
Rebecca Adams Rieder, Sr. Staff Attorney, Connecticut Association of Boards of Education  
Kris Sodhi, State Council for Educational Opportunities for Military Children  
John Taylor, Executive Director, Booker T. Washington Academy (Representing Northeast Charter Schools Network)  
Mirellise Vazquez, Executive Director, Tauck Family Foundation (Representing Connecticut Council on Philanthropy)  
Beresford Wilson, Director, FAVOR

Guests:

Milly Arciniegas, Hartford Parent University  
Jennifer Benevento, AFT Connecticut  
Paige Bray, University of Hartford  
Akia Callum, Bridge to Success  
Ingrid Canady, State Education Resource Center  
George Coleman, Partnership for Early Education Research, Yale University  
Cheryl Hilton, Southington Women for Progress Equity Initiative  
Joshua Hurlock, Connecticut Higher Education Supplemental Loan Authority  
Kyrinda Richardson, Urban League of Greater Hartford  
Jessica Lavorgna, Windsor Locks Public Schools  
Jeanette Weldon, Connecticut Higher Education Supplemental Loan Authority

State Agency Staff:

Judy Carson, Connecticut State Department of Education  
John Frassinelli, Connecticut State Department of Education  
Ajit Gopalakrishnan, Connecticut State Department of Education  
Charlene Russell-Tucker, Connecticut State Department of Education  
Deborah Watson, Office of Early Childhood

## II. Welcome and Introductions

Ms. Canady welcomed the group and asked members and guests to introduce themselves. She then reviewed the group's engagement norms. 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 highlighted recent changes to the CSDE organizational structure including the appointment of Ms. Russell-Tucker as Deputy Commissioner of Educational Supports and Wellness, and Mr. Chris Soto as Director of Innovations and Partnerships. He noted that Connecticut schools were recently [ranked among the top three in the nation](#) by the independent news organization *Education Week*. The Commissioner said while the national recognition is appreciated, the state has much more to do to provide every student in Connecticut a high quality education and preparation for college and career. One activity he is undertaking toward this end is the creation of a comprehensive plan to promote social and emotional learning, and to improve culture and climate in schools. Commissioner Cardona asked participants to write down their recommendations for this plan; notes were collected and reviewed by the Commissioner.

## IV. Pathways to Affordable Post-Secondary Education

Ms. Jeannette Weldon, Executive Director, Connecticut Higher Education Supplemental Loan Authority (CHESLA), introduced CHESLA's mission and vision to expand educational opportunities in Connecticut by offering cost-effective education financing programs and information resources to Connecticut students, alumni and their families. CHESLA is a resource for students as they plan for their college education, not only by providing financing, but also by providing information and tools for students to make informed decisions; to enhance the competitiveness of Connecticut institutions of higher education by providing additional grant and financing options; and to encourage interest in higher education to help the state meet its workforce needs.

Mr. Joshua Hurlock, Assistant Director, CHESLA, presented [programs and tools available through CHESLA](#), including financial literacy and planning tools, a need-based scholarship program, in-school loan program and a program for graduates to refinance college loans.

Ms. Weldon shared the five pillars of CHESLA's strategic plan: collaboration, economic and workforce development for the public good, technology, innovation, and public engagement and accountability. She welcomed members of the Commissioner's Roundtable to collaborate on creating awareness about CHESLA's resources for making post-secondary education affordable for Connecticut students.

Mr. Ajit Gopalakrishnan, Chief Performance Officer, presented on the [Free Application for Federal Student Aid \(FAFSA\)](#). Mr. Gopalakrishnan noted that completion of the FAFSA is associated with higher rates of college enrollment. Last year, \$17.6 million in federal Pell Grant funding was unclaimed by eligible Connecticut students who did not complete the FAFSA. The CSDE is encouraging school districts to work with high school seniors and their families to complete the FAFSA. In collaboration with the Connecticut Office of Higher Education, the

CSDE is providing a report on FAFSA Completion Status for currently enrolled Grade 12 students to authorized users in districts through EdSight Secure. Mr. Gopalakrishnan referenced a recent webinar the CSDE created for school districts and other information [on the CSDE web site](#).

**V. Roundtable Discussion**

Ms. Canady asked participants to work in groups at their tables to consider how they will share the information they received at today's meeting with their constituencies. She also instructed participants to make recommendations for the CSDE to encourage students and families to access financial aid tools, such as the FAFSA and CHESLA. Finally, groups were asked to put forward ideas for developing outreach strategies that could be shared by state and local stakeholders, to promote pathways to affordable post-secondary education.

**VI. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 12:00 p.m.