

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

Hartford

Draft Minutes of Meeting

(Subject to Revision)

March 31, 2021

I. Call to Order

Ms. Ingrid Canady, Executive Director, State Education Resource Center, called the meeting to order at 1:03 p.m. The meeting was held online.

Members present:

Jeffrey Bianco, Co-Chair, Gay, Lesbian & Straight Education Network (GLSEN)
Connecticut

Jeana Bracey, Director of School and Community Initiatives, Child Health and
Development Institute

Susan Brill, Parent, New Canaan

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)

Charlene Russell-Tucker, Acting Commissioner, Connecticut State Department of
Education

David Scata, Director of Education, Mohegan Tribe

Audra Talbot, Parent, The Advocacy Office of Audra Talbot

Mirellise Vazquez, Executive Director, Tauck Family Foundation (Representing
Connecticut Council on Philanthropy)

Beresford Wilson, Director, FAVOR

Members absent:

Rahisha Bivens, Parent, New Haven

Zulma Costas, Parent, Hartford Parent University

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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
Kris Sodhi, State Council for Educational Opportunities for Military Children
Yalitza Senquiz, Parent, Waterbury
John Taylor, Executive Director, Booker T. Washington Academy (Representing Northeast Charter Schools Network)
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)

Guests:

Milly Arciniegas, Hartford Parent University
Jennifer Benevento, AFT Connecticut
Dena Booker, Stamford Public Schools
Laurel Brandon, Mansfield Public Schools
Arlanda Brantley, Waterbury
Althea Brooks, Waterbury Bridge to Success
Ingrid Canady, State Education Resource Center
Julie Church, East Haven Public Schools
Marjorie Davis, SERC
Yvonne de St. Croix, New Milford Public Schools
Teresa DeBrito, Regional School District 12
Greg Glidden, State Education Resource Center
LaToya Ireland, Waterbury
Tressa Spears Jackson, Community Health Network of CT
Marc Jaffe, Children's Learning Centers of Fairfield County
Tonya LaPlante, Connecticut Technical High School System
Anne Mead, Danbury Public Schools
Joanna Meyer, Partnership for Early Education Research
Christina Morales, Windsor Public Schools
Marybeth Morales-Davis, Waterbury
Kyrinda Richardson, Urban League of Greater Hartford
Maria Sanchez, American Savings Foundation
Nick Simmons, Office of the Governor
Paula Smith, Mohegan Tribe
Roslyn Sotero, Waterbury Bridge to Success

Michael Strambler, Partnership for Early Education Research
Carolyn Westerholm, FAVOR

State Agency Staff:

Judy Carson, Connecticut State Department of Education
John Frassinelli, Connecticut State Department of Education
Desi Nesmith, Connecticut State Department of Education
Glen Peterson, Connecticut State Department of Education

II. Welcome and Introductions

Mr. John Frassinelli, Division Director, Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), welcomed the group and introduced the [agenda and objectives of the meeting](#). He introduced Acting Commissioner Russell-Tucker noting that Ms. Russell-Tucker initiated the Commissioners' Roundtable in 2016 as the CSDE Chief Operating Officer and, five years later, she is now leading the group as commissioner.

III. Emergent Critical Issues in Education

Acting Commissioner Russell-Tucker discussed the following emergent issues:

- CSDE recently launched the [AccelerateCT Education Task Force](#) to assist in the development of a statewide education recovery and acceleration framework that includes programming to promote renewal, reduce opportunity gaps, accelerate learning and advance equity during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Acting Commissioner Russell-Tucker recently created the Special Populations Roundtable to bring together stakeholders to share best practices in the field and collaborate on emerging issues. The Special Populations Roundtable will inform CSDE policy, accountability and support.
- CSDE will administer statewide student assessments this spring. The assessments will provide information to parents and educators about student learning and identify gaps that have been exacerbated due to the pandemic. With accurate student assessments, resources and supports can be targeted equitably to areas of greatest need.
- Connecticut has made Social Emotional Learning (SEL) a priority and created a statewide [system of supports](#) around SEL and student and staff well-being in order to effectively address the unprecedented level of stress experienced over the past year. CSDE recently [announced](#) that Aperture Education's research-backed SEL assessments, [the DESSA](#), are available to all Connecticut school districts at no cost.
- In partnership with the Department of Public Health, CSDE published [Finish Strong](#) to identify continued priorities for this final portion of the school year and into the summer. The Finish Strong guidance affirms the importance of the mitigation strategies we have focused on this year, reminds the school community that despite the spring weather and vaccinations we must remain vigilant, and provides additional recommendations around the use of mitigation efforts in the school, community, and if traveling.

Acting Commissioner Russell-Tucker introduced Nick Simmons, Director of Strategic Initiatives, Office of the Governor. Mr. Simmons conveyed Governor Lamont's appreciation for the efforts of teachers and families to provide students with in-person access to schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. He announced that the federal [Emergency Broadband Benefit Program](#) will soon be available in Connecticut. The Emergency Broadband Benefit Program provides support for broadband services and certain devices to help low-income households stay connected during the COVID-19 pandemic.

IV. Connecticut's Priorities for Use of the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds II (ESSER II)

Deputy Commissioner Nesmith provided an overview of the [Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds II \(ESSER II\)](#) purpose, timelines and priorities. Dr. Judy Carson, Program Manager for School-Family-Community Partnerships, highlighted opportunities in the ESSER II priorities that align with the [CT Family Engagement Framework](#). The ESSER II funds position school districts to use high-impact practices and a coordinated approach to build educators' and families' capacity to work as partners.

V. Listening to Roundtable Members: Observations and Recommendations

Ms. Canady invited participants to share their perspectives regarding their observations and recommendations for supporting students and families during COVID-19. They were asked to take a moment of reflection and write down their responses to the following prompts:

- What is happening now? What can you share about families' current experiences with navigating children's education during the pandemic (connectivity, etc.)?
- Based on your observations, what are your recommendations for efforts and investments going forward (technology, etc.)?
- What suggestions do you have as we calibrate the Roundtable's focus and priorities moving forward?

Participants discussed their responses which included continuing issues with connectivity and devices in some cities, families' fears about returning to school, students' social emotional needs, caseloads for special education and pupil services staff, and the challenges English learners and their families are facing. They also noted areas of success that could serve as guides for future investments, such as successful community-based summer learning partnerships, outdoor learning models, and school partnerships with local organizations serving immigrants. Moving forward, participants recommended that the Roundtable continue to function as a conduit for the Commissioner to communicate about emergent priorities with families, educators and community leaders. Several participants noted the particular importance of continued communication within the Roundtable about the role of social emotional learning in education.

VI. Adjournment

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