

THE COMMISSIONERS' ROUNDTABLE FOR FAMILY AND
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN EDUCATION
Hartford

Draft Minutes of Meeting
(Subject to Revision)
May 26, 2021

I. Call to Order

Ms. Ingrid Canady, Executive Director, State Education Resource Center (SERC), called the meeting to order at 1:04 p.m. The meeting was held online.

Members present:

Jeana Bracey, Associate Vice President of School and Community Initiatives, Child Health and Development Institute of CT

Mary Lou DiPaola, ESL Teacher, New Haven Board of Education (Representing Connecticut Federation of Educational and Professional Employees)

Subira Gordon, Executive Director, ConnCAN

Andreas Lolis, Student, State Student Advisory Council on Education

Jennifer Lussier, Parent Consultant, Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center

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

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

Members absent:

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

Rahisha Bivens, Parent, New Haven

Susan Brill, Parent, New Canaan

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)

Paula Gilberto, CEO, United Way of Central and Northeastern Connecticut (Representing United Way of Connecticut)

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
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
Michele O'Neill, Educational Issues Specialist, Connecticut Education Association
David Scata, Director of Education, Mohegan Tribe
Yalitza Senquiz, Parent, Waterbury
Kris Sodhi, State Council for Educational Opportunities for Military Children
Audra Talbot, Parent, The Advocacy Office of Audra Talbot
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
Beresford Wilson, Director, FAVOR
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
Tanya Budler, Office of the Governor
Ingrid Canady, State Education Resource Center
Julie Church, East Haven Public Schools
Greg Glidden, State Education Resource Center
Marsha Guthrie, Children's Learning Centers of Fairfield County
Melvette Hill, Parent Leadership Training Institute
Tressa Spears Jackson, Community Health Network of CT
Marc Jaffe, Children's Learning Centers of Fairfield County
Natalie Langlaise, Hartford
Jessie Lavorgna, Windsor Locks Public Schools
Joanna Meyer, Partnership for Early Education Research
Carol O'Donnell, Early Childhood Funders Collaborative
Kyrinda Richardson, Urban League of Greater Hartford
Orlando Rodriguez, CEA
Gwen Samuel, Connecticut Parents Union
Paula Smith, Mohegan Tribe

State Agency Staff:

Judy Carson, Connecticut State Department of Education
Madi Csejka, Connecticut State Department of Education
John Frassinelli, Connecticut State Department of Education
Desi Nesmith, Connecticut State Department of Education

II. Welcome and Introductions

Mr. John Frassinelli, Division Director, Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), welcomed the group and reviewed the [agenda and objectives of the meeting](#). He introduced Acting Commissioner Russell-Tucker.

III. Emergent Critical Issues in Education

Acting Commissioner Russell-Tucker noted that there are a number of new and important initiatives taking place. She invited members of the meeting to share this information with their constituents.

Commissioner Russell-Tucker [presented](#) the following emergent issues:

- The CSDE awarded funding for high-quality summer enrichment programs to 235 applicants through the AccelerateCT Summer Program Expansion Grant, which is funded by the federal American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act, 2021, Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER). Over 96,000 Connecticut children will be served by programs throughout the state. Families can find [information](#) about hundreds of summer programs that are offered through municipalities, school districts, and community partners such as non-profits, childcare centers, private and independent schools, and faith-based organizations.
- Governor Lamont initiated a program to allow Connecticut children 18 and under, plus one accompanying adult, to visit any of the state's participating museums, zoos, science and cultural centers. The program will be created with ARP ESSER funding and the full list of participation attractions will be available at www.ctvisit.com by July 1, 2021.
- Commissioner Russell-Tucker introduced Ms. Tanya Budler, Office of the Governor, who discussed [Connecticut's state plan](#) for the ARP ESSER funds. Her [presentation](#) highlighted the state's priorities and the amounts of funding available for school districts and for state-level activities.
- The CSDE, in collaboration with SERC, held two public forums to engage diverse stakeholder groups in developing Connecticut's ARP ESSER state plan. Members in the public forums provided input utilizing the structure of the [CSDE Public and Stakeholder Input document](#). Videos of those sessions are available on [the CSDE website](#).
- Mr. Frassinelli reviewed a new initiative for reengaging chronically absent students and improving attendance. [The Learner Engagement and Attendance Program \(LEAP\)](#) was created by the Governor's Office to target 15 high-need districts. The program will support home visits with the goal of reengaging students, encouraging them to participate in summer programs and facilitating a seamless reentry into school in the fall.
- Mr. Desi Nesmith, Deputy Commissioner, discussed new online curricula that are available in Connecticut. In May, the CSDE [announced](#) that it is entering into partnerships with Apex Learning and Defined Learning to provide equitable access to high-quality online curricula and courses for students and teachers, at no cost to school districts. The partnerships are part of CSDE's [efforts](#) to advance state-level priorities for use of the ARP ESSER funding, including the strategic use of technology to engage and

expand equitable access to high-impact, accelerated learning opportunities. Mr. Nesmith said that, through this project and others, the CSDE is working with districts to prioritize equity and language access for all students.

- Over the last five years, school districts in Connecticut have hired more than 1,900 educators of color, [exceeding the goal](#) set by the State Board of Education to increase the number of educators of color by 10 percent – approximately 1,000 positions – between 2017 and 2021. Commissioner Russell-Tucker noted that, while the five-year goal has been met, the CSDE would continue pursuing policies that do more to close the existing gap between educators and students of color.

IV. Panel Discussion: Engaging Stakeholders in Connecticut's American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds (ARP ESSER)

Mr. Frassinelli introduced panel members: Milly Arciniegas, Executive Director, Hartford Parent University; Andreas Lolis, Student, State Student Advisory Council on Education; Gwen Samuel, Founder and President, CT Parents Union; and Mirellise Vazquez, Executive Director, Tauck Family Foundation.

The panel considered two questions:

- How can the CSDE best communicate with families about ARP ESSER and other education-related initiatives and encourage their input/participation?
- What can the CSDE communicate with districts as practical approaches to engage and communicate with families and communities about ARP ESSER planning and opportunities?

The panel discussed issues related to ensuring families and community members are meaningful participants in planning for use of federal funds. The discussion included strategies for improving two-way communication between schools and families, utilizing community partners and grass roots efforts to be more inclusive of families who do not speak English, and partnering with philanthropy for assistance with engaging and convening families and community members.

V. Listening to Roundtable Members: Observations and Recommendations

Ms. Canady invited participants to share their perspectives regarding the panel discussion. Participants were also invited to submit their suggestions and questions about state and local planning and use of ARP ESSER funds and returning to school in September. Commissioner Russell-Tucker discussed the importance of identifying effective uses of the new funding and strategies for sustainability. She expressed her appreciation for the contributions of Roundtable members as continuing partners in this work.

VI. Adjournment

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