

CONNECTICUT ASSOCIATION FOR READING RESEARCH
Summary of the Connecticut State Board of Education (CSBE) Meeting
March 3, 2021

Attending: Bonnie Bauer, Erin Benham, Eric Clemons, Karen Dubois-Walton (remote), Elwood Exley, Estela Lopez (Vice-Chair), Janet Gates (Ex-Officio-remote), Donald Harris, Martha Prou, Awilda Reasco (remote), Malia Sieve, Robert Trefry (Ex-Officio-remote).

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Steven Hegida, President of the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education CT, and Dean of the College of Education at SCSU, spoke about the work of Teacher Preparation institutions and collaborative work with the CSBE during the COVID-19 Pandemic. He cautioned the Board regarding long term impacts of creating lower standards in order to meet current, emergency needs.

Christine Cutler, parent from Sterling CT, requested that the Board issue vouchers to students entering high school, due to the stalled process with the town that currently partners with Sterling to admit their students.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Members of the Board retired to Executive Session to discuss the appointment of the Acting Commissioner.

REPORT OF THE COMMISSIONER

No report

ITEMS REQUIRING ACTION

The Board voted to raise Item B out of order.

B. Appointment of Acting Commissioner of Education. The Board voted unanimously to appoint Charlene Russell-Tucker as Acting Commissioner of Education. Russel-Tucker has been Deputy Commissioner since 2019 and has served in the Department for over 20 years.

A. The Condition of Education in Connecticut 2019-20. Ajit Gopalakrishnan, Chief Performance Officer, presented the indicators that describe the progress of public education in Connecticut, 2019-2020. Included are the characteristics of students and educators, student performance on key indicators of student engagement, and student readiness for college and career.

The overarching consideration in the data analysis is the switch to fully remote instruction from March through June 2020. All state academic assessments in 2020 were cancelled, impacting the ability to determine performance metrics. Despite this, the following trends were highlighted.

- Student enrollment continues to decline by one half of one percent. Enrollment is increasingly diverse (48.9% are non-white), poor (43.3% are eligible for free/reduced lunch), and with greater educational needs (i.e. 16% are students with disabilities).
- The demographics of the teaching force are not changing as rapidly. The percentage of non -white educators has increased from 8.1% to 9.6% in five years.
- The percentage of students who received at least one suspension/expulsion in 2019-20 was 4.9 percent. The CSDE is grouping districts into four tiers based on suspension/expulsion rates in order to provide a system of supports and targeted action planning.
- The chronic absenteeism rate was 12.2 percent in 2019-20; it should be noted that for the 2019-20 school year, chronic absenteeism calculations are based only on in-person school days until mid-March 2020. Incidences of suspensions/expulsions and chronic absenteeism continue to be evidenced disproportionately among students of color, English learners, students with disabilities, and students from low-income families. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2018-19 district tiers are being used to identify those districts needing support.
- The four-year high school cohort graduation rates are rising and the graduation rate gap between most student groups continues to shrink. Connecticut's graduation rate of 88.5 percent remains more than three points higher than the national average. Two 2019 cohorts noted their highest four-year graduation rates since 2011; English learners reached a new high of 71.5 percent, and students with disabilities, reached a new high of 67.9 percent. Cohorts of students who are eligible for free lunch, Hispanic/Latino students and both male and female cohorts all demonstrated increases as compared to the 2018 cohort.
- College entrance rates demonstrated a slight uptick for the class of 2019 (71.5 percent). College graduation rates dropped slightly from 50.5 percent for the high school class of 2013 to 50.3 percent for the class of 2014 earning a two- or four-year college degree in six years after high school graduation.

The entire report is available at

https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Board/BoardMaterials030321/The_Condition_of_Education_in_Connecticut_2019_20.pdf

REPORT OF THE CHAIR

No report

CONSENT AGENDA

The consent agenda was approved

- A. Approval of the 2020-21 Concussion and Head Injury Annual Review for Coaches.
- B. Approval of New Educator Preparation Program: Sacred Heart University, Music Education Program
- C. Approval of New Educator Preparation Program: Capitol Region Education Council, Teachers of the Visually Impaired Program
- D. Acceptance of Surrender of the Charter of Stamford Academy, Inc.

REPORT OF THE COMMISSIONER

No report

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

- A. Agency Update. Charlene Russell-Tucker and John Frassanelli reported on the major actions of the CSDE during February. The Department has begun planning for the next Five-Year Plan for Education. Stakeholders are being identified and planning is for the first draft to be presented to the Board in January 2022, with the final draft ready for a vote in June, 2022.

The Federal Department of Education has waived the requirements for Federal Testing but is requiring that States conduct any tests that are mandated in the particular states. Connecticut is positioned to carry out its required testing both in person and remotely. In addition, protocols have been established for the distribution of ESSER II Federal emergency funding for districts.

The Department also conducted a student *Thought Exchange*, gathering input from students across the state regarding their pandemic learning and social/emotional experiences, and their suggestions for improvement. Over 8,000 middle and high school students answered the following question, “*As you are learning through the pandemic, what can Connecticut Schools do to make students feel even more connected, energized and enthusiastic about learning this year?*” The essential themes that emerged were

- Relationships—listening to and understanding students, facilitating social connections, helping with mental health, and using some fun activities
- Teaching and Learning—prioritizing the volume of work, focusing on the quality not quantity, reducing stakes (and stress) from all assessments, continuing to improve virtual/online learning.
- Communication and Flexibility—adjusting deadlines, maintaining consistent and clear communications

The Commissioner reported on Connecticut’s rank as number one in the percentage of students achieving a 3 or better on at least one AP exam. There were increased scores among all groups—Black, Hispanic, and low income. The outcomes were attributed to subsidizing test fees and increased outreach by the State Department to identify students of promise, and targeted letters to those

students by the Commissioner of Education urging them to enroll in AP/IB courses.

Lastly, state wide attendance is the highest since September, 2020. Just under fifty eight percent of districts are now fully in person, thirty-six and a half percent are hybrid and five and a half per cent remain fully remote.

Respectfully submitted,

Ann Marie Mulready