



THE BOARD REPORT



2001-02: Issue 1

October 2001

The State Board of Education met on October 2-3, 2001. Due to the cancellation of the September meeting, all business originally scheduled for consideration in September was included on the Board's October 2-3 agenda. Below are highlights of the October meeting.

In his annual back-to-school message, Commissioner of Education Theodore Sergi told educators that we need to expand opportunities for Connecticut students to learn more about other parts of the world, other people and other cultures. He noted that such learning can take place in the classroom as well as outside the classroom, without necessarily adding more time or spending more resources. He added, "No school is an island, capable of completely educating its students in isolation."

The Connecticut General Assembly considered this issue during the 2001 Session. Legislation was approved that reads:

It shall be the policy of the state to encourage its students, teachers, administrators and educational policy makers to participate in international studies, international exchange programs and other activities that advance cultural awareness and promote mutual understanding and respect for the citizens of other countries. (Section 10-27 of the Connecticut General Statutes)

To facilitate its discussion, the Board invited Dr. Frederick Czarra, Director of International Education for the Council of Chief State School Officers, to share his expertise in this area. Dr. Czarra described what he believes are the international dimensions of education: (1) communication skills (world languages); (2) international education (history and geography; others' cultures, languages, economic and political systems); (3) cross-national comparisons of educational data, allowing us to compare our education system and results to those of other countries; (4) exchange of educational practices, allowing countries to share information and participation in successful programs; (5) "education for all" – recognizing that education should be a basic right of children across the world; and (6) international exchanges between citizens of the United States and other countries, from elementary school through college.

Dr. Czarra illustrated the practical application of incorporating global issues into classroom instruction, and how easily such lessons can integrate several subject areas. He spoke of the shift in world language instruction, stating that schools are now embracing a more holistic and in-depth study of the culture of the country being studied. When asked to prioritize the study of a second language or culture, Dr. Czarra replied that he did not have a preference. "What is important is to introduce children to other parts of the world and engage them in the study of a different culture. This can be accomplished successfully either way." He continued, "We need to provide students with a sense of the world. Students need to be taught how to be critical thinkers and question what they read, hear or perceive."

Commissioner Sergi stated that we are not proposing a "new curriculum;" rather, we must have our students read and write about global issues beginning in the elementary grades. World language is an important part of a quality education, he added. He described the effort of each school, district and organization to expand our students' knowledge of the world as "unquestionably worthwhile." "The members of our next generation need to have the skills, abilities and understandings to lead the world...but they cannot and will not lead, and live peacefully in, a world they know little about," he concluded. The Board will continue its discussion of international education and will develop a position statement to be issued to school districts.

Praxis tests are administered to teachers obtaining or continuing their certification to demonstrate competence in the following: reading, writing and mathematics, by meeting Connecticut's standard on Praxis I – Computer-Based Test (or by meeting the approved waiver standard); and the candidate's intended teaching area, by meeting Connecticut's standards on the Praxis II subject knowledge tests. The Praxis tests are intended to help the state ensure that beginning teachers have a minimum level of basic skills and a basic level of knowledge in the subject matter they will be teaching, and support Connecticut's commitment to high-quality teaching. Overall, pass rates on the Praxis tests average approximately 80 percent. However, the results show a performance gap between minority and nonminority candidates, and that a very small number of minorities are choosing education as a profession. Additional efforts are needed to address these concerns. One proven measure is allowing candidates to take the tests again if they were unsuccessful on their first attempt.

Based on the findings of an in-depth analysis of Praxis test results, the Board approved the following recommendations.

1. Discontinue the Special Education Application of Core Principles Across Categories of Disability Praxis II Test. A new examination will be validated for use and will be proposed for adoption and establishment of the passing score by the State Board of Education.
2. Discontinue the Agriculture Test. Reviewers believed this test contains outdated items that do not reflect current agriculture and the range of agricultural employment and instruction in Connecticut. Currently there is no alternative assessment available in this area.
3. Adjust the passing score on the Praxis II Mathematics Content Knowledge Test from 141 to 137. The standard practice of adjusting the initial-recommended score by one-half of the standard error of measurement was never done for this test since it was first administered in 1997. The adjusted passing score brings the pass rate of this examination in closer alignment with the pass rate of all other Praxis II tests. The adjusted standard will be applied to all candidates who have taken this test since 1997 and future test takers.
4. Ensure access to remedial assistance to all prospective teachers, with a focus on minority candidates, in need of support to be successful on Praxis I and II.
5. Analyze performance data of candidates who did not meet the passing standard on Praxis I and Praxis II to identify types of skill area deficiencies. Share this analysis with high schools and higher education institutions.
6. Ensure that teacher preparation programs provide ongoing individual support and tutoring, with a focus on minority candidates, to enable them to meet the certification testing requirements.
7. Attract more candidates, including minorities, into the teaching profession through the Alternate Route to Certification programs, and by providing additional scholarships, financial incentives and "grow your own" programs.
8. Institute a formal three-year evaluation cycle for all Praxis exams and review and evaluate the new tests as they become available.

Invited to present their views on the proposed Praxis standards were Dr. Hernan LaFontaine of the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents, Dr. Brian Perkins, Chairman of the Department of Educational Leadership at Southern Connecticut State University, and Dr. Valerie Lewis, Commissioner of the Department of Higher Education. Dr. LaFontaine expressed his support for Connecticut's efforts to set high standards for teachers and administrators. The Praxis tests are one way to ensure a minimal level of knowledge we expect of our educators, he stated. Dr. LaFontaine fully supported special tutorial courses for minorities to prepare them for tests.

Dr. Perkins stated that lowering standards is not the proper way to attract or increase the minority teaching population. We need to ask why minorities are not entering the field and why their skills are not adequate to pass entrance examinations. The answers to these questions will help us direct our attention to the curriculum in our high schools and, specifically, to those areas that need to be strengthened, Dr. Perkins explained.

Commissioner Lewis said she regards the Praxis tests as fair, and reminded the Board that the cut scores are to be regarded as "floors," not "ceilings." She concurred with Dr. LaFontaine's support of test preparation programs, and suggested that we inform students early on to allow them to take the core coursework needed to do well on the Praxis tests. She added that it would be beneficial to us if the Educational Testing Service provided us with more diagnostic information.

INDOOR AIR QUALITY OF SCHOOL BUILDINGS

To expand on a discussion held at its August retreat, three individuals were invited to make a presentation to the State Board of Education on indoor air quality (IAQ) in school buildings. In preparation for the October 3 discussion, board members reviewed the "Indoor Air Quality Tools for Schools Action Kit" sent to all school districts, a Report by the Connecticut Academy of Science and Engineering on IAQ, and Substitute Bill No. 1265, An Act Concerning Indoor Environmental Quality in Schools. This bill ultimately did not pass, but was under consideration until late in the 2001 session. It included proposals for funding for prevention and correction of air quality problems and significant requirements in the area of health assessment and record keeping. A similar proposal will inevitably be on the legislative agenda for the 2002 session of the General Assembly.

Dr. Eileen Storey, University of Connecticut Industrial Health Clinic, told the Board that she is seeing as patients a growing number of teachers with health concerns related to school environments. She categorized IAQ into two components: (1) sick building syndrome – due to a lack of fresh air and poor air filtration; and (2) building-related illnesses – allergic responses, asthma and recurring pneumonia-related illnesses, due to mold, dustmites, moisture, etc. While she does not have sufficient data on students, Dr. Storey said that the symptoms of teachers seeking medical help for building-related illnesses disappear when the teacher is removed from the school environment for a period of time. Student and staff absences due to such illnesses impede the learning process. Dr. Storey told the board that the clinic's goal is to identify sources of illness, address them and keep school buildings open.

Gil Cormier, industrial hygienist, told the Board that his role is to recognize hazards and recommend ways to control them. He becomes involved in assessing IAQ as a result of Worker's Compensation claims. He attributed several of the problems associated with poor air quality to water and moisture. Many of school building materials are soft and porous and are hosts to microbial growth. Carpeting, too, encourages such unhealthy growth when it becomes damp or wet. Mr. Cormier said that monitoring the quality of indoor air is not the goal; rather, we should address the root causes, particularly the design of buildings (roof pitch; construction site). Important areas in addressing air quality include construction methods, and funding for routine preventative maintenance and building operations.

Paula Schenck, Department of Environmental Medicine, University of Connecticut Health Center, discussed how exposure to one's environment impacts his or her well-being. School buildings are vulnerable to disrepair, she noted, and we must recognize the significant consequences of poor air quality on students and teachers. She agreed with Mr. Cormier about the importance of regular maintenance in terms of providing a healthy environment and preventing greater long-term costs. She told the board that districts are encouraged to use the "Tools for Schools kit," and to educate indoor air quality teams. Funding for indoor air quality improvements would greatly assist districts in their efforts to improve the school environment.

Representing the State Department of Education were **Cheryl Carotenuti, School Nurse Consultant**, and **David Wedge, School Facilities Consultant**. Ms. Carotenuti stated that school nurses are a key member of a school indoor air quality team. They can track illnesses and inform administrators of trends or a potential link between IAQ and health-related issues that have surfaced. Mr. Wedge told the Board that currently, schools are eligible for funding for new air quality systems, but not for repairs to or replacement of existing equipment.

The Board's Legislation Committee is discussing including in its 2002 legislative package a proposal related to indoor air quality.

SAT RESULTS 2001

The Board received a report on Connecticut's performance on the SAT. Connecticut's combined average score was 1019, the highest average score in the state in over twenty years, and one point below the national average. While only 4 of 10 students nationwide took the 2001 SAT, Connecticut had an 84% participation rate, the highest participation rate in the nation. Commissioner Sergi noted, "This is what all states strive for – high numbers of students taking the test and aspiring to higher education, combined with an overall strong performance." Nonetheless, he called for more poor and minority students from our cities and rural areas to prepare for and take the test.

SPECIAL EDUCATION IN CONNECTICUT, 2000-01

The Department prepared its annual report on special education. This statistical report tracks progress for students with disabilities on indicators such as prevalence rates, race/ethnicity, placement in the least restrictive environment, and participation in and performance on the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) and Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT). Some of the key highlights of the report include:

- ❑ The identification of students who have a disability and require special education and related services has continued to decrease slightly over the past five years. This can be attributed, in part, to the publication of state guidelines related to the identification of students with disabilities, and greater local attention to identification procedures.
- ❑ The participation rates for students with disabilities in the CMT and the CAPT increased from the previous year's rate, but continued progress is needed in this area. While there has been a trend of some improvement of the scores of students with disabilities on the CMT over the past several years, higher achievement on this and the CAPT is expected.
- ❑ The 2001-02 special education prevalence rate of K-12 students was 12.50% (69,150 students of a total school population of 553,178).
- ❑ The three most prevalent disabilities (learning disabilities, speech/language disability and emotional disturbance) account for more than three-fourths of students identified with disabilities.
- ❑ Black and Hispanic students are identified with disabilities at a rate approximately 2.5 prevalence percentage points higher than White students. While the complex relationships among race, poverty and disabilities may contribute to this difference, the Department and school districts must continue to review identification guidelines and procedures to ensure that inappropriate identification does not occur.

Data contained in this report is used by the Department and local school districts on a continuing basis to assess progress in meeting goals and objectives in the *Report on Special Education and Related Services* (1998) and the *Connecticut Agenda for Improving Education Services to All Students, Particularly Students Eligible for Special Education and Related Services* (1998)

For a complete copy of this report, please contact the Office of Public Information, 860-713-6525.

CONNECTICUT ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE TEST – SECOND GENERATION

The Board approved standards for the second generation of the Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT). The standards approved by the Board for the four content areas of CAPT (mathematics; Reading Across the Disciplines; Writing Across the Disciplines; and Science) will be applied to the May 2001 CAPT administration and all future test administrations. In each content area, three standards were approved, setting four score bands. The highest score band will represent those students who are at or above the state goal; the goal standard for each subtest of CAPT represents a high level of achievement, reasonable to expect of students in the spring of their sophomore year. The lowest score band represents those students who are recommended for intervention.

The CAPT has been administered to Grade 10 students since 1994. The Second Generation CAPT standards were developed by a standard setting committee in each subject area, in consultation with professionals from the State Department of Education. Special consideration was given to the test's alignment with Connecticut's curriculum frameworks and its relationship to the Connecticut Mastery Test.

ENGLISH MASTERY STANDARD TO ASSESS STUDENTS IN BILINGUAL PROGRAMS

The Board approved three revisions to the standards it approved earlier this year. The revisions include (1) the elimination of the requirement for the Language Assessment Scales – Oral test in the third grade; (2) a technical change to reflect current usage, from "at or above remedial standard" to "above the intervention level" in reference to the recommended exit standard for the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT); and (3) clarification as to when the CMTs will be administered, to reduce the potential for overburdening students with multiple test administrations within one year.

The Board approved revised standards for eligibility for the reissuance of the initial educator certificate for those individuals who have failed to successfully complete the Beginning Educator Support and Training (BEST) Program. Standards were adopted that affect the conditions of initial educator certificate reissuance; requirements for intervening study and experience; and documentation of successful completion of teaching experience and coursework. Once the initial certificate is issued and the teacher is employed under that certificate, the teacher will be enrolled in the BEST Program and must successfully meet all requirements of the BEST Program in effect at the time of enrollment.

TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS

University of Bridgeport: The Board granted full program approval for the period October 1, 2001, through September 30, 2006, to the graduate level programs preparing teachers in the following teacher preparation programs: elementary education (Grades 1-6), secondary education subject areas (Grades 7-12); and special subject areas, including music and remedial reading and language arts teacher (pre-kindergarten-Grade 12); and granted provisional approval for the period October 1, 2001, through September 30, 2003, to the middle grades subject areas (Grades 4-8) and the intermediate administration or supervision preparation program; and granted initial program approval to new graduate teacher preparation programs in general science (Grades 7-12) and reading and language arts consultant (pre-kindergarten-Grade 12).

Central Connecticut State University: The Board extended full program approval for the period October 1, 2001, through September 30, 2003, to the school counselor preparation program.

University of Hartford: The Board granted provisional approval for the period October 1, 2001, through September 30, 2003 to the following undergraduate/graduate preparation programs: early childhood (birth-kindergarten and nursery-Grade 3); elementary education (Grades 1-6); secondary education (Grades 7-12); music (pre-kindergarten-Grade 12); and to the following graduate programs: special education (Grades 1-12); school counselor (Grades 1-12); school psychologist (Grades 1-12); intermediate administration or supervision (pre-kindergarten-Grade 12); and superintendent (Grades 1-12).

Sacred Heart University: The Board granted full program approval for the period October 1, 2001, through September 30, 2003, to the undergraduate/graduate programs preparing teachers for elementary and secondary education.

APPLICATIONS FOR FUNDS

The Board approved the submission of the following applications for funding:

- ❑ School Renovation, IDEA and Technology Grant: \$9.8 million was requested over a two-year period for emergency school facility repairs and renovations and compliance with federal accessibility laws (Part B of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act). Funds would also help districts defray the costs of students whose special educational services exceed the state's average per-pupil expenditure.
- ❑ Transition to Teaching Grant: \$1.5 million over a three-year period was requested. Funds will be used to build a long-term capacity to collaboratively resolve teacher shortages by strengthening recruitment, preparation, induction and retention of individuals with skills in a designated shortage area who are changing careers. Attention will be focused on minorities and prospective teachers who are willing to commit to an urban teaching assignment.
- ❑ Christa McAuliffe Fellowship: The Board accepted from the Council of Chief State School Officers \$47,175 for the 2001-02 Christa McAuliffe Fellowship. The recipient of this year's fellowship is Phyllis Cyr, a teacher at Griswold Elementary School. Ms. Cyr will use the funds to support the development of an interdistrict community classroom-based literacy program, with a focus on literacy training for teachers, instructional assistants, and parents.

APPLICATIONS FOR FUNDS (continued)

- ❑ Public Charter Schools Program: The Board approved the application for funds under the second year of the three-year program grant (\$1,545,879). The primary purpose of this grant is to support charter schools in the first three years of their existence in planning, design and implementation activities.
- ❑ Fund for the Improvement of Education Program: The Board approved the application for \$850,000 from the U.S. Department of Education to support Connecticut's Early Reading Success Institute. This initiative is a collaborative effort of the State Department of Education, the University of Rhode Island and Haskins Research Laboratories. Funds will be used to implement a state-of-the-art literacy initiative to broaden the training of professionals in the best practices in reading instruction and to provide a model system of effective teacher training, targeted for priority school districts.
- ❑ Title VII Bilingual Education State Program: The Board approved the application for \$100,000 to the U.S. Department of Education to enhance Connecticut's initiatives to enable limited English proficient students to meet the same standards of academic performance that are expected of all students in Connecticut. Funds will be used for personnel, data collection, professional development and technical assistance costs.
- ❑ Teacher of the Year Program: The Board accepted with gratitude \$22,000 from ING Aetna Financial Services to support the 2002 Teacher of the Year Program. Funds will be used for the Teacher of the Year Gala at the Bushnell Theater and to cover expenses of the Connecticut Teacher of the Year for travel and other expenses incurred in the performance of his or her duties. This year marks the seventh consecutive year that ING Aetna has generously sponsored this event.
- ❑ Together Educating and Moving: TEAM Connecticut: The Board approved the Department's application for funds available from the Centers for Disease Control to support this program. The requested funds (\$117,333) will be used to develop programs for preteens ages 9-13, their parents or other caregivers, and others who can influence preteens. The program's primary goal is to encourage activities, especially physical activity, to promote healthy lifestyles and displace risky behaviors.

The Board appointed to the Review Committee for the Approval of Connecticut Educator Preparation Programs for a three-year term ending September 30, 2004: James Ritchie, Dean of the School of Education and Human Resources, University of Bridgeport; Susan Sawchuk, mathematics teacher, Daniel Hand High School, Madison; Jerry L. Johnson, Regional Manager of Conservation and Load Management, Connecticut Light and Power; and JoEllen Belter, Reading Recovery™ teacher, North Canaan Elementary School. The 12-member Review Committee is responsible for making recommendations to the Commissioner of Education concerning the educator preparation programs visited at higher education institutions.

The Board reappointed Margaret W. Field to the Advisory Council for School Approval for a term ending June 2004. Ms. Field, representing the New England Association of Schools and Colleges Commission on Independent Schools, is part of the 11-member council, six of whom represent the public schools and five of whom represent the non-public schools. The Council advises the State Board of Education on applications of schools seeking state approval and reviews applications of accrediting agencies for recognition by the State Board of Education.

OATH OF OFFICE

*Newly appointed student Board members **Jennifer E. Chudy** and **Andrew Gladstein** were sworn in as members of the State Board of Education on October 2, 2001. Governor Rowland appointed Ms. Chudy, a senior at Tolland High School, and Mr. Gladstein, a senior at Trumbull High School, to the Board for a one-year term commencing July 1, 2000.*

The 2001-02 school year marks the fourth year students have served on the Connecticut State Board of Education.

The Board approved the change of name of the State Department of Education's Bureau of Program and Teacher Evaluation to the Bureau of Evaluation and Educator Standards. The new title more accurately represents the roles and responsibilities of this bureau in the Division of Evaluation and Research.

VOCATIONAL-TECHNICAL SCHOOL MATTERS

Opening of School Year

Superintendent of Schools Dominic Spera reported on the opening of the 2001-02 school year. He noted that the October 1st enrollment in the Regional Vocational-Technical Schools was 10,910, a 3 percent increase over the October 1 enrollment a year ago. The total Grade 9-12 and adult enrollment was 12,029 on October 1. The system currently has 36 unfilled positions, six of which are durational positions and filled by long-term substitute teachers. Ten positions are in the process of being filled. Mr. Spera told the Board that the system is experiencing difficulty in finding library media specialists and reading teachers. The system's starting salaries are competitive, he noted, but teachers on the middle-levels often find jobs in other districts that offer more attractive salaries.

District Evaluation and Professional Development Plan 2001-05

The Board approved the District Evaluation and Professional Development Plan 2001-05. The plan is designed to promote quality teaching in order to improve student learning and will serve as an accountability tool. It also promotes professional development of all teachers through individual and collaborative approaches, a self-analysis and assessment of teaching effectiveness, and a collegial relationship among teachers and between teachers and supervisors. The Plan was developed in response to *The Connecticut Guidelines for Teacher Evaluation and Professional Development* and *Connecticut's Commitment to Excellence in Teaching Second Generation*.

Other

The Superintendent presented the Board with a status report on construction projects underway in the RVTSS, and presented a list of textbooks recommended for use by the school system. The Board approved the list.

CONNECTICUT STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

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- ❖ To obtain a copy of a report considered by the Board, please contact the Office of Public Information, 860-713-6525.

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The Board Report is published monthly and is posted on the Department's Internet site (<http://www.state.ct.us/sde>). It provides a summary of matters considered by the State Board of Education at its regular monthly meetings. The Department welcomes comments and suggestions concerning the format and content of *The Board Report*. Please submit your comments to Pamela V. Bergin, Office of the State Board of Education, 165 Capitol Avenue, Room 301, Hartford, CT 06106, or pamela.bergin@po.state.ct.us

The next meeting of the State Board of Education is scheduled for
Wednesday, November 7, 2001.

The meeting will be held in Room 307 of the State Office Building,
165 Capitol Avenue, Hartford, Connecticut, at 9:30 a.m.

Visitors are advised to call the Office of Board Matters
(860-713-6510) to confirm the meeting date and time.

