

CONNECTICUT STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION
Hartford

Legislation and Policy Development Committee Meeting
February 4, 2015

Minutes
(Approved 3/4/2015)

Pursuant to notice filed with the Secretary of the State, the Board of Education Legislation and Policy Development Committee met in Room 119, State Office Building, 165 Capitol Avenue, Hartford, Connecticut on February 4, 2015.

I. Call to Order

Committee Chair Theresa Hopkins-Staten called the meeting to order at 8:36 a.m. Also present were committee members Robert Trefry, Joseph Vrabely, Erin Benham, Maria Mojica and Terry Jones.*

Also present for all or part of the meeting were the following Department of Education staff members: Chief Financial Officer & Acting Legal Director Kathy Demsey, Bureau Chief John Frassinelli, Bureau Chief Ajit Gopalakrishnan, Bureau Chief Mark Linabury, Regional School Choice & Sheff Office Division Director Glen Peterson, Education Staff Assistant Sergio Rodriguez, Interim Commissioner Dr. Dianna R. Wentzell, Chief Operating Officer Charlene Russell-Tucker, Associate Education Consultant Kari Sullivan, Staff Attorney Matthew Venhorst and Paralegal Mark Shepherd. In addition, members of the Norfolk-Colebrook Temporary Regional School Study Committee were in attendance.

II. Approval of Meeting Minutes

On a motion made by Mr. Vrabely and seconded by Ms. Benham, the Committee unanimously approved the January 7, 2015 Legislation and Policy Development Committee meeting minutes.

III. Alternative Education Standards Update

Committee Chair Hopkins-Staten recognized Chief Operating Officer Charlene Russell-Tucker who began the discussion by noting that the 2014 proposed legislation on Alternative Schools failed to pass, however, the Department is continuing its work on the Alternative Schools Committee that is addressing issues that were included in the 2014 proposal. The department is also reviewing current legislative proposals. After citing the input of CABE, CAPSS and

others on the Alternative Schools Committee she introduced Bureau Chief Mark Linabury, who continued the review.

Mr. Linabury reminded Committee Members of the department's focus on the development of guidelines to achieve a best practices model for the application of Alternative Education Standards. He began by outlining a set of concepts the Committee is reviewing:

- o Standards: students enrolled in an Alternate Education program should expect to be held to the same standards as those in a traditional program;
- o Graduation Rates: will be assessed based on the Special Education needs in addition to the behavioral needs of enrolled students;
- o Entrance Criteria: to be determined based upon input from the home/resident districts, school administrators and parents; and
- o Exit Criteria: to be assessed based on continuity of support throughout a given program (i.e. developmental reporting by the same team members on an individual basis).

Other items for consideration in the development of a best practices model would be individual student goals, curriculum, instruction and life skills. Mr. Linabury also stressed the importance of networking with core units to assess and monitor students in Alternative Education. Among those noted were local districts and/or regional school districts and student/family/and community based groups.

The best practices model resulting from applying these components, he continued, would provide insight into the effectiveness of program evaluation, student growth or whether alternative assessments should be developed.

Mr. Linabury noted the crucial role of data collection in the development, assessment and fine tuning of the best practices model for Alternative Education Standards. He noted that 55 Alternative Education Programs have been established in 45 school districts across the state, with 47 of these created for the 2014-15 school year and a total enrollment of approximately 1,500 students. Bureau Chief Ajit Gopalakrishnan concurred, informing Committee Members that the new 47 programs have each been assigned codes by the Bureau of Data Collection and that the process of collecting data for the Alternative Education programs is presently underway.

A detailed discussion ensued, and Committee members offered their comments and asked questions. Committee Chair Hopkins-Staten inquired about the availability of a final report to be brought before the entire Board. Mr. Linabury noted that this is being worked on and that the next department meeting devoted to this matter would be held February 13, 2015. Mr. Trefry requested a categorical overview of student enrollment in Alternative Education programs, to which Mr. Linabury replied that the majority of the students were either special needs or behaviorally challenged. Mr. Vrabely asked which age groups are most typically in need of such a program and added that outreach to students at a younger age might forestall

the necessity for Alternative Education programs. In conclusion, Mr. Linabury responded that the programs are overwhelmingly populated by secondary/high school level students.

IV. Status on Revisions to the Guidelines for Policymakers Regarding Culturally Responsive Education

Committee Chair Hopkins-Staten again recognized Chief Operating Officer Russell-Tucker who offered a general outline of the current status of the Department's work on Culturally Responsive Education and called upon Division Director Glen Peterson to update the Committee.

Mr. Peterson noted that members of the same group who drafted the original Guidelines are presently meeting again to work on the revisions and are fully aware of the need and importance of doing so. He also advised Committee Members that Education Consultant, Dr. William A. Howe is currently conducting a training session on Culturally Responsive Education with faculty and administrators at the Walsh School. Mr. Peterson added that a greater emphasis on simulation content would distinguish the revised Guidelines, noting that feedback from the Jewish Defense League unequivocally considered any Holocaust simulation exercises as inappropriate for students. Ms. Hopkins-Staten confirmed with Mr. Peterson for Committee Members that a simulation of American slavery prompted this review.

Ms. Russell-Tucker concluded the review by advising Committee Members that a department memo is being forwarded immediately with the existing position statement and the new position statement is in development.

*Mr. Jones arrived at 9:01 a.m.

V. Update of the Norfolk-Colebrook Temporary Regional School Study Committee

Chair Hopkins-Staten recognized Chief Fiscal Officer and Acting Legal Director Kathy Demsey who began the presentation and introduced Staff Attorney Matthew Venhorst to update the Committee on recent developments by the two towns and the Temporary Regional School Study Committee.

Attorney Venhorst noted that the Study Committee has been meeting since 2012 to outline, address and develop all issues involved in studying the advisability of forming a regional school district. Among these are:

- o Feasibility and financial details;
- o Organizational plan preparation;
- o Scheduling of local referenda; and

- o Statutory compliance.

A printed Proposed Regionalization Plan, prepared by the Norfolk and Colebrook Public Schools, was distributed to Committee members and Attorney Venhorst offered additional background regarding the Plan's progress. Declining enrollment as it affected class size and student/teacher ratios and overall cost reduction were cited as key underlying causes for studying possible regionalization. The Study Committee had a draft version of the Plan, which continues to be revised and refined, and is contingent upon legislative modification.

Discussion ensued. Members of the Study Committee in attendance introduced themselves to the Committee and spoke in defense of their efforts at regionalizing and also responded to concerns and comments put forth by Committee Members. Mr. Trefry and Mr. Jones encouraged their efforts, noted the need for regionalization in Connecticut and asked for more specific information as to how regionalization of school districts benefits the state. Ms. Demsey and Dr. Wentzell also noted the benefits of regionalization and agreed that the Norfolk/Colebrook plan deserves a detailed review by the Department.

Mr. Trefry requested and Ms. Demsey concurred that the Norfolk/Colebrook regionalization plan be revisited in the future as an Agenda item.

Chair Hopkins-Staton thanked the Study Committee and all the participants for their respective presentations.

VI. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 9:28 a.m.

Prepared by:

Mark Shepherd, Paralegal