

Connecticut Students See Gains in Test Scores and Attendance

Patrice McCarthy

Executive Director & General Counsel, CABE

The Connecticut Performance Index measures overall average achievement in a subject area. Academic performance in Connecticut improved across all student groups in English language arts (ELA), mathematics, and science in 2025, while chronic absenteeism continued to decline, according to new statewide data released today by the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE). The results from the spring assessments mark the first time in the decade since the Smarter Balanced tests were introduced that all student groups have shown improvement at once. These improvements bring Connecticut closer to surpassing pre-pandemic levels. Chronic absenteeism also fell for the third straight year, dropping from a high of 23.7 percent in 2021-22 to 17.2 percent in 2024-25, meaning that nearly 34,000 more students were present for school on a regular basis over this same period.

The Smarter Balanced assessments in Grades 4 through 8 show that from 2023-24 to 2024-25, growth in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics was stronger than in the previous period. In ELA, students achieved 60.6 percent of their growth targets on average in 2024-25, up from 58.7 percent in 2023-24.

In mathematics, students achieved 62.3 percent of their growth targets on average in 2024-25, compared to 61.4 percent the year before. At the state level, students are reaching approximately 60 percent of their growth targets on average, with 60 schools where students met at least 80 percent of their ELA growth targets and 104 schools where students met that benchmark in mathematics.

Chronic Absenteeism Continues to Improve

Chronic absenteeism improved for nearly every student group in 2024-25. The largest gains were in kindergarten, where rates dropped from 18.5 percent to 16.3 percent. For

See **TEST SCORES** page 9



The East Hartford High School Hornet Marching Band provided an energetic performance at the Commissioner's Back-to-School Meeting for Superintendents.

2025 CABE/CAPSS CONVENTION: Education Leaders Unite for Learning!

Lisa Steimer

Deputy Executive Director, CABE

On November 21-22, 2025, approximately 500 education leaders from across Connecticut and the country will gather for Connecticut's premier education conference, the CABE/CAPSS Convention, for professional learning, networking and the exchange of ideas.

Why should YOU attend?

You lead by example, and our students are watching. We tell our students to be lifelong learners, and we reward teachers for continued learning. Remember, good governance doesn't just happen – it is learned! Board members and superintendents expect district staff to engage in professional development and should have the same expectation for themselves. Ninety-one percent of 2024 convention participants found the convention program to be good or excellent. One participant commented that, "The thoughtful agenda provided a broad range of important information to become a productive Board of Education member."

The CABE/CAPSS Convention provides the opportunity for your board and superintendent to build camaraderie as you continue to strive to be an effective leadership team. Catch up with old friends and make new ones at informal networking opportunities. Recognizing the importance of community and learning, a participant stated that, "Connecting with other board of education members and feeling like I was gaining competence as a board member."

Join us to learn from exceptional speakers and workshop sessions, including members of the Connecticut State Board of Education and the Commissioner of Education. Nine-

ty-two percent of last year's convention participants rated convention workshops as good or excellent. Comments regarding workshops included, "Informative and engaging." "Very relevant."

See **LEADERS UNITE** page 11

Congratulations to New Certificated and Master Board Members

Lisa Steimer

Deputy Executive Director, CABE

We are pleased to announce those school board members who earned the Master Board of Education Member and the Certificated Board of Education Member levels in the 2024-2025 year.

The Master Board of Education Member (MBEM) program builds on the basics of the Certificated Board of Education Member program. To earn the MBEM, members must have earned the Certificated Board of Education Member level and 20 additional credits in core areas that include leadership, effective meetings, school/community relations, stra-

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PRESIDENT COMMENTARY

Promoting the Positive While Confronting Challenges in Public Education

Leonard Lockhart
President, CABE

As you begin this school year, you are once again on the front lines of one of the most important responsibilities in our state and our nation: ensuring that every child has access to a high-quality public education. While the conversation about public education across the country is often clouded by narratives of underperformance, funding challenges, and national comparisons, Connecticut's boards of education have an opportunity, and a duty, to promote the truth about our districts, our schools, and our students.

It is undeniable that public education is facing significant headwinds. Across the nation, stories of "failing schools" dominate headlines, while state and federal debates over funding often result in districts being asked to do more with less. Locally, many Connecticut boards find themselves caught between community expectations, state mandates, and the very real fiscal pressures of municipal budgets. Yet despite these challenges, our boards and educators continue to nurture student success, strengthen communities, and open pathways of opportunity for future generations.

This is why it is essential for you, as local leaders, to actively promote the positive stories from your districts while at the same time acknowledging the barriers you face. The work of public education is too important to be defined solely by negative headlines

or reduced to a set of test scores.

Every district in Connecticut has stories worth telling; stories of innovation, resilience, and achievement that showcase the strength of public education. Whether it is a robotics team advancing to national competitions, a group of students leading community service projects, or teachers implementing creative strategies to support literacy and math, these examples highlight the tremendous value our schools bring to students and families.

When you communicate with your communities, it is important to put these successes front and center. Highlight programs that prepare students for college and careers. Share the ways your district is expanding opportunities for students in the arts, sciences, and technology. Celebrate athletic and extracurricular achievements that bring pride and unity to towns and cities. By consistently promoting the positive, boards can shift the narrative away from broad generalizations about underperformance and toward the realities of what is working right here in Connecticut classrooms.

This is not about ignoring areas where improvement is needed, it is about making sure the public sees the full picture. Too often, the conversation around education is dominated by deficits, which diminishes the confidence of families and erodes trust in schools. Your role includes being champions for your districts, elevating successes so that communities understand their



investment in public education is paying dividends.

At the same time, boards of education must be candid about the barriers created by persistent underfunding at the local, state, and federal levels. The truth is that Connecticut's districts are being asked to deliver a 21st century education with resources that are too often stuck in a 20th century model. Special education mandates are chronically underfunded, the state's Education Cost Sharing formula still falls short of true equity, and federal support for critical programs remains insufficient.

Boards cannot shy away from advocating for adequate and equitable funding. When boards make the case through data, personal stories, and examples from their own districts, they help legislators and community members understand that funding is not about numbers on a spreadsheet; it is about opportunities for children. Adequate resources mean smaller class sizes, updated technology, access to mental health support, and expanded extracurricular offerings. These are not luxuries but essentials if our students are to thrive in today's world.

See **PRESIDENT** page 3



Mission: To assist local and regional boards of education in providing high quality education for all Connecticut children through effective leadership.

Vision: CABE is passionate about strengthening public education through high-performing, transformative local school board/superintendent leadership teams that inspire success for each child.

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR COMMENTARY

Building Trust, Connections, and Impactful Networks

Patrice McCarthy
Executive Director & General Counsel, CABE

I recently had the opportunity to attend the National School Boards Association Council of Urban Boards of Education (CUBE) Annual Conference. Throughout the two and a half days of sessions, there was a theme that is very relevant to all of us working in public education today. Building trust, connections and impactful networks are critical to the work of boards of education and the climate in the school community.

Connections are those we make with colleagues on the board, community members and other elected officials. It is through those connections that we are best able to develop networks where we can work collaboratively to achieve a common goal. For example, CABE works with other education interest groups including the Connecticut Association of Public

School Superintendents (CAPSS), the Connecticut Association of School Business Officials (CASBO), the Connecticut Association of Schools (CAS), the teacher’s unions, and the Regional Educational Service Centers (RESCs) on initiatives to support public schools. Collectively our voice is stronger and our impact is greater.

Trust is developed when we are consistent in demonstrating our integrity, competency and compassion. Boards of education can build trust by developing a shared vision that focuses on students, and supporting district goals and a strategic plan that implement that vision. In order to maintain trust, the views of colleagues – on the board and in the community – must be treated with respect, even when we disagree. Modeling civility and respect at the board table sets the standard for conduct in the schools and the community.



Identifying the shared values in the school district, such as fairness, respect, civility, inclusion, equality, and kindness, unifies the board and the community.

As boards of education prepare to welcome new members it is important to provide an onboarding process that includes discussion of roles and responsibilities as well as board policies, mission and vision, procedures and expectations. Boards of education that understand their roles and commit to a long term vision can serve as beacons of hope in their community.

PRESIDENT
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Your ability to acknowledge funding challenges while still promoting district strengths is what gives you credibility. Communities will respond positively when they see that boards are both celebrating success and being honest about needs.

One of the most powerful messages boards can deliver is that public education is not simply a line item in a budget, it is the foundation of our democracy and the engine of our economy. When residents invest in schools, they are investing in safer communities, stronger property values, and a workforce that can meet the challenges of a rapidly changing world.

National narratives may paint public schools as struggling, but Connecticut can and should lead by example in reframing education as the pathway to opportunity and progress. Boards of education are in the unique position to remind parents, taxpayers, and policymakers that every dollar spent on education yields returns that benefit all.

As board members, your leadership is about more than governance, it is about vision and purpose. You set the tone for how education is perceived in your communities. By choosing to highlight student success, by advocating for resources, and by maintaining high expectations for staff and students, you demonstrate confidence in the future of public education.

Yes, there will always be critics. Yes, there will always be comparisons to national averages or international rankings. But Connecticut’s boards of education can rise above the noise by telling the real story: that despite funding challenges, despite national headlines, and despite the obstacles, our students are learning, growing, and achieving every day.

When you attend board meetings, speak at community events, or interact with local media, remember that you are ambassadors for your districts. The way you speak about your schools shapes the way others see them. The pride and hope you carry into those conversations are contagious, and they are necessary if we are to counteract the nega-

tivity too often directed at public education.

Connecticut’s boards of education are entrusted with both great responsibilities and profound opportunities. In the face of national narratives about poor performance and the undeniable reality of underfunding, you have the chance to elevate the positive, advocate for the necessary, and inspire confidence in the promise of public education.

By promoting the strengths of your districts, acknowledging the need for fair funding, and reminding your communities that education is the most important investment they can make, you are not only defending public education, but you are also advancing it.

The children of Connecticut deserve nothing less than your full commitment to both telling their stories of success and fighting for the resources they need to thrive. Together, we can ensure that the narrative of public education is not one of decline, but one of resilience, achievement, and hope for the future. Thank you for your service.

SEE YOU IN COURT – THE NUTMEG BOARD OF EDUCATION

Free Speech in Nutmeg

Thomas B. Mooney, Esq.
Shipman & Goodwin

The Nutmeg Board of Education makes many mistakes. The latest imbroglio created by the board will be reported here each issue, followed by an explanation of what the board should have done. Though not intended as legal advice, these situations may help board members avoid common problems.

The beginning of the school year in Nutmeg was peaceful. But the peace ended in Nutmeg after a prominent political figure was assassinated on a college campus. Tom Teacher, an English teacher at Median Middle School in Nutmeg, posted several comments on social media expressing the view that the divisive rhetoric of that public figure justified his killing. Word about Tom’s posts got out quickly, and soon Mr. Superintendent was inundated with calls and emails demanding the termination of Tom Teacher. Before Mr. Superintendent could meet with Tom Teacher and his representative from the Nutmeg Union of Teachers, however, a parent sent him an outraged email complaining that Paula Pedant, a history teacher at Nutmeg Memorial High School, told her class that she did not regret the killing because sometimes people must reap what they sow.

Mr. Superintendent met with both teachers and their union representatives, and both teachers admitted to the alleged conduct. Paula Pedant expressed remorse for her comment in class, but Tom Teacher was unrepentant, claiming that the First Amendment protects his right to express his views on the matter. Mr. Superintendent placed both teachers on administrative leave with pay and without prejudice so that he could talk with counsel and decide on the next steps.

Meanwhile, the online edition of the *Nutmeg Bugle* reported on the comments made by both teachers, which generated a number of social media posts that excoriated the teachers for their insensitive comments. The members of the Nutmeg Board of Education were brought into the debate when Nutmeg residents sent them emails and texts weighing in on the controversy. While a few of the communica-

tions expressed support for these teachers, most called for the immediate termination of the two teachers, expressing the view that anyone who celebrates the death of another person should not be teaching children.

At the meeting of the Nutmeg Board of Education last night, several parents spoke during Public Comment on the matter, stating that such insensitive posts and statements should not be tolerated. At the conclusion of Public Comment, veteran Board member Bob Bombast moved to add an item to the agenda so that the Board members could have what Bob described as a “sorely needed” public conversation on the matter. Mrs. Chairperson asked if anyone objected, and when no one objected, she told the Board that she was adding the matter to the agenda and gave Bob the floor to start the discussion.

Bob thanked Mrs. Chairperson for exercising the prerogative of the Chair to add the agenda item, and he launched into a diatribe that ended with his saying that he didn’t see how these two teachers could continue their employment in Nutmeg. Not wanting to be outdone, several other Board members chimed in, agreeing with Bob that the comments by these teachers should not be tolerated. As usual, however, Board member Mal Content was a dissenting voice. Mal told the Board members that these teachers were simply exercising their constitutional right of free speech and that the Board members should stay out of the debate.

Is Mal correct in his view? What are the rights of these teachers, and what is the proper role for board members in such matters?

The United States Supreme Court has addressed the free speech rights of public employees on several occasions. The traditional view was that, given their public service, public employees were not protected by the First Amendment. The sentiment was expressed most memorably by Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes in 1892, when while sitting on the Supreme Judicial Court of Massachusetts he wrote:

The petitioner may have a constitutional right to talk poli-

tics, but he has no constitutional right to be a policeman. There are few employments for hire in which the servant does not agree to suspend his constitutional right of free speech, as well as of idleness, by the implied terms of this contract. The servant cannot complain, as he takes the employment on the terms which are offered to him.

McAuliffe v. Mayor of New Bedford Massachusetts (1892). However, in 1968, the United States Supreme Court decided to the contrary that public employees are protected by the First Amendment. In *Pickering v. Board of Education (U.S. 1968)*, the Court overruled a decision of the Illinois Supreme Court that had affirmed the termination of Mr. Pickering for writing a letter that criticized (in some ways inaccurately) the superintendent and the board of education of the district that employed him as a teacher. In that case, the Court ruled that speech by public employees is protected by the First Amendment unless the

disruptive impact of the speech outweighs the importance of the speech.

Fifteen years later, the Court then elaborated on this principle in *Connick v. Myers (U.S. 1983)*, establishing the general framework for assessing whether the private speech of a public employee is protected by the First Amendment. First, we must determine whether the speech relates to a matter of public concern; speech by a public employee that involves a purely personal concern or grievance is not protected by the First Amendment. When such speech does relate to a matter of public concern, we must now apply a balancing test to determine whether the importance of the speech outweighs any disruption it causes, in which case the speech is protected by the First Amendment.

The Court further clarified the rules governing speech by public employees in *Garcetti v. Ceballos (U.S. 2006)*. There, the Court

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THE 10TH EDITION
OF THE PRACTICAL GUIDE TO CONNECTICUT
SCHOOL LAW

A Practical Guide to
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Comprehensively revised and updated through the 2023 Legislative Session, the **Tenth Edition** of this treatise on Connecticut School Law is written by Thomas Mooney of Shipman & Goodwin LLP and published by CABE.

The Guide is the must-have resource for school board members and school administrators interested in the various state and federal laws, regulations, and judicial decisions governing school district operations in Connecticut.

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Below are the highlights of activities that the CABE staff has undertaken on your behalf over the last month. We did this:

- ◆ **By providing opportunities for members to learn how to better govern their districts:**
 - Provided a Roles and Responsibilities Workshop for the Plainfield and Region #20 Boards of Education.
 - Responded to 50 requests for policy information from 16 districts, providing sample materials on policy topics. Further, districts continue to access CABE’s Online Core Policy Reference Manual and/or online manuals posted by CABE for policy samples. The topics of greatest interest were those pertaining to Library Material Review and Reconsideration, Library Collection and Maintenance, Library Display and Program Policy and School Safety.
 - Provided support to board members and central office administrators regarding policy matters.
- ◆ **By promoting public education:**
 - Staffed meetings of the CABE Government Relations and Resolutions Committees meeting.
- ◆ **By ensuring members receive the most up-to-date communications:**
 - Provided a Policy Highlight, via e-mail, with information regarding School Safety.
- ◆ **By providing services to meet member needs:**
 - Presented Superintendent Search workshop for Stamford Board of Education.
 - Facilitated Board Chair Check-In.
 - Responded to a variety of legal inquiries from members.
 - Facilitated a goal setting session for the Andover Board of Educa-

- tion.
 - Facilitated a board self-evaluation for the Brookfield Board of Education.
 - Discussed board self-evaluation with the Cromwell Board of Education.
 - Working with a district Policy Chair and IT Director on policy components related to AI.
 - Working with the State Board of Education and the Digital Learning Advisory Council on developing “AI Best Practices in Schools.”
 - Working with a district’s policy committee for policy development.
 - Prepared materials, as part of the Custom Update Policy Service, for New Fairfield, New Hartford, North Stonington and Sterling.
 - Prepared materials, as part of the Custom Policy Service, for the Bridgeport and Shelton Public Schools.
 - Preparing a Policy Audit for the Wilton Public Schools.
 - Currently assisting Farmington and Watertown Public Schools with their superintendent searches.
- ◆ **By helping districts operate efficiently and conserve resources:**
 - Posted policies online, as part of the C.O.P.S. Program for Branford, Derby, Griswold, New Fairfield, New Hartford, Somers, Wolcott and the CABE CORE Manual.
 - Currently building a Policy Manual hosting site in the COPS Program for the Hartford Public Schools.
- ◆ **By representing Connecticut school boards on the state or national level:**
 - Attended CT Educator Preparation and Certification Board meetings.
 - Attended State Board of Education meetings.
 - Attended CREC Fall Staff con-

- vening.
 - Attended CT School Attorneys Council meeting.
 - Attended Bridgeport Public School Convocation.

CONGRATULATIONS (continued from page 1)

tegic planning, group dynamics, board member ethics, school finance, labor relations, and school law.

Those earning the Master level are:

Julia Dennis - Berlin
Ken Marcucio – Derby
Andrea Ackerman – Groton
Ethel Grant – Naugatuck
David Furie - Windsor

To achieve the Certificated Board of Education (CBEM) level of CABE’s Board Member Academy, a board member must accumulate at least 20 credits, earned by participating in CABE programs. Core areas addressed in earning the CBEM are board

- Participated in a meeting of the Connecticut Commission for Educational Technology.
- Attended the Commissioner’s Back to School meeting.

relations with the superintendent, with the community and with each other; policy; curriculum; school finance; school law; labor relations, and board operations.

Those earning the Certificated level are:

Ellen Michaels - Branford
Lynette Easmon - Bloomfield
Jeff Peterson – Fairfield
Mark Kulos – Norwich
Colleen Clark – Southington

Congratulations to all!

To learn more about the CABE Board Member Academy, please go to <https://www.cabe.org/professional-development/board-member-academy> or contact Lisa Steimer at lsteimer@cabe.org.

SEE YOU IN COURT (continued from page 4)

held speech by public employees that is “pursuant to duty,” i.e., expressed in doing one’s job, is not subject to First Amendment protections.

Applying these rules, we see that the speech of Tom Teacher on social media may or may not be protected under the Connick v. Myers balancing test, depending on the impact of the speech. By contrast, Paula Pedant’s comments were made “pursuant to duty” as a teacher. In her case, Mr. Superintendent may decide whether to impose discipline on Paula without applying a balancing test because her speech was not protected by the First Amendment.

Mere exposure to comments by others, whether at a board meeting or otherwise, does not create due process issues for board members. However, the members of the Nutmeg Board of Education should not have expressed their views on potential discipline for either teacher, which is an administrative responsibility. If Mr. Superintendent recommends termination of the contract of either teacher, the

Board members will sit in judgment on that recommendation, and as a matter of due process they must then act in that capacity as impartial judges. Accordingly, board members should not comment on such controversies involving teachers, either publicly or privately. Such comments may invite the question whether the board member can later decide the matter impartially, and indeed prior comments on such matters could be the basis for challenging a termination decision on due process grounds.

Finally, Mrs. Chairperson’s response to Bob’s request for a Board discussion of this matter violated the Freedom of Information Act. Adding items to a board agenda is not the prerogative of the chair. Rather, under the FOIA an item may be added to the posted agenda only by a two-thirds vote of the board and only at a regular meeting.

Attorney Thomas B. Mooney is a partner in the Hartford law firm of Shipman & Goodwin who works frequently with boards of education. Mooney is a regular contributor to the CABE Journal. Shipman & Goodwin is a CABE Business Affiliate.

Accurate Knowledge About Our Histories is Powerful

Martha Brackeen-Harris
DEI Consultant, CABE

As a child, I loved the vibrant colors of autumn. As the leaves covered the ground, my three siblings, neighborhood friends, and I would spend hours in the woods across the street from my house playing “Cowboys and Indians.” We grew up during the 50s and 60s and since we didn’t know much about the lives or the culture of indigenous people in our state, we imitated what we learned from television westerns such as *The Lone Ranger* and *Rawhide*, along with an occasional western movie. Our pretend cowboys wore big hats and carried cap guns in their holsters while pretend “Indians” wore a few feathers in their hair and carried sticks as pretend bows and arrows that we erroneously thought were only used for weapons.

Our goal was to tag a member of the other group before they could tag you. If you were tagged (or captured), you had to sit down until someone was the last person standing. Unfortunately, the cowboys could call the “Indians” names such as savages, but the “Indians” could only use broken English to respond. We didn’t know much about their history or their culture. We didn’t know that they weren’t monolithic. They lived among their own tribes, had their own languages, had fully developed family and spiritual lives, customs, celebrations, and families. We had no idea that Indigenous people had lived on this land for thousands of years before the Europeans came. We learned about their existence in the context of conflict and not their stories and contributions, and we carried those biases and stereotypes with us for many years.

By the 1960s, our fascination with playing “Cowboys and Indians” was no longer the focus of our lives. The reality of the Civil Rights era touched us in such personal ways that the history of others no longer demanded so much of our attention. We watched television coverage where innocent black children, who were peacefully protesting the injustices that were happening to them and their families, being bitten by police dogs and sprayed with powerful water from hoses made to put out fires. We

knew that we were living in a time of protests. We heard the songs and the chants of protesters of the Vietnam War, the unfair treatment of women, and violence against the gay community. At the end of the 60s, the Red Power movement was taking place in our country. Indigenous activists were protesting the discriminatory policies, broken treaties, systemic injustice, and land seizure in addition to fighting for sovereignty. However, the news coverage was scant for their protests compared to the attention other protesters were given.

During the 70s and 80s, I was focused on finishing college and growing in a teaching career. It wasn’t until I took a summer graduate course in the early 80s on teaching American history that I realized that I was unprepared to teach about Indigenous people. I read two books, *A People’s History of the United States* by Howard Zinn and *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* by Dee Brown that opened my eyes to my miseducation of such an important part of American History. I accepted the opportunity to rethink the way I taught history especially when Indigenous people were included in the lesson. It was a great way for relieving some of the guilt I may have carried, although innocently, for passing my biases and prejudices on to others.

As I continued my research, the topic that impacted me the most was the treatment that many Indigenous children experienced when non-members of the tribes developed a plan to educate them by taking them from their homes to attend boarding schools or created day schools either on or off the reservations. The children were not allowed to speak in their tribal languages, and they couldn’t wear their own clothing. They couldn’t practice their religions and essentially, were stripped of their Indigenous identities. Some were reportedly abused and when their parents protested for the right to educate their own children they could be put in jail.

The more we learn about the lasting impact of historical trauma, we need to be concerned about how that educational system effects today’s Indigenous students’ educational experiences. Are we finding disparities

in academic achievement and graduation rates? Are they thriving and feeling that they are accepted and valued? Are we, as educators in 2025, in touch with their histories, their lives, and making sure our policies include their needs?

As of July 1, 2023, each local and regional board of education in Connecticut was mandated to include Native American studies in their Social Studies curriculum. Members of each of our major Connecticut recognized tribal nations, Golden Hill Paugussett, Paucatuck Eastern Pequot, Mashantucket Pequot, Mohegan and Schaghticoke, were invited to participate in developing this curriculum. They wanted to ensure that the curriculum included but not limited to each of their stories, and the information was accurate and appropriate for all students. I believe that good policies begin with a good process. The inclusion of various voices increases the odds that the final version will have a greater chance to help our students thrive.

I am thankful that our current students have access to

accurate information about their own histories and the histories of others so our schools can be the catalyst to ensure all students will learn and grow in a place where prejudices and biases due to misinformation can turn into understanding and respect for each other. Accurate knowledge about our histories is a powerful gift that was lacking for me and others in my generation. I’m grateful for all the educators and other dedicated people who were responsible for developing policies and practices that would transform our educational system.

Final thought from Louise Erdrich, enrolled member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians.

“Things which do not grow and change are dead things.”

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<https://americanindian.si.edu/nk360/code-talkers/boarding-schools/>

Quoted from: <https://cea.org/state-partnering-with-local-tribal-nations-to-create-native-american-studies-model-curriculum/>

September State Board of Education Meeting

Sheila McKay

Associate Director of Government Relations, CABE

Superintendents Dr. Alexandra Estrella from Norwalk and Dr. Susan Nash-Ditzel from Killingly and their staff were invited to give a district overview of their participation in a pilot program for behavioral health. SDE had a two-year pilot grant for seven districts. Norwalk lowered depression (by 20 percent), anxiety (by 5 percent) and suicide (by 4 percent).

Killingly worked on measuring six skills to work on targeted interventions. The district saw improvement in students feeling they had stronger instructional support up from 79 percent to just under 90 percent. The students sense of belonging has increased in the showing of their feeling they have a connection to an adult; up from 79 percent to 90 percent. Finally, students felt they had a trusted adult to help them solve a problem; from 76 percent to 85 percent. The district prioritized providing professional development to 285 educators on mental health issues to better assist students. The Superintendent spoke of the decrease in chronic absenteeism and behavioral referrals to the office; decreased over four years.

“We are seeing broad improvement in all student groups and all grades” said Ajit Gopalakrishnan, Chief Performance Officer as he reviewed the latest annual state assessment results. “We need some positive encouraging news; people have been working extremely hard to accelerate student engagement and improvement.” Scores were up across all student groups and all class levels over last year. See a full review in the article on page 1.

The Ethics of Political Influences on Boards of Education

Nick Caruso

Associate Executive Director for
Field Services and Technology, CABE

In many ways, small town politics symbolize the character of New England. The idea of “home rule” is quite evident in the structure that governs our local public schools. In most cases, boards of education work tirelessly for the improvement of our children’s education without regard for the political environment. Board votes span party lines and consensus between all board members is the goal. In my opinion, this is by far the most common practice amongst boards in Connecticut. However, there are times when board members appear to cross the line and politics start to influence board deliberations.

There seems to be two ways in which politics can negatively influence boards of education. The first is when the political pressures are within the board itself. Whether strictly “Republican/Democrat” politics, or by ideology,

or when the person presenting an idea becomes more important than the idea itself, the work of the board is more likely to fall short. Most boards in Connecticut manage to refrain from real political squabbles; there might be some tension around election of officers, but that is soon over and the board gets back to business. Sometimes, feelings are hurt and it takes longer for the wound to heal. In fact, sometimes it never heals and conflict remains. I have seen boards literally paralyzed for months when this type of behavior erupts – and children pay the price for it. Somehow, over the last few years, this has become the norm in politics, although (fortunately) it often bypasses our local school boards.

The second issue is more complex. The board members themselves refrain from political infighting, but they are besieged from outside by political forces. The Mayor, the Town Council, Board of Selectmen or

a Town Committee chair wield power over the board and get it involved in a town-wide political fight. Board members are given a choice – play along or you don’t get to run for re-election. New board members are even told that this is how the process works – that you *must* do what the council/selectmen want. The responsibilities given to board members are important ones; and need to be respected. The statute giving boards of education authority is pretty explicit:

“Each local or regional board of education shall maintain good public elementary and secondary schools, implement the educational interests of the state as defined in section 10-4a and provide such other educational activities as in its judgment will best serve the interests of the school district...”

Boards of Education are charged with implementing the educational interests of the state and given the responsibility for

maintaining good schools. Notwithstanding the fact that individuals on boards can certainly disagree with what “good” means, the charge is pretty clear.

For the sake of effectiveness of governance and doing what is in the best interests of the school district it is imperative that board members understand their proper roles and work hard to do what they believe is best, pursuant to the charge to the board. Sometimes this is not the easiest path, nor the easiest politically. This is why we need board members of sound judgment; able to withstand unfair or unwise pressure.

I recall a conversation with a board colleague (from the other party), many years ago. Somehow the two of us had found ourselves on the opposite side of a controversial issue from the rest of the board. He was bemoaning the fact that he was being inundated with phone calls from influential

See **TECHNOLOGY** page 12

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Connecticut Has Second-Best School System In The Country

Patrice McCarthy
Executive Director & General Counsel, CABA

A new study from WalletHub found that Connecticut has the second-best public school system in the country. The study, published in July 2025, considers test scores, funding, class-size and school safety, among other factors.

Researchers found that Connecticut excelled in nearly all these areas. Connecticut has the fifth-highest reading test scores out of every state and the District of Columbia, and is tied with California and D.C. for the highest median ACT scores.

Connecticut also has the third-highest share of students who receive a 3 or higher on AP exams, and 6.6 percent of Connecticut public schools are in the top 700 public schools nationwide, WalletHub reports. Connecticut also prioritizes class size, with the eighth-best pupil-to-teacher ratio in the country.

However, Connecticut still faces achievement gaps. The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) reports that only between 50-60 percent of students across all grade levels met English language proficiency standards in the 2024-2025 academic year. EdSight found that only around 18 percent of students met or exceeded overall English language proficiency standards.

A WalletHub study released earlier this year also found that Connecticut had the second-highest amount of racial inequality in educational outcomes in the country. This study compared educational attainment among black and white students in each state. It used data from the US Census Bureau, the National Center for Education Statistics, and the ACT and College Board.

“Another area where Connecticut stands out is safety,” according to WalletHub. “The

Constitution State is one of only 17 states that require regular audits of school safety. Additionally, Connecticut has the lowest prevalence of illegal drugs on school property, the second-lowest youth incarceration rate and the six-lowest share of students who have carried any kind of weapon on school property.”

According to WalletHub, only our neighbor Massachusetts has better school systems. Acknowledging the areas where we need to continue to improve, it is important to recognize the

TEST SCORES
(continued from page 1)

the second year in a row, students in Grades 3 and 4 had the lowest absenteeism rates at 12.5 percent and 12.4 percent. Absenteeism in high school, however, remains higher than in other grades.

The Connecticut State Department of Education’s

successes of Connecticut public schools in meeting student needs.

People in the News

CABA Executive Director and General Counsel Patrice McCarthy was recently appointed to the CT Bar Association’s 2025-2026 Civics Education Executive Committee.

evidence-based home visitation program – the Learner Engagement and Attendance Program (LEAP) – continues to make a strong impact, with student attendance improving by double digits six months after a visit. A new state budget line item of \$7 million now supports this initiative.

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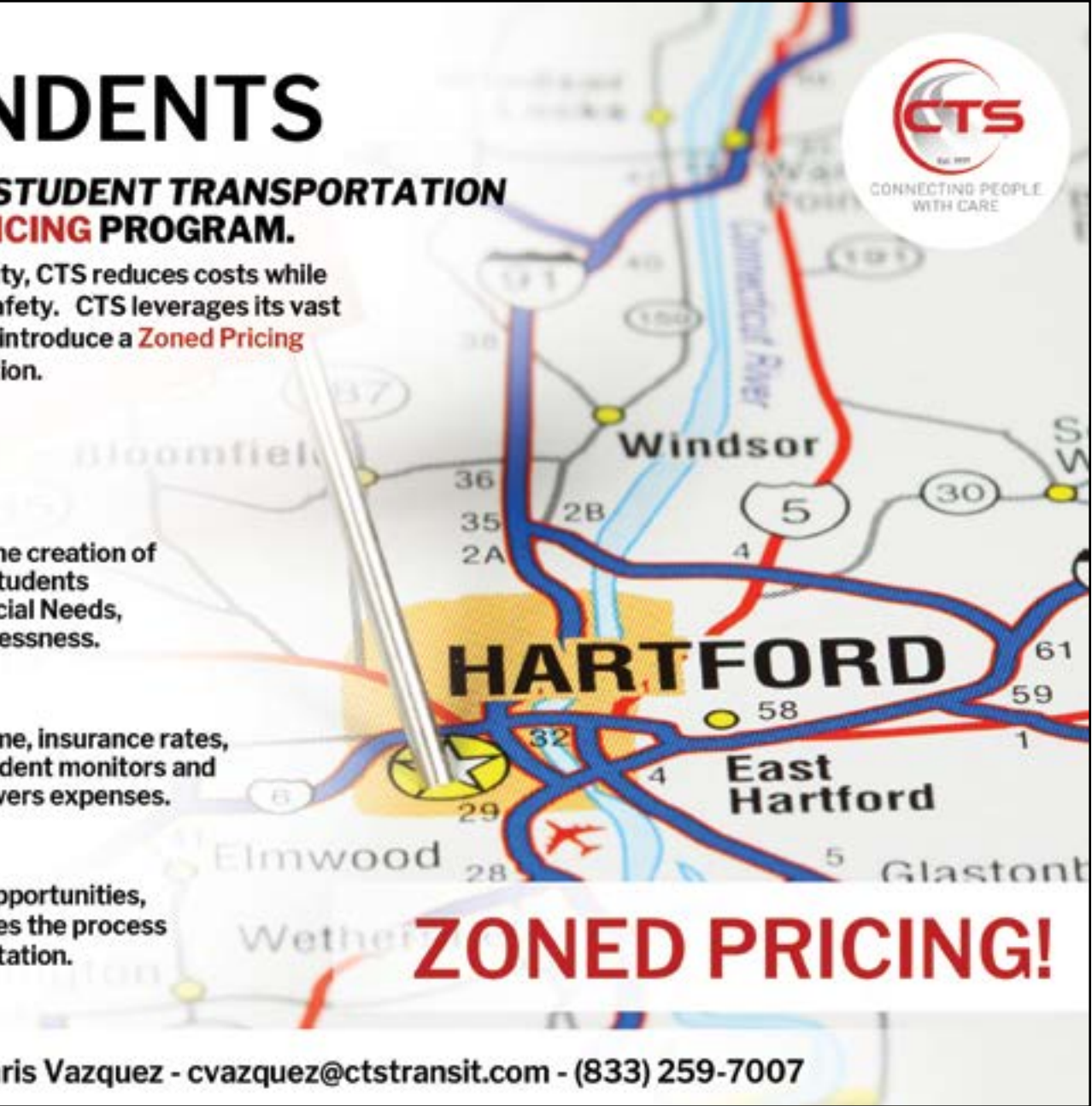
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Public Attitudes Toward Public Education

Patrice McCarthy
Executive Director & General Counsel, CABE

The 57th Annual PDK Poll on Public Attitudes Toward Public Education (formerly the Gallup/PDK Poll) examined a range of education-related topics. Data was collected in June from a national sample of 1,005 adults. These are a few highlights from this year's poll:

- **A majority of U.S. adults support limiting cell phone use during the school day.** 46 percent prefer phones be allowed only during lunch and breaks, while 40 percent support a full-day ban. Only 11 percent favor unrestricted use — highlighting strong public support for setting boundaries on technology in the classroom.
- **Despite recent political proposals, 66 percent of U.S. adults oppose eliminating the federal education department.** Most Americans (65 percent) believe the department's elimination would have a negative impact on public education.
- **Parents are interested in access to public education funding for the purposes of sending their children to private or religious schools.** 59 percent of parents in the 2025 PDK Poll would send their child to a non-public school if at least partial funding was provided. This is up from 56 percent in support of using public funding to open families up to private options in 2020.
- **The public interest in charter and lab schools remains steady from recent polls,** with 46 percent supporting funding these types of schools. Support for funding charter schools was 68 percent in the 2013 PDK Poll. Interestingly, support for charters across political ideologies was similar, but support from Black families was strongest.
- **Nearly two-thirds of Americans agree that teacher salaries are inadequate.** 64 percent believe that teacher pay is too low. This belief was championed by Democrats (73 percent believing pay is too low) and less by Republicans (39 percent believing pay is too low).

Analysis

For over 20 years, the Poll has asked respondents to grade their community's schools and

the nation's public schools with a letter grade (A-D, Failing). Among the poll's results from over 20 years of data, the 57th annual poll showed decreased support for the nation's schools. 43 percent of respondents gave their own community's schools a letter grade of A or B, down from 53 percent in 2013. Only 13 percent of respondents gave the nation's public schools an A or B rating, down from 26 percent in 2004.

Support for charter schools and lab schools was not as high as in past PDK Polls. This year, 46 percent of respondents supported funding charters or lab schools. Support for charter or lab schools was highest among Democrats (51 percent), and nearly the same for independents and Republicans (44 percent and 45 percent, respectively). The public's approval of charter schools was higher in previous PDK polls. In 2013, for example, support for charters was at 68 percent.

U.S. Department of Education

Only 12 percent of respondents strongly support the elimination of the U.S. Department of Education, with 66 percent opposing or strongly opposing closure. Interestingly, 34 percent of male respondents supported the agency's elimination, versus 9 percent of female respondents. Attitudes different along political lines, with 46 percent of Republicans strongly supporting or supporting elimination of the department, versus 23 percent of independents, and 0 percent of Democrats.

Among our respondents, 19 percent believed eliminating the department would have a positive impact on public education, with 65 percent believing the opposite. 6 percent of respondents thought that eliminating the department would have no impact.

Teacher Salaries

Personnel salaries are among the largest component of a school district's budget. The National Education Association's report on educator pay (2025) reports a national average starting salary for new teachers of \$46,526 and an average national teacher salary of \$72,030. The NEA report for Connecticut shows an average starting salary of \$49,860 and on average salary of \$86,511.

The 2018 PDK Poll revealed

	Very/ Somewhat Important	Very/Not at all Important
Providing security measures to keep students and teachers safe	99 percent	0 percent
Initiatives to make students feel like they belong as part of the school community	98	3
Addressing teacher shortages	97	1
Providing CTE programs	97	3
Improving teacher pay	92	7
Educating students about technology, such as AI and responsible social media use	84	16
Providing more control to states and individual districts over education policy and funding	82	13
Diversity, Inclusion, and equity (DEI) Initiatives	61	23

that 66 percent of the American public thought that teacher salaries were too low. In this year's poll, that number shrunk to 64 percent, with 20 percent feeling that teacher salaries were "just about right" and only 1 percent believing that salaries are too high.

Using 2024 data, World Population Review reports the average teacher starting salary by state ranges between \$58,409 (California) and \$42,492 (Mississippi). The differences in pay between states has a relationship to different regional costs of living, but a 2018 report suggests there are other factors to explain the differences. For comparison, the World Population Review also publishes a livable wage chart by state, highlighting the minimum salary for a single adult with no children. The livable wage is defined as "the income required to cover basic family needs without reliance on outside assistance."

Across political ideologies, Democrats led in the belief that teacher salaries are too low (73 percent) versus 62 percent for independents and 39 percent for Republicans. 92 percent of the respondents believed addressing teacher pay is an important issue.

Cell Phone Policies and AI in the Schools

According to a May 2025 report, twenty-one states have instituted statewide policies or policy mandates around cell phone access in public schools. A complete ban on cellphone use throughout the school was supported by 40 percent of respondents; 46 percent supported access to cellphones

outside of classroom activities such as during lunch or in-between classes. 11 percent of respondents do not support a cellphone ban, especially if use of the device helps students academically. Nevertheless, 86 percent of Americans support some kind of cellphone restriction for students during the school day.

In the 2024 PDK Poll, all respondents were asked about their support for the use of artificial intelligence in education. This year's support for AI waned, most significantly for the purpose of assisting teachers in the creation of lesson plans.

What is important to the American public in 2025?

In this year's poll, many of the potential education priorities listed garnered strong support. Among the highest priorities are initiatives to make students feel like they belong as part of the school community, career and technical education programs, addressing teacher shortages, and improving teacher pay. The most support was given to providing security measures to keep both students and teachers safe in America's schools.

There was the least amount of consensus around support for DEI programming or initiatives: 61 percent of U.S. adults say diversity, inclusion, and equity initiatives are either very important (49 percent) or somewhat important (12 percent). 89 percent of Democrats said it is very/somewhat important compared to 22 percent of Republicans and 62 percent of independents.

Commissioner's Back-to-School Meeting with Superintendents

Lisa Steimer
Deputy Executive Director, CABE

Commissioner Charlene Russell-Tucker and the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) staff recently met with superintendents and education partners from across the state to celebrate the new school year and to launch this year's theme, *Unlocking Lifelong Potential*.

Gov. Ned Lamont provided remarks noting that, "We are doing something right. Test scores are up, and absenteeism is down." The governor wants to make sure resources are going to the classroom to support teachers.

Reminding participants that the students are our "why", Commissioner Russell-Tucker introduced the East Hartford High School Hornet Marching Band who provided a rousing performance.

Commissioner Ronnell Higgins of the Connecticut Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection (DESPP) shared DESPP's support for safety in our schools.

Commissioner Russell-Tucker announced that last year Connecticut saw improvement in state assessment scores across every grade, subject, and learning group. Additionally, for the third year, attendance improved. The work being done in districts is making a difference.

When talking about this year's theme, *Unlocking Lifelong Potential*, Commissioner Russell-Tucker shared the life story of Olympian Wilma Rudolph. Because of the support Rudolph received as a youngster facing health issues and the belief people had in her, Rudolph overcame significant obstacles and went on to win three Olympic gold medals. The Commissioner stressed that this theme applies to all students, families, staff, communities, and ourselves.

In introducing the keynote speaker, Bryce Fuemmeler of Harvard's Leadership and Happiness Laboratory, the Commissioner spoke about how the well-being of superintendents (leaders) matters. Often, she noted, leaders put

themselves last. Happiness is not a luxury, rather it is a necessity.

Bryce Fuemmeler presentation highlighted how to focus on the intrinsic nature of one's work.

- Beware of the hedonic treadmill - how people adapt to negative or positive emotions regardless of what they experience.
- Set approach, not avoidance goals. Approach goals, with intrinsic orientation, lead to a more meaningful work life.
- Embrace work friendship. Make friendship culture organic, not forced.
- Build a culture of earned success - a culture where hard work and excellence is recognized and rewarded.
- Focus on how your work serves others.

Commissioner Russell-Tucker closed the program announcing the four Connecticut Blue Ribbon Schools - House of Arts, Letters, and Science (HALS) Academy, New Britain; Gildersleeve School, Portland; Green Acres Elementary

School, North Haven; and Weston Intermediate School in Weston. Congratulations!

LEADERS UNITE (continued from page 1)

Newly elected board members are welcome and encouraged to participate! A new board member commented that, "This was my first conference as a new board member. I look forward to more learning in the future! Thank you for all the work you are doing to support us!"

Be sure to visit exhibitors who work with your district to supply goods and services. Those who visited the Exhibit Hall shared that, they appreciated exhibitors "ability to be informative without "pushing," as well as the variety of exhibitors participating.

Most of all, celebrate Connecticut's successes and leave with a renewed sense of purpose and optimism!

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POLICY IN PRACTICE

The Promise of Moving Ahead

Jody Goeler
Sr. Staff Associate for Policy Service, CABE

Currently, it appears that most conversations around the use of AI in the education field center on providing thoughtful and informed leadership at the district, school, and classroom levels on implementation strategies. Such areas include how schools should respond to the proliferation of AI, determining the role this technology should play in education, developing a better understanding of its benefits and drawbacks, and leveraging the technology to improve teaching and learning, as well as district operations. Questions related to these areas include the degree to which AI will impact and transform standardized testing, school management, professional development, measures to curb “deepfakes” and bullying, special education, and supports for English learners (to name a few).

I recently heard it stated that AI technology places us at a

critical juncture, where we must consider either the promise of moving ahead or the peril of staying where we are. And yet, I’ve never been comfortable with such decision points that require a one-way-or-the-other approach to things. Perhaps this is a result of a cautious disposition, or maybe because I was born into an *analogue* world and had to make the necessary adjustments to survive and even lead in this new age. While I love the cool things new technologies bring, I still break into cold sweats when I attempt to change one of the screens in my car or receive an error message when completing a task I’ve done a thousand times before without a problem.

Accepting the realization that the only reasonable approach is to embrace the promise of moving forward, I must also acknowledge that it won’t be without making critical judgments: grounding such judgments in the “why?” determining what can be automated and what should not

be; identifying and considering things that are uniquely human, and acknowledging that AI will offer opportunities to strengthen and not eliminate segments of our school workforce.

AI and Policy Support

More specifically, in the policy world, AI technology may offer boards of education and superintendents a tool that enables them to adopt policies tailored to their specific needs and community characteristics, utilize their collective voice, and do so with minimal time and effort devoted to research. Over the years, I’ve had board members ask in the face of demanding and time-consuming tasks, such as curriculum projects and policy deliberations, “Can’t we just take what our neighboring district has? Why reinvent the wheel? Can’t we just have our attorneys draft our policies?” Unfortunately, simply adopting someone else’s curriculum or shortcutting the policy adoption process leaves out the critical voices of your staff and community, fails to acknowledge student and staff demographic patterns, and does little to build support and buy-in.

On the other hand, the limited time and resources devoted to lengthy research and wordsmithing detract from the board’s critical leadership work: time for deliberation and consensus-building, time to engage in staff presentations on their essential work, and time to listen to and engage with constituents. Through its capacity to automate, search, collect, synthesize, and share back what it is prompted to deliver, AI does hold promise for moving ahead.

AI bots offer an encouraging path forward for boards seeking to maintain current, compliant, and coherent policy manuals. To that end, CABE’s policy department is partnering with the RESC, EdAdvance and its AI Strategic Division in developing a Custom Policy Management AI bot to support a high quality policy audit process that can review existing policies to ensure legal and judicial compliance, consider language tone, voice, and clarity, as well as provide audit summaries to help guide boards in their policy manual update considerations.

Over the years, CABE has assisted many Connecticut boards of education through our policy audits and comprehensive policy updating services. Collaborating with EdAdvance enables our policy department to develop new services and supports that assist boards in their policy development and updating, which would have once been impossible to consider, such as reviewing an entire policy manual and adjusting it for tone, emphasis, terms, conflicting language, and overall policy coherence and emphasis.

As we begin building the technology, our collaboration will likely uncover new ways to support member boards in their policy work. We anticipate that the development phase will take place over the next several months, during which time we will keep you updated. In the meantime, CABE’s policy department looks forward to continuing our current services.

As with all things related to AI, it requires careful consideration in developing prudent safeguards and a thorough review and authentication process. However, the promise of AI technology may offer boards a constructive middle ground in their policy development. The debate over “reinventing the wheel” versus “customizing to uniqueness” is unlikely to disappear; it reflects fundamental differences in how boards approach governance. However, AI may offer boards a new middle ground: the ability to start with proven models, adapt them with precision, and do so in a fraction of the time previously required.

For CABE member boards, this means that more energy can be devoted to the substance of policy – what values it reflects and how it affects students – rather than on the mechanics of drafting. Boards can enter policy discussions with richer comparative data, more tailored drafts, and clearer choices.

In a time when boards face mounting demands, from addressing student achievement gaps to navigating new technologies themselves, AI, at least as it relates to policy development, may prove to be less about replacing human judgment and more about reclaiming time for the deliberations that matter most.

Upcoming CABE Programs

- **CABE 2026 Legal Issues** (*In person*)
October 16, 2025 | 8:30 a.m. Registration
9:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m. Program | The Lyceum, Hartford
- **School Climate** (*Webinar*)
October 20, 2025 | 12:00-1:15 p.m.
- **Fall Meeting of Superintendents
Administrative Professionals** (*In person*)
October 21, 2025 | 11:30 a.m. Registration
12:00-1:30 p.m. Networking & Light Refreshments
1:00-3:00 p.m. Program
- **Digital Wellbeing in the Age of Social
Media and AI** (*Webinar*)
November 6, 2025 | 12:00-1:15 p.m.
- **CABE Delegate Assembly** (*In person*)
November 20, 2025 | Mystic Marriott Hotel, Groton
- **CABE/CAPSS Convention** (*In person*)
November 21-22, 2025 | Mystic Marriott Hotel, Groton
- **New Board Member Orientation/
Leadership Conference** (*In person*)
December 9, 2025
Sheraton Hartford South Hotel, Rocky Hill
- **2026 Legislative Issues and
Advocacy** (*Webinar*)
December 16, 2025 | 12:00-1:15 p.m.



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WHY REPRESENTATION MATTERS:

An Interview with Dr. Lamirra Hood-Stewart

Erin Conley
Darthula Mathews
 Great Schools Partnership

Education leaders increasingly recognize that a diverse educator workforce is not just a matter of equity; it is a matter of impact. All students benefit when they learn from educators who reflect the diversity of the world and who view students and families as assets.

Dr. Lamirra Hood-Stewart is a Connecticut educator and leader who has spent over 20 years living and working in the state. From home daycare to leading clinical day schools, her journey is shaped by experience, reflection, and a deep commitment to equity. Her story, rooted in both triumph and challenge, offers a powerful lens into why representation matters and how schools and school systems can move from intention to action.

Question 1: Can you share your journey into education and leadership? How has your identity shaped that journey?

My path into education began with caring for my own kids and supporting families. I ran a home daycare in New York and later supported military families in Maine. I transitioned from volunteering to working in Head Start,

and eventually earned my master's in special education and my doctorate in educational leadership. It wasn't just career growth, I saw how my kids, especially my daughter, were the only ones who looked like them in many classrooms. That motivated me to stay in spaces where I could make a difference for kids who, like me, needed someone to understand them and see their worth.

Question 2: What are some of the challenges you faced as a BIPOC educator? How did you navigate them?

It was hard to realize that standardized tests didn't account for my students' experiences, or mine. I gave a cognitive test asking, "What is the cow doing in the picture?" and the student answered, "eating grass." He lost points because the "correct" answer was "grazing." That shook me. I was educated, but I would've answered the same way. Beyond standardized testing, I often felt unheard, especially as a young black woman among veteran white educators. I've learned to speak up, stay curious rather than confrontational, and remain rooted in my purpose.

Question 3: What was it like as a parent raising BIPOC children in a less diverse community?

I thought a "better" school district would offer more opportunity, not realizing the emotional toll. My daughter was ridiculed for her skin color, called "Black as a Sharpie," and developed body dysmorphia from beauty standards that excluded her as the only one like her in our community. One year, an incident made the news: white students chased a Black student with a noose and my daughter was the only one to report it. That broke my heart. I had chosen academics over cultural belonging. Though my children found strength, I still wonder if staying in a more diverse community was better. Their experiences shape how I support my students today.

Question 4: How has the presence/absence of BIPOC educators impacted your sense of identity and belonging?

While I had a diverse peer group growing up, I rarely had teachers who looked like me. In my lived experience, that miss-

ing presence influenced how I was perceived and what I was encouraged to pursue. A school counselor once told me "No, you want to be a midwife" instead of the OBGYN doctor I had aspired to be. This made me question my worth. That lack of representation pushed me to become the role model I didn't have. When I became a principal and experienced students of color cheering for my promotion like I'd won a championship, I understood why. It reminded me how much representation matters, for belonging and for belief in what's possible.

Question 5: What role does representation play in shaping school culture and experience for all students?

Representation builds a culture where all students feel seen and safe. When staff reflect student and world diversity, it promotes empathy and psychological safety. Kids realize they can achieve more because they see people like them and around the globe in positions of influence. Diversity in staff also brings broader perspectives, which benefits every student and the larger school community.

Question 7: What actions can school systems take to recruit, support, and retain educators of color?

To keep BIPOC educators, we must care about their well-being—personally and professionally. The emotional labor is heavy, especially in communities affected by trauma. Recruiting is hard because many don't see teaching as viable or respected. Support must include training in bias, culture, and trauma impact. Educators need tools to understand and meet students' complex needs with compassion. Building communities of care and offering growth opportunities are key.

Question 8: What advice would you give to aspiring BIPOC educators considering leadership roles?

Be confident in who you are and speak up, your perspective is needed, even when others don't see it. Speak up. Share your story, not because it's your job to educate everyone, but because your truth is powerful. Find your people, those who affirm and support you, and don't let anyone dim your light. Your presence creates

change and opens doors for others.

Dr. Lamirra Hood-Stewart reminds us that representation is more than symbolic—it is transformational. We are grateful for the story she shared and the ongoing impact she has in the lives of students and families. She not only serves as a role model and mentor for young BIPOC students, but also builds safe, inclusive spaces where every voice is respected and valued. By setting high expectations and ensuring the right supports are in place, she empowers students to achieve at the same level as their peers and to envision successful futures for themselves.

Great Schools Partnership has been working closely with the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) to strengthen and diversify the state's educator workforce. Over the past couple of years, we supported districts in completing their Increasing Educator Diversity (IED) plans and facilitated sessions at the SERC Dismantling Systemic Racism Conference, CSDE Task Force Convenings, and CT EdRising. We've also built a strong partnership with CSDE and are aligning our efforts with the State Board of Education's 2023–2028 Strategic Plan. Alongside these efforts, we've hosted focus groups with K–12 districts and higher education leaders to better understand both the successes and challenges of this work. Moving forward we are excited to dig deeper into best practices and strategies for retaining, promoting and sustaining a diverse educator workforce in Connecticut. If you would like to learn more about how to diversify your educator workforce, join us for a webinar hosted by Great Schools Partnership on October 29 at 5:30 pm.

TECHNOLOGY

(continued from page 8)

members of his party, demanding he support the initiative. He had been told outright that his failure to support the vote would probably result in him never again being considered for a seat on the board. He didn't know what to do. I suggested that he had a choice. He could spend the next three years doing what he believed was right (the remainder of his term), or he could sit on the board for 20 years – and hate every minute of it. Not only did he vote his conscience, but, three years later, he was reelected by a large margin.

I believe our communities want board of education members with the highest ethical standards, and I think most board members fall into that category. In these tough times, I think it more important than ever to do the right thing – our children's future depends on it.

Meeting of Interest

■ Connecticut State Board of Education

October 8, 2025
 4:30 p.m.
 North Haven High School



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CONDUCTING AN “ORGANIZATIONAL” BOARD MEETING:

Electing Board of Education Officers

Conrad Vahlsing
DEPUTY GENERAL COUNSEL, CABE

With the fall season underway, many Connecticut towns will be abuzz this year as election season is also in full swing. And with local elections around the corner, it is a good time to review how board of education officers are selected. For those new to service on a board of education, being elected as a member of the board is not the same as electing board officers.

Local elections set the membership of the board, then those members meet in public in order to select from among themselves who will serve as officers. In Connecticut, much of the process for selecting board officers is contained in state law. So even if a newly elected member is an expert in Robert's Rules and has maybe even served on another public board before, it is important to learn the process that is specific to boards of education.

But Robert's Rules experts will also be able to guide the process smoothly as certain parliamentary rules do apply. For example, Robert's Rules states that nominations do not require a second. And as with many board tasks, boards should check their policies and bylaws to see if they have established a process for electing board officers, but any such process must align with state law. It is also a good idea to see if any town charter provisions contemplate officer elections.

Electing board officers is done at what is commonly called the “organizational” board meeting but note that the word itself is not in the relevant state statute (C.G.S. Section 10-218 for local boards). Organizational meetings are outlined in Robert's Rules (Section 54 of the official 12th edition) but primarily to refer to meetings to initiate a new group, which is not exactly what boards of education members are tasked

with, which is more of a re-organization of the new and existing members, and selecting officers among them. But Robert's Rules has other sections describing voting and election of officers.

As related asides, which may help members new and returning alike, the official version of Robert's Rules is currently in its 12th edition and its full title is Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised (commonly abbreviated as RONR). It is over 1100 pages and even the citations can look a bit confusing. A citation to Robert's Rules will often look like this: RONR (12th ed.) 54:11. To break down what the numbers refer to, the 54:11 would be a reference to Section 54, paragraph 11.

And yes, that example citation is a part of the section on organizational board meetings, but again, it won't be particularly helpful to boards of education as it describes processes such as electing temporary board officers at a first initiation/organizational meeting and permanent officers at a second organizational meeting.

Returning to Connecticut state laws for electing officers, there are separate statutes for local boards (Section 10-218) and for regional boards (Section 10-46(d)). And there are differences.

For local boards, the meeting to elect officers must be held within one month of newly elected members taking office. At the meeting, at least a Chair and a Secretary must be elected. And if officers are not elected within one month, the town council (or selectmen where there is no town council) picks the officers from among the board of education.

For regional boards, the process may be a bit more complicated as some towns may hold elections at differing times (e.g., in the month of May). Generally, the meeting to elect officers must be held “in the month following the

last election of members thereof held in the member towns in any calendar year.” At the meeting, a Chair, Secretary, and Treasurer (and any other officer deemed “necessary”) must be elected. When there is a tie in the voting, the tie is broken by lot.

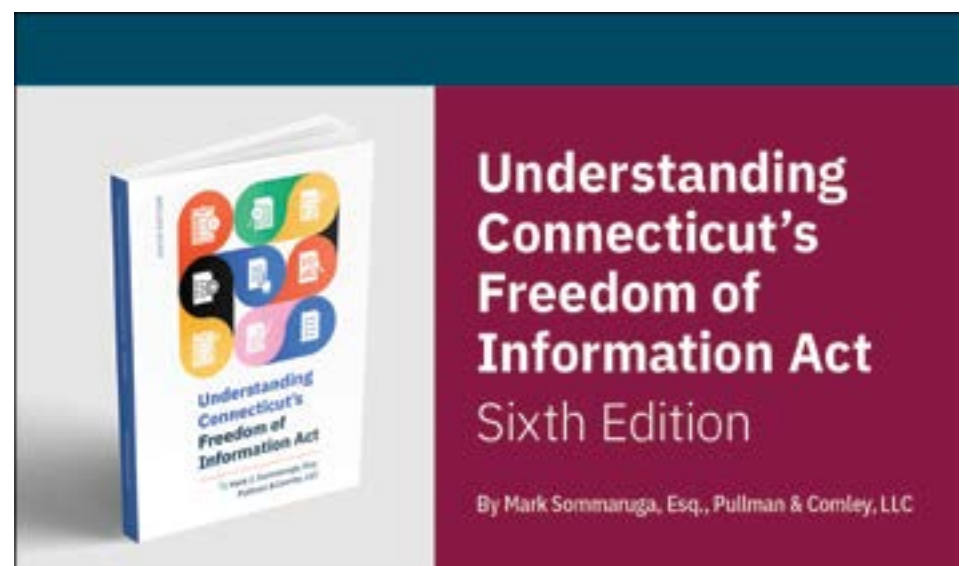
The statute for local boards states that the votes of each member must be written down and made available for public inspection within 48 hours of the meeting, and also included in the minutes. This requirement generally aligns with separate state Freedom of Information Act requirements for public agency voting, with one wrinkle related to timing. Where the minutes containing the voting for election of local board of education officers must “be available for public inspection at all reasonable times” (again, Section 10-218), the state FOIA states that minutes have to be made available for public inspection within seven days of a meeting (Section 1-225). And

for regional boards of education, while there is no mention of writing down votes, or having them in the minutes, in the relevant statute, both local and regional boards should be complying with state FOIA requirements for all meetings they hold.

Of course, there is a long list of tasks for newly elected board members (not to mention all of the learning!), but conducting an effective organizational board meeting should be on the list. Conducting a smooth meeting to elect board officers can set a tone upon which boards may continue their all-important work. In support of that, and as a final note, readers should know that CABE has a sample procedure for conducting officer elections as well as a document containing some important points on the process. Contact any CABE staff to request the documents, with contact information at cabe.org/about/staff.

“People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.”

– John C. Maxwell



The Connecticut Freedom of Information Act (“FOIA”), often called the “Sunshine Law,” is a series of laws that guarantee the public access to meetings and records of governmental entities in Connecticut. The FOIA also sets forth numerous exceptions to its open meetings and records requirements. Over the years, however, both the FOIA and its exceptions have often been misconstrued.

This book should serve to provide guidance to public agencies and their members (not to mention members of the public) seeking to navigate the maze of edicts and exceptions associated with the FOIA.

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