

Questions for the Nominee for Education Commissioner

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State Commissioner of Education (CGS §§ 4-5 to -7; Chapters 163, 164, 166, 168-170, 172 & 173)

- Serves as the administrative officer of the State Department of Education (SDE) and administers, coordinates, and supervises the activities of the department in accordance with the State Board of Education's (SBE) policies.
- Directs and supervises numerous SDE programs including teacher and administrator certification, special education, technical high school system, charter and magnet schools, regional agricultural science centers, adult education, education accountability and school performance programs, and various grants to school districts and towns.
- Serves as secretary to the SBE; must compile and publish all regulations and acts which may be required and perform such duties as the board prescribes.
- SBE recommends education commissioner candidate to the governor; governor nominates candidate and submits nominee for approval by either house of the General Assembly.

Questions for nominee

1. You have been an educator in Meriden public schools for 20 years: first as a teacher, then a school principal, and most recently as an assistant superintendent. What challenges and opportunities for Connecticut education did you see on the local school district level? How are you trying to address those challenges and opportunities as commissioner? Are the challenges and opportunities different at the state level?

2. How are you adjusting to managing an organization as large and diverse as SDE, and how have you approached learning about its strengths and weaknesses?
3. For years, the legislature has heard that SDE is under-staffed. Have you found that to be the case? Are there particular areas where the need is greatest?
4. While the [CCJEF v. Reil](#) case is over, the Supreme Court did not find Connecticut's public school system to be without problems (it deemed the state's overall funding adequate but acknowledged that poor communities struggle to meet the needs of their students). The court decided it was not up to the judicial branch to manage public education for the state. Are there lessons that you as an education leader take from that decision even though it did not mandate that the state take any specific action?
5. In recent years, the legislature enacted legislation aimed at increasing the number of racial minority teachers in Connecticut. Last year it passed [PA 19-74](#) as well as provisions in the budget act regarding minority teacher college loan reimbursement grants ([PA 19-117](#), §§ 262 and 263). How important is it for the state to recruit more African-American and Latino teachers? Is Connecticut doing enough in this area?
6. There is an ongoing plan to make the state's Connecticut Technical Education and Career System (CTECS) an independent state agency, separate from SDE. Last year the legislature passed legislation ([PA 19-117](#), §§ 273-284) that delays this separation until the 2022-23 school year. What is your position on whether CTECS should be an independent agency? Will it be more difficult for SDE to oversee K-12 public education in Connecticut if this system is independent and chooses to do some things differently than the State Board of Education and SDE?
7. Since 2015 all Connecticut school districts have given students the smarter balanced assessment (SBAC) for math and English in grades 3 through 8 and grade 11. Is this new assessment doing a better job than the old Connecticut mastery tests of measuring how well Connecticut's students are doing? SBAC assessments are taken on a computer. Is this a challenge for students, especially younger ones, who may not be familiar with using a computer?
8. You co-chaired the Achievement Gap Task Force for several years and under your leadership the task force issued a [report](#) in 2014. Was the task force able to identify steps the state could take to narrow Connecticut's achievement gap (now called by many the opportunity gap)? Have many of the steps have been adopted by the state and are they having a positive impact? Can you point to some examples?
9. In recent years, new mandates have been placed on school districts and their staff. These mandates include, to name a few, required subject matter such as African-American and Latino studies, anti-bullying requirements, and expanded criminal history records check requirements. How are districts, principals, and teachers handling the new requirements? Is the burden of mandates something that SDE is concerned with?

10. How do you think the teaching profession is faring in Connecticut? Do we have enough people who want to be teachers, and are the teacher preparation programs at colleges and universities doing a good job of preparing them? Also, how much of a problem is teacher retention? Is the state doing enough on that front?
11. According to the SDE's student enrollment data ([EdSight](#), SDE's data webpage), Connecticut's public school enrollment continues to drop. In the 2008-09 school year statewide enrollment stood at 571,046. Ten years later in the 2018-19 school year enrollment was 530,612. That's a decrease of more than 40,000 students over the ten-year period. What problems does this enrollment drop pose for the state in general and for districts specifically? Are there particular parts of the state that have been impacted more than others?
12. While the overall student population is decreasing, the percentage of students identified as needing special education services is steadily increasing. According to [EdSight](#), in 2008-09 the special education population made up 11.99% of statewide enrollment. In 2018-19, that figure had risen to 15.0%. Is our educational system getting better at identifying special education needs or are we overidentifying students as needing special education? Or is there another cause for the increase?
13. As the state continues to offer more educational opportunities that cross town lines – such as magnet, charter, and technical high schools, and agricultural science centers – should the state move toward disconnecting public education from municipal government and boundaries?
14. What is the state of charter schools in Connecticut? Are they providing innovation that can be replicated in other schools, charter and non-charter schools?

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