



OLR RESEARCH REPORT

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QUESTIONS FOR THE NOMINEE FOR COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION

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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 policies established by the State Board of Education (SBE).
- Directs and supervises numerous programs of the SDE including teacher and administrator certification, special education, technical high school system, charter and magnet schools, regional agricultural science centers, adult education, early childhood programs, 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 were selected commissioner from outside the SDE and outside the state. What challenges and opportunities for Connecticut education did you see as an outsider and has your perception of those challenges and opportunities changed now that you have been on the job for several months?
2. Have you ever managed an organization as large and diverse as the SDE? How are you adjusting to this and how have you approached learning about its strengths and weaknesses?
3. Connecticut has often been cited as having the greatest achievement gap of any state in the nation. Do you agree with this assessment and what are the first steps you and the department can make toward closing it?
4. The state is in the midst of a lawsuit over whether it is adequately funding education for Connecticut's public school children. While not a final resolution to the lawsuit, the state supreme court has ruled that the state must provide an "adequate" education for all public school students. Do the lawsuit and the supreme court decision influence or hinder the work you do to improve education in the state?
5. As the state continues to offer more educational opportunities that cross over town lines – such as magnets, charters, vocational-technical schools, agricultural science centers – should the state move toward disconnecting public education from municipal government and boundaries?
6. We know a large percentage of teachers leave the field every year. And just last week, the governor proposed significant changes to the teacher tenure and teacher certification laws. Do you think these proposed changes will affect people considering whether to enter the education field? How will they affect those already in the field?

7. You are closely identified with the charter school movement. Some have applauded this, while others are concerned about a possible over emphasis on charters. How do charter schools fit into your vision of public education in Connecticut?
8. Where does Connecticut stand compared to other states regarding how our pre-K through 12th grade education prepares young people to be college or career ready?
9. Before you arrived in Connecticut, the SDE directly intervened in two low-performing districts, Bridgeport and Windham. In Bridgeport the state reconstituted the board of education (and thus triggered a lawsuit) and in Windham it imposed a special master to oversee the district on behalf of the state. Are these interventions working and why was the state's approach so different with each? Will the state continue to intervene in other districts in the near future?
10. Like many other states, Connecticut is preparing to seek a waiver for the federal No Child Left Behind requirements. Why are we seeking that waiver and what will the state benefit from receiving it? What are the consequences if the state does not get the waiver?
11. Recently there have been numerous news media reports about special education students being placed in seclusion rooms for inappropriate periods of time. Parents of these students are very upset with the way their children are being treated. Does Connecticut do enough to ensure that seclusion rooms are only used when absolutely necessary and are used safely and appropriately? Should state law be changed to address this?
12. Advocates for the state technical high school system have long held that the state does not adequately support the technical system. For several years there have been reports of technical high schools and their facilities being in substandard condition for prolonged periods. Do you see this as a problem and what steps are you taking to address it?

JM:tjo