

**OPENING STATEMENT BEFORE THE
EXECUTIVE AND LEGISLATIVE NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE**

Erik M. Clemons

Nominee for Member of the Connecticut State Board of Education

February 18, 2016

Hello, Representative Janowski, Senator Duff, Senator Kane and Representative Buck-Taylor, and members of the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee.

My name is Erik Clemons, and I feel honored and privileged to be appointed as a member to the Connecticut State Board of Education. Also, my sincere thanks to this committee for the opportunity to appear before you to speak to my desire to serve on the CT State Board of Education.

When receiving the news concerning my being recommended for appointment to the State Board of Education, I reflected on how, in many forms, my life's journey has been greatly impacted by education.

I grew up in Norwalk, CT, raised by a single mother where we lived in the Carver Apartments. At that time, I was bussed from my urban neighborhood to a school in the suburbs. Admittedly, I underperformed throughout my educational experience. My underperforming had little to do with academic capacity, and more to do with my life's instability due to the effects of poverty. As a result, I attended two middle schools, as well as a different high school over the span of four years. I would imagine there remain children and families whose educational experiences continue to be compromised by the effects of poverty, especially in Connecticut's urban school districts.

Upon graduating high school, I attended college, but was ill prepared to complete a year. Luckily, I was able to secure a job as a mail-handler in the U.S. Postal Service, in Stamford CT, where I worked for 16 years. While at the post office, I dreamed of making a greater contribution

to society, especially to those children and families whose social conditions bore resemblance to those that I was able to overcome. In 2000, I enrolled as a full-time student at Southern CT State University, graduating with a BS in Sociology (2004). Upon graduating, I resigned from the U.S. Postal Service, and embarked on my dream of making a difference through the advent of education.

I started my new career as a paraprofessional at Thomas Edison Middle School, in Meriden, CT. After three years, I decided to teach at-risk youth at New Haven Job Corps Center, all the while attending Hartford Seminary and obtaining a graduate degree in Theology and Ethics. Afterwards, I was blessed to serve as Executive Director of Leadership, Education, Athletics, and Partnership (LEAP), while at the same time serving as President of New Haven Public Schools City-Wide PTO, serving on the first ever NHPS Education Reform Committee (as a parent). Moreover, I am past Board Member of Elm City Prep School (AF). Currently, I am a *founding* Board Member of Elm City Montessori Charter School, Education Fellow at Pahara-Aspen Institute, and *founding* CEO & President, CT Center for Arts and Technology. Ultimately, all of the above listed accomplishments have provided me with a deep understanding of and belief in the importance of education. However, nothing qualifies me more for such an appointment than serving as dad to my four daughters, three of whom graduated from NHPS; Kiara (Smith College and Florida Coastal School of Law grad), Nyle (Tuskegee University grad), Nia (Hampton University-sophomore) and Kai (Hamden Hall Country Day School-sophomore).

They are shining examples of what one can achieve through education.

I look forward to answering your questions.