

Questions for Education Commissioner Nominee

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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, 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.
- Recommended by SBE as commissioner candidate to the governor; governor nominates candidate and submits nominee for approval by either house of the General Assembly.

Questions

1. As the head of the state's education agency, how do you balance the idea of parents' right to make decisions for their children and the state's obligation to provide an education that will prepare students for the 21st century?
2. A recent [survey](#) of Connecticut public school teachers revealed high levels of burnout and low morale, and stories of teacher shortages persist as districts struggle to fill open positions. Why do you think this is so? How should the department address this?

3. Connecticut school districts received considerable sums of federal money related to COVID-19 relief efforts. What kind of oversight or follow-up has the department done to ensure that towns and their boards of education have spent the funds properly? How can SDE assure the legislature and the public of how the funds were spent?
4. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the air quality in schools has become a major concern for some parents, students, and teachers. The state has made \$150 million available (\$75 million in federal American Rescue Plan Act funds, \$75 million in state bonding) to assist towns with upgrading their schools' heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems ([PA 22-118](#), § 367). Has SDE offered any guidance to districts who wish to make improvements but are not able to afford the required local funding obligation? Does the department view this as an equity issue, given that the improvements can have a direct impact on individuals' health?
5. Last year, at the General Assembly's direction, the department developed [remote learning standards](#) for use beginning in the current school year (2022-23) ([PA 21-46](#), § 16, as amended by [PA 21-2, June Special Session](#) (JSS), § 391). The controlling public act specified that these standards are not to be considered regulations. Do you believe that they should be, or would you prefer that they remain standards?
6. How would you explain curriculum design to parents and guardians who have questions about the creation of public school curricula? What advice would you give to those who seek more input in the curriculum design and oversight process in their local district?
7. The Remote Learning Commission recently issued a report in response to the General Assembly's request for a plan to develop a statewide remote school ([PA 21-2, JSS](#), § 387). As the commission's chairwoman, could you explain the commission's recommendations and their rationale?
8. For years, the legislature has heard that SDE is under-staffed. Is this the case, and do you expect it to get worse? Did last year's expected wave of state employee retirements hit the agency? Are there particular areas where the need is greatest?
9. Since 2015, all Connecticut school districts have given students the smarter balanced assessment (SBAC) for math and English in grades 3 through 8. How do pre-pandemic SBAC scores compare to those in recent years? Do you believe SBAC is still the best tool for measuring student progress in elementary school?
10. The College Board has been in the news recently as some states have taken issue with the curriculum of certain Advanced Placement courses. What is your opinion of the AP program? Do you think its courses should be offered in Connecticut public schools?
11. Recent [data](#) from your department indicates that the rates of chronic absenteeism have dramatically increased in almost all school districts since the start of the pandemic. What is SDE doing to address this? Is this having a significant impact on students across the board?

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