

MINUTES STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

**333 Market Street | 1st Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17126**

March 12-13, 2025

On March 12, 2025, the State Board of Education (Board) held an Executive Session to consult with counsel on the Board's responsibilities under Act 69 of 2024. On March 13, 2025, the 384th meeting of the State Board of Education was convened and called to order at 9:41 a.m. by Chair Karen Farmer White. Public notice of both meetings was made in accordance with the Sunshine Meeting Act of 1986.

Attending:

Hon. Carol Aichele
Nathan Barrett
Naina Bhatia
Katherine Christiano
Yadira Cupeles
Rep. Bryan Cutler

Sandra Dungee Glenn
Ernest Hadrick
Amanda Hetrick
Jeffrey Keeling
Maureen Lally-Green
Robert Mitchell

Hon. Pedro Rivera
Monica Taylor
Karen Farmer White
Lee Williams
Sen. Lindsey Williams
Benjamin Wilson

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the November 14, 2024, meeting of the Board were approved on a **Christiano/Taylor** motion.

COMMITTEE REPORT

TEACHER AND SCHOOL LEADER EFFECTIVENESS COMMITTEE

Ms. Sandra Dungee Glenn, Chair of the Teacher and School Leader Effectiveness Committee, reported that the Committee met the previous day to receive updates from Acting Secretary of Education Carrie Rowe on the Department of Education's (Department) efforts to attract, prepare, and retain teachers. Ms. Dungee Glenn said she asked the Department to develop a strategic plan of goals related to the Commonwealth's educator workforce needs. She also noted that the Department is in the process of hiring a new Chief Talent Officer. Ms. Dungee Glenn made an additional request related to work the Committee is engaged in to conduct a periodic review of the assessments required for educator certification. As it pertains to that work, Ms. Dungee Glenn asked that the Department provide the Committee with data on certification assessment pass rates and disparities in pass rates.

COMMITTEE REPORT

ACADEMIC STANDARDS/CHAPTER 4 COMMITTEE

Dr. Lee Williams, Chair of the Academic Standards/Chapter 4 Committee, reported that the Committee met the previous day and acted to approve the appointment of external

committees to review the Academic Standards for Arts and Humanities and the Academic Standards for Health, Safety and Physical Education. Lists of the nominees to serve on these standards review committees were shared with all Board members. Dr. Williams said nominees to serve on these standards review committees were solicited through an application process facilitated by the Department. Dr. Williams said the Academic Standards/Chapter 4 Committee charged the standards review committees with conducting an initial examination to determine whether these standards need to be updated and, if so, to prepare recommendations for the Committee to consider. The Academic Standards/Chapter 4 Committee further directed that the scope of work for the Health, Safety and Physical Education standards review committee include a focus on mental health.

Finally, Dr. Williams announced that the Board's recent adoption of new academic standards for Personal Finance, Career Education and Work, Economics, and Family and Consumer Sciences is now complete. Dr. Williams said the final rulemaking containing those standards took effect upon its publication in the Pennsylvania Bulletin on February 8, 2025.

COMMITTEE REPORT **SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON PRIVATE SCHOOL ACCREDITATION**

The Hon. Carol Aichele, Chair of the Special Committee on Private School Accreditation, reported that the Committee met the previous day to consider an application from the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) seeking recognition from the Board as an approved accrediting organization under the Private Academic Schools Act.

The Hon. Aichele said, consistent with Chapter 52, ACSI's application previously was referred to the Department of Education for its review, and that the Department presented its findings and recommendation on the application to the Committee. She said the Department reviewed the ACSI organization, accreditation protocols and process, accreditation standards, complaint process, monitoring process, and policy on background checks. A copy of the Department's report on the application was provided to all Board members for review.

The Hon. Aichele said the Department concluded that ACSI should not be recognized as an approved accrediting organization under the Private Academic Schools Act because such approval is unnecessary to meet the objectives expressed in the application. The Hon. Aichele said, in its findings, the Department noted that private academic school licensure is not required for schools owned or operated by or under the authority of a bona fide religious institution. She further stated that these schools, under Pennsylvania state law, may not be subject to state compulsion or licensure (see, *Christian School Assn. of Greater Harrisburg v. Commonwealth*, 52 Pa. D&C2d 430 (Dauphin CCP, 1971)).

The Hon. Aichele said the Department also noted that no Board action is necessary for non-public non-licensed schools to seek ACSI accreditation, and that state law does not require approval by this Board if such schools seek to use ACSI to provide additional oversight of their programs. Further, the Hon. Aichele said *Christian School of Greater Harrisburg* holds that the Board may not impose its oversight on such arrangements.

As noted in the Department's report, the Hon. Aichele said the Board's Statement of Policy in Chapter 52 contemplates the Board approving accrediting organizations under the

Private Academic Schools Act in order for these organizations to accredit schools as an alternative to private academic school licensure. The Hon. Aichele said the special committee agreed with the Department's recommendation that it is unnecessary for the Board to approve ACSI as an accrediting organization and that such approval would provide no substantive benefit or alternative to licensure for the community that ACSI seeks to accredit. Rather, the Hon. Aichele said approval of ACSI in the manner that ACSI proposes would serve as no more than an advisory opinion or tactic recommendation of ACSI's protocols, and that neither result is contemplated by the School Code.

In conclusion, the Hon. Aichele transmitted the special committee's recommendation that the application of ACSI be disapproved and requested that the Chair place the application on the Board's agenda for consideration later in the meeting. The Hon. Aichele then invited discussion among the Board on the application.

REPORT OF THE ACTING SECRETARY OF EDUCATION

Dr. Carrie Rowe, newly appointed Acting Secretary of Education, reported that the Department is reviewing actions of the federal government and executive orders pertaining to education. She also reported on the FY 2025-26 budget proposal introduced by Governor Shapiro in February and highlighted various investments in education that were proposed in the budget. Dr. Rowe also congratulated school employees across the Commonwealth who were the recipients of special awards and recognitions. She shared that Leon Smith recently was named as the 2025 Pennsylvania Teacher of the Year, and that Ashlie Crossen, the 2024 Pennsylvania Teacher of the Year, has been named as a finalist for the National Teacher of the Year. Dr. Rowe also shared that the Department presented the first Recognizing Inspiring School Employees (RISE) awards to Crystal Parks, a school custodian at Keystone Central School District, and to James Green, a school police officer in the Butler Area School District. Dr. Rowe noted that Mr. Green later was honored with the National RISE Award.

NEW BUSINESS

Chair Karen Farmer White announced that two renewal applications were submitted to the Board from organizations that currently are recognized as approved private academic school accrediting bodies. The applications filed by the Pennsylvania Association of Independent Schools and by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools Commissions on Elementary and Secondary Schools seek to renew each organization's approval for another five years. Ms. Farmer White referred both applications to the Special Committee on Private School Accreditation to formulate a recommendation on each application for the Board's consideration. Consistent with 22 Pa. Code Chapter 52, Ms. Farmer White also referred both applications to the Department of Education for its review and recommendation.

Sen. Williams requested that the Board take under consideration protocols for accepting public comment that provide for comments to be delivered virtually or over the phone.

DISCUSSION ITEM **2024 ANNUAL REPORT TO THE GOVERNOR AND THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

Chair Farmer White provided time for discussion on a draft of the Board's 2024 annual report to the Governor and the General Assembly. A copy of the draft annual report was made available to all members for review.

DISCUSSION ITEM **ACT 69 of 2024**

Chair Farmer White announced that the Board met in Executive Session on January 9, 2025, and on March 12, 2025, to consult with counsel on its responsibilities under Act 69 of 2024. Ms. Farmer White said the new State Board of Higher Education (SBHE) must consult with the Board in formulating recommendations for the Governor and the General Assembly about the appropriate delineation of roles and responsibilities related to higher education. Chair Farmer White summarized the primary statutory and regulatory powers and duties related to higher education in Article XXVI of the School Code. She shared that the SBHE's Transfer of Authority Subcommittee submitted a set of preliminary recommendations to the Board for its review and feedback. Chair Farmer White invited discussion among the Board regarding those preliminary recommendations and how responsibilities related to higher education should be delineated.

Amanda Hetrick stated that the Board's comprehensive view of the continuum of education from Pre-K through higher education is important. Ms. Dungee Glenn agreed with Mrs. Hetrick about the importance of the Board's comprehensive view of education. She stated that the SBHE can serve a valuable role in conducting a deep dive regarding research, best practices, and assessing needs related to higher education and further expressed that the Board's role in developing a Master Plan remains relevant. Sen. Williams stated that the Board has not had a meaningful amount of time to review the SBHE subcommittee's preliminary recommendations. She requested an explanation of the division of duties between the Executive Director of the SBHE and the Deputy Secretary and Commissioner for Postsecondary and Higher Education, stated that there should be a meaningful channel for public input on the recommendations, and said it was premature to consider transferring additional regulatory authority. The Hon. Pedro Rivera recommended that the Board form a committee to consult with the SBHE regarding the appropriate division of higher education responsibilities and that the Board ask the General Assembly to consider an extension of the timeline for the SBHE to make recommendations. Katherine Christiano agreed with Mr. Rivera and stated that further consideration of these matters should include clarity on where responsibility for educator preparation should fall.

Chair Farmer White called for the Board to enter into recess.

Upon reconvening, Mr. Rivera offered a motion for the Board to forego agreeing to or rejecting the SBHE Transfer of Authority Subcommittee's recommendations until further consideration of such recommendations is conducted by both entities. Dr. Rivera further moved that: 1) the Board form a subcommittee to further study this issue and engage with representatives of the SBHE to determine areas of joint concern and agreement; 2) the Board request that the General Assembly extend the SBHE's deadline for providing feedback regarding the transfer of authority in order to accommodate this fulsome review, and 3) that Board communicate to the SBHE the Board's desire that the SBHE join in seeking such an extension

from the General Assembly. Consideration of the motion was held after the acceptance of public comment.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mr. Stephen Deck, Senior Director of Accreditation and Credentialing for the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI), spoke in support of ACSI's application. Mr. Deck discussed the benefits of accreditation that drive improvement and growth in schools and that hold schools accountable to a school's action plan. Mr. Deck noted that ACSI holds other state recognitions and asked that the Board approve ACSI's application to provide another level of credibility and accountability to ACSI and its schools. Mr. Deck asked the Board to consider the quality of ACSI's accreditation process.

Mr. Randall Wenger, counsel for ACSI, also spoke in support of ACSI's application. Mr. Wenger said some want to derail ACSI's application solely because of its religious beliefs. He referenced a Lancaster Newspaper group report on the application, said he has heard that legislators oppose the application based on ACSI's religious beliefs, and referred to a case involving Catholic Family Services in Philadelphia.

ACTION ITEMS

APPLICATION OF THE ASSOCIATION OF CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS INTERNATIONAL

A motion to accept the recommendations of the Special Committee on Private School Accreditation and the Department of Education and to deny the application of the Association of Christian Schools International seeking approval as an accrediting organization under the Private Academic Schools Act, for the reasons set forth in the Special Committee's report, was made by the Hon. Carol Aichele and seconded by Monica Taylor.

VOTE: All were in favor as indicated by unanimous voice vote.

ENTERTAINMENT OF MOTION REGARDING RECOMMENDATIONS TO BE DEVELOPED UNDER SECTION 2011-L(d)(5) OF THE PUBLIC SCHOOL CODE

Dr. Pedro Rivera moved that the State Board of Education forego agreeing to or rejecting the State Board of Higher Education Transfer of Authority Subcommittee's recommendations until further consideration of such recommendations is conducted by both entities. Dr. Rivera further moved that: 1) the State Board of Education form a subcommittee to further study this issue and engage with representatives of the State Board of Higher Education to determine areas of joint concern and agreement; 2) the State Board of Education request that the General Assembly extend the State Board of Higher Education's deadline for providing feedback regarding the transfer of authority in order to accommodate this fulsome review, and 3) that the State Board of Education communicate to the State Board of Higher Education the Board's desire that the State Board of Higher Education join in seeking such an extension from the General Assembly. The motion was seconded by Sen. Lindsey Williams.

VOTE: All were in favor as indicated by unanimous voice vote.

Following adoption of the motion offered by Dr. Rivera, Chair Farmer White acted to appoint a Higher Education Transfer of Authority Committee as directed by the motion. The following members were appointed to serve on the committee: Karen Farmer White, Sen. Lindsey Williams, Monica Taylor, Benjamin Wilson, and Sandra Dungee Glenn.

2024 ANNUAL REPORT TO THE GOVERNOR AND GENERAL ASSEMBLY

A motion to approve the 2024 Annual Report to the Governor and the General Assembly was made by Sandra Dungee Glenn and seconded by Dr. Benjamin Wilson.

VOTE: All were in favor as indicated by unanimous voice vote.

RESOLUTION HONORING DR. KHALID MUMIN

A motion to approve a resolution honoring Dr. Khalid Mumin, former Secretary of Education, was made by Dr. Benjamin Wilson and seconded by Robert Mitchell.

VOTE: All were in favor as indicated by unanimous voice vote.

RESOLUTION HONORING MR. SHANE CROSBY

A motion to approve a resolution honoring Mr. Shane Crosby, former Executive Director of the Professional Standards and Practices Commission, was made by Nathan Barrett and seconded by Robert Mitchell.

VOTE: All were in favor as indicated by unanimous voice vote.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Chair Farmer White announced that a hearing on the petition of the Springfield School District seeking to withdraw as a local sponsor of Delaware County Community College has been rescheduled. Ms. Farmer White announced that the hearing now will take place on September 18, 2025. Following the hearing, the hearing examiner will provide a report to the Board to inform the Board's decision-making on the petition.

Ms. Sandra Dungee Glenn reminded Board members of an invitation to attend the PA Literacy Summit on Wednesday, March 26th in Harrisburg.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 11:30 a.m. on an **Aichele/Taylor** motion.

Stephanie Jones

Stephanie Jones
Administrative Assistant