

**MINUTES
STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION**

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

September 9, 2021

The 364th meeting of the State Board of Education was convened on September 9, 2021. Due to public health measures being implemented across the Commonwealth to address the COVID-19 pandemic, members of the Board and members of the public participated in the meeting virtually via webinar and teleconference. Public notice of the meeting was made in accordance with the Sunshine Meeting Act of 1986. The meeting was called to order at 11:37 a.m. by Chair Karen Farmer White.

Attending:

James Agras	Pamela Gunter-Smith	Jonathan Peri
Hon. Carol Aichele	Sarah Jordan	Eva Rankin
Nathan Barrett	Jeffrey Keeling	Hon. Curt Sonney
Jamie Bracey-Green	Hon. Maureen Lally-Green	Taiba Sultana
Sandra Dungee Glenn	Hon. Mark Longietti	Karen Farmer White
Reva Gandhi	Hon. Scott Martin	Lee Williams
		Hon. Lindsey Williams

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the July 14, 2021, meeting of the Board were approved on a **Lally-Green/Agras** motion.

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION

Secretary Noe Ortega introduced new members of the Department’s senior leadership team. He welcomed Dr. Debora Carrera, the Department’s new Executive Deputy Secretary, who most recently served two decades with the School District of Philadelphia. Next, Dr. Ortega introduced Dr. Nikole Hollins-Sims as a new Special Assistant to the Secretary who will focus on issues related to equity, diversity, and inclusion. Lastly, Dr. Ortega introduced Hannah Barrick, another new Special Assistant to the Secretary who will oversee funds from the American Rescue Plan.

Dr. Ortega discussed the start of the new school year and the return to in-person instruction at school districts statewide. He reviewed a number of health and safety initiatives that he and Acting Secretary of Health Alison Beam announced over the past few weeks, including an indoor masking order for K-12 schools, early learning programs and childcare facilities and the availability of free COVID-19 testing for K-12 schools across the Commonwealth.

Dr. Ortega also shared that the U.S. Department of Education recently approved Pennsylvania’s American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief

(ARP ESSER) fund plan, which has allowed the Department to begin releasing the remaining ARP ESSER funds to school districts.

Finally, Secretary Ortega highlighted the Department's podcast series "PDE Presents" which launched in January 2021.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mark Gleason commented on the Board's recent discussion regarding Chapter 49 and spoke to the importance of improving reading instruction. Mr. Gleason said a recent article in the *New York Times* reported that only 15% of educator preparation programs are training elementary school teachers in a way that includes actual instruction on how to teach children how to read with direct instruction and phonics, or the science of reading. Mr. Gleason noted that language in the proposed amendments to Chapter 49 includes structured literacy, and suggested that the Department could go even further to address appropriate instruction in reading.

ACTION ITEMS

APPROVAL OF EXTENUATING CIRCUMSTANCE FOR WAIVERS UNDER SECTION 121 OF THE SCHOOL CODE

A motion to approve adding the COVID-19 pandemic as an extenuating circumstance for waivers under Section 121 of the Public School Code for the graduating class of 2023, as recommended by the Council of Basic Education, was made by Jeffrey Keeling and seconded by Lee Williams.

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

FINAL AMENDMENTS TO CHAPTER 49 (CERTIFICATION OF PROFESSIONAL PERSONNEL)

A motion to approve final amendments to Chapter 49 (Certification of Professional Personnel), as recommended by the Council of Higher Education, was made by Sandra Dungee Glenn and seconded by Jamie Bracey-Green.

VOTE: The motion to approve final amendments to Chapter 49 was approved by a vote of 14-0 (YEA: Aichele, Barrett, Bracey-Green, Dungee Glenn, Gunter-Smith, Keeling, Lally-Green, Longiotti, Martin, Peri, Sonney, Farmer White, Lee Williams and Lindsey Williams)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Chair Karen Farmer White called for an Executive Session of the Board for the purpose of consulting with counsel about litigation.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

The Board met in Executive Session to receive an update on litigation from counsel.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 12:51 p.m. on an **Agras/Hon. Lindsey Williams** motion.

Stephanie L. Jones

Stephanie Jones
Administrative Assistant