

CONNECTICUT TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL SYSTEM

Meeting Minutes CTHSS Board December 16, 2014

Pursuant to notice filed with the Secretary of State, the Connecticut Technical High School System Board¹ met on December 16, 2014 at Windham Technical High School in Willimantic, CT.

I. Call to Order

Mr. Robert Trefry called the meeting to order at 1:31 p.m. He then requested that Board members, guest speakers, and attendees rise for the pledge of allegiance.

Present: Robert Trefry, Chairperson
Joseph Vrabely, Vice Chairperson
Commissioner Sharon Palmer, Board Member
Commissioner Catherine Smith, Board Member
Stephan Bundschu, Board Member
Karen Eichstaedt, Board Member
Patricia Keavney-Maruca, Board Member
Dr. Nivea Torres, Superintendent of Schools
Vincent Diana, Education Consultant
Heidi Balch, Education Consultant
Hank Weiner, Education Consultant
Mark Ambruso, Principal of Windham Technical High School
Sarah Caldwell, Student of Windham Technical High School
Miguel Morales, Student of Windham Technical High School

Absent: Fitz Walker, Board Member
John Barrasso, Board Member
Matthew Nemerson, Board Member

Mr. Trefry began the meeting discussion by thanking Mr. Mark Ambruso, Principal of Windham Technical High School², for hosting the Board meeting. Mr. Ambruso thanked the Board for their unwavering support and introduced two (2) Windham Tech students. The first student, Sarah Caldwell, briefly described her experience at Windham Tech. Ms. Caldwell, a culinary student, is currently second in her class and looking forward to work-based learning next year. She explained that her time spent at Windham Tech has been a great learning experience and has given her many opportunities. The second student, Mr. Miguel Morales, Senior Class President and Student Council President, briefly described

¹ Further citation of the *CTHSS Board* to be cited as the *Board*.

² Further citation of *Windham Technical High School* to be cited as *Windham Tech*.

his experience at Windham Tech. Mr. Morales said that his time spent at Windham Tech has been “life-changing.” He said that the school staff helped him believe in himself, and considers his shop-mates as family. Mr. Morales also stated that the impact of Dr. Nivea Torres’ administration brought welcomed changes to Windham Tech.

Commissioner Catherine Smith congratulated both students, expressed gratitude for their welcoming remarks, and wished them good luck with their future endeavors. Mr. Trefry also thanked the students for their welcoming remarks, and commented on what a pleasure it was to join a table full of students for a lunch prepared by Windham Tech’s culinary students.

II. Public Participation

There was no public participation.

III. Consent Agenda

Mr. Joseph Vrabely moved, Commissioner Smith seconded, that the Board discuss item VII.A. *Biennial Summary Report: 2012-13 to 2013-14*³ prior to item VI. *Report of the Superintendent of Schools*. The motion carried unanimously.

Vote: In Favor: R. Trefry, J. Vrabely, S. Palmer, C. Smith, S. Bundschu,
P. Keavney-Maruca, K. Eichstaedt
Opposed: None
Abstained: None
Absent: F. Walker, J. Barrasso, M. Nemerson

IV. Executive Session

There was no executive session.

V. Consideration of Minutes from the Board Meeting Held on November 18, 2014

Mr. Vrabely moved, Commissioner Sharon Palmer seconded, that the Board approve the minutes from the meeting held on November 18, 2014. The motion carried with six (6) members in favor and one (1) member abstained.

Vote: In Favor: R. Trefry, J. Vrabely, S. Palmer, C. Smith, S. Bundschu,
K. Eichstaedt
Opposed: None
Abstained: P. Keavney-Maruca
Absent: F. Walker, J. Barrasso, M. Nemerson

³ Further citation of the *Biennial Summary Report: 2012-13 to 2013-14* to be cited as *Biennial Report*.

VI. Report of the Superintendent of Schools

Dr. Torres offered brief explanations to the Board on the following items (in consecutive order as presented):

Middlesex Chamber of Commerce – December 16, 2014:

Dr. Torres attended the Middlesex Chamber of Commerce meeting held on December 16, 2014 at the Crowne Plaza in Cromwell, CT. Governor Daniel Malloy was a guest speaker. Dr. Torres explained that this event was an excellent networking opportunity.

Teacher of the Year – December 2, 2014:

Dr. Torres informed the Board that Ms. Diane Blake, a Science Instructor at Windham Tech, was chosen as *Teacher of the Year*.

An Afternoon with Dr. Torres – December 4, 2014:

That afternoon Dr. Torres met with all of the CTHSS Principals to discuss the launch of the *CTHSS Strategic Plan*.

Radio Visits – December 10, 2014 and December 15, 2014:

Dr. Torres advised the Board of her recent visit(s) and on-air discussion(s) at local radio stations. She explained that local radio stations serve as an avenue to spread the CTHSS message and ensure continued visibility. During said visits Dr. Torres offered listeners information in regards to the *CTHSS's Strategic Plan* and enrollment policy.

Connecticut Employment and Training Commission (CETC) – December 11, 2014:

Dr. Torres was invited to give a presentation on the *CTHSS Strategic Plan*. Commissioner Palmer added that Dr. Torres' presentation was very well received and members of the CETC were impressed.

Seeking Land for Purchase:

Dr. Torres explained to the Board that the CTHSS, with the assistance of other state agencies, is actively seeking land for sale. The land will be purchased to build a new technical high school in the Windham/Mansfield/Storrs area. The plan is to purchase at least fifty (50) acres for the school, to include adequate space for new programs and athletic fields.

Joint Standing Committee – November 24, 2014:

Dr. Torres presented her report on the status of the CTHSS and coordinated partnership with the Department of Labor before a panel of Legislators.

Henry Abbott Technical High School, Ribbon-cutting Ceremony – December 17, 2014:

The CTHSS celebrated the opening of its seventh E-house and *Live Green Save Green* greenhouse at Henry Abbott Technical High School in Danbury, CT. Dr. Torres included that the green E-house initiative was developed to create on-site laboratories for students and trade instructors for hands-on learning and green workforce development. The E-house was designed and built to feature high-efficiency and renewable energy technologies.

VII. Items Requiring Action

A. *Biennial Summary Report: 2012-13 to 2013-14*

Dr. Torres opened discussion on the *Biennial Report* by introducing Mr. Vincent Diana, Education Consultant. Mr. Diana began the discussion by providing a brief overview of the report. The *Biennial Report* contains data on applicants, enrollment, adult program enrollment, enrollment capacity, program information, strategic school profile, Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT), and an update report on J. M. Wright Technical High School in Stamford, CT.

Discussion followed and several questions for clarity on data were raised by the Board. Board members requested clarity on the following items included in the *Biennial Report*:

- Enrollment capacity
- Program information
- Admissions and recruitment process
- Number of applicants per school

As a point of clarity, Dr. Torres explained to the Board that the *Biennial Report* does not reflect current or future plans of the CTHSS. She also noted that the Admissions Policy will be reviewed at the next Subcommittee on Quality and Policy meeting on January 9, 2015, and again at the next Board meeting on January 20, 2015.

Mr. Vrabely moved, Commissioner Smith seconded, that the *Biennial Report* be presented at the upcoming State Board of Education (SBE) meeting scheduled for January 7, 2015.

Vote: In Favor: R. Trefry, J. Vrabely, S. Palmer, C. Smith,
S. Bundschu, P. Keavney-Maruca, K. Eichstaedt
Opposed: None
Abstained: None
Absent: F. Walker, J. Barrasso, M. Nemerson

The motion carried unanimously. A copy of this report is included in the official file of this meeting.

VIII. Items for Discussion

A. Skills USA CEP CRC Training Report

Dr. Torres opened discussion on *Success Skills*, Foundation No. 6 outlined in the *CTHSS Strategic Plan*, by introducing Ms. Heidi Balch, Education Consultant. Ms. Balch began the discussion with a brief overview as to how *SkillsUSA* and its framework offer the essential skill-area development that CTHSS students require for future success. The three framework components of *SkillsUSA* include the following:

- *Personal Skills*: Essential values, personality traits and personal characteristics for success in life.
- *Workplace Skills*: Essential attitudes and abilities for success in the workplace.
- *Technical Skills Grounded in Academics*: Essential knowledge and competencies for success on the job.

Ms. Balch explained to the Board how the partnership between the CTHSS and *SkillsUSA* helps prepare students for a career and/or college after graduation. Highlights of her presentation included the following topics:

- The labor gap
- College readiness
- Career readiness
- Challenges and solutions
- The mission of *SkillsUSA*

Ms. Balch concluded her presentation by inviting Board members to “see our students in action” at an upcoming *SkillsUSA* Regional Conference. Discussion followed, along with questions for clarity. Mr. Trefry asked, “How do students become *SkillsUSA* members?” Ms. Balch replied that all CTHSS students are *SkillsUSA* members, although their involvement may vary. Karen Eichstaedt asked, “How can *SkillsUSA* increase moral and

engage students?” Ms. Balch explained that *SkillsUSA* empowers students to make goals and complete important projects. A copy of Ms. Balch’s presentation is included in the official file of this meeting.

B. STEM Learning

Dr. Torres opened the discussion on *STEM Learning* by introducing Mr. Hank Weiner, Education Consultant. Mr. Weiner began the discussion by providing Board members with a brief definition of *STEM Learning*, as follows:

The acronym (STEM) relates to a mindset; a “best teaching practice” incorporating problem-solving, project-based learning and critical thinking. It is not intended to be a specific course, curriculum or add-on, but what is achieved on a daily basis. All students will receive a relevant integrated education, which connects science, technology, engineering and math to every area of learning as it pertains to every curriculum in each career cluster.

Mr. Weiner advised the Board that Career Technical Education (CTE) is Connecticut’s *STEM Learning* strategy. He included that while other school districts are attempting to operationalize a concept such as *STEM Learning*, many already offer high-quality CTE programs that impart critical academic, technical and employability skills. Mr. Weiner concluded his presentation by sharing several examples of how Connecticut’s technical high schools are using *STEM* in project-based learning.

A copy of Mr. Weiner’s presentation is included in the official file of this meeting.

IX. Report of the Chair

Mr. Trefry suggested that the Board prepare a resolution regarding Commissioner Stephan Pryor’s resignation and future endeavor(s). Commissioner Palmer moved, Commissioner Smith seconded, that the Board prepare a formal resolution expressing their appreciation for Commissioner Pryor’s leadership and assistance to the CTHSS throughout his tenure as the Commissioner of Education. The motion carried unanimously.

Vote: In Favor:	R. Trefry, S. Palmer, C. Smith, P. Keavney-Maruca, K. Eichstaedt
Opposed:	None
Abstained:	None
Absent:	F. Walker, J. Barrasso, M. Nemerson, J. Vrabely, S. Bundschu

X. Committee Reports

A. Quality and Policy

Ms. Patricia Keavney-Maruca, Co-Chairperson of the Subcommittee on Quality and Policy, provided members of the Board with an update regarding the status of the two (2) legislative proposals for submittal to the 2015 Session of the General Assembly. The first legislative proposal⁴ has been approved to be included in the legislative package to be presented to the SBE. The amended legislative proposal⁵ will be discussed at a future SBE Legislative meeting.

B. Outreach and Finance

Mr. Trefry provided members of the Board with a brief overview of the CTHSS's financial situation and changes to its manufacturing programs. He also suggested Mr. John Murphy, Education Consultant, be present at the upcoming SBE meeting. Dr. Torres concluded the discussion by providing Board members with a brief CTHSS budget update.

XI. Public Participation

There was no public participation.

XII. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at 3:03 p.m.

Prepared by:


Christina Sanchez, Office Assistant
CTHSS

⁴ 1. Amendment of the requirement for an annual rolling capital improvement and capital equipment plan from a five year plan to a three year plan.

⁵ 2. All reports and requests for actions of cognizance required by statute will come before the CTHSS Board for final approval.