



STATE EDUCATION RESOURCE CENTER

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## **Event Summary:**

**Community Forum Hosted by  
Connecticut Senator Douglas McCrory  
and Commissioner of Education  
Charlene M. Russell-Tucker:  
“A Discussion about Education:  
The Past, the Present, the Future”**

Presented January 14, 2025



**Community Forum Hosted by  
Connecticut Senator Douglas McCrory and  
Commissioner of Education Charlene M. Russell-Tucker:**

**“A Discussion about Education:  
The Past, the Present, the Future”**

**Date:** 1/14/2025

**Time:** 5:30 - 8:00 p.m.

**Location:** Windsor High School Auditorium, 50 Sage Park Rd., Windsor, CT 06095

**Notetakers:** SERC Consultants Christina Simms, Eben McKnight, Clarisa Rodrigues, Chelsea Barone

Forum's Expected Outcomes:

- To engage community members in conversations and reflections about the evolution and history of education in the United States.
- To hear from the Connecticut Senate Chair of Education Senator Douglas McCrory and the Commissioner of Education Charlene M. Russell-Tucker about the current landscape and priorities for Connecticut students.
- To engage community members in conversations about their insights regarding the future of Connecticut's education.

Summary of Audience Responses:

Volunteers were asked to share their responses to the following questions during the community forum. Responses to each question were categorized into common themes.

Part 1 Questions:

- What are some significant educational milestones that stand out to you?
- What are some ways that U.S. education has historically shaped the social and cultural landscape within our state?
- How did access to education differ for different groups of students historically?
- How have efforts to address educational inequity evolved over time?

Theme 1: Funding distribution - Regionalized funding and more equitable tax distribution were suggested as possible solutions to address educational inequities. One audience member discussed the inequitable distribution of taxes post-Covid and online learning, and how these events set certain districts back. The Sheff v. O'Neill ruling was noted in two separate responses as having unintentional consequences they believe caused some disparities in funding to school districts.

Theme 2: Educating the educator - Three audience members collectively described a need for teachers to: reflect on our history and become aware and confident to teach students about the historical events presented in the timeline; know the importance of teaching students to appreciate their education so that history will not repeat itself, and; understand voter suppression in our country and how certain groups (e.g., Native Americans) have been suppressed from receiving an education throughout history. There was also a call from an audience member to think beyond surface-level issues (i.e., funding) and to think about more deeply rooted issues instead.



Theme 3: Mental health - The third theme suggested by a student was the need to address mental health. Generational mental health was noted as an issue, and additional efforts such as having safe spaces are needed. In safe spaces, students would not be pressured and could talk about how they are doing and what's happening within their family, helping them learn how to navigate what they're feeling and experiencing.

One student shared the positive experiences he's had at Windsor High School and is glad he chose to attend public school over private school.

#### Part 2 Question:

- What are your thoughts about the current state of education in Connecticut?

Theme 1: Teacher training - The most frequent topic emerging from audience responses included teacher training. There was also another call to educate the educator as a response to this question; specifically, the need to train educators to teach for the future, not "for the right now" (e.g., artificial intelligence [AI]).

Response: The Senator noted that it's important to teach finance in our schools. The Commissioner added that finance has been added to some of the newer curriculum initiatives.

#### Part 3 Question:

- From the priorities presented by the Senator and the Commissioner and from your perspective, which ones offer the most significant impact on the future success of our students, and why?

Theme 1: More for us by us - A student noted the need for "more for us by us," or the need for more teachers who look like the student body and wanting teachers who will teach history without walking on eggshells and tip-toeing because they're afraid they'll offend students of color.

Theme 2: Educate the educators - The same student echoed the need to educate the educator stating that education is a two-way street. She described the need for more educators who are willing to learn about and understand their students.

Theme 3: Improved teacher-student interactions - Another student described the need for schools to build relationships with their communities and to improve teacher-student interactions so students can talk to their teachers without shame and judgment, and get to know their students by being personable and understanding.

Response: The Senator responded that the mental health of our students is extremely important and noted that pre-service teachers need to understand this before entering the classroom.

#### Part 4 Question:

- If, as a community committed to change, we could take action on one thing to strengthen Connecticut's future educational agenda, what would be most important to you?

Theme 1: Supporting mental health - The first theme, supporting mental health, was described by a grandmother who raised her seven grandchildren as being the most important area to





strengthen in the educational agenda. She stated that until mental health gets addressed there will continue to be issues with education, especially with boys.

Theme 2: Elevate the teaching profession - The second theme was to elevate the teaching profession making it desirable again by enhancing professional training and increasing pay. The need to stop telling teachers what they can't teach (ex. Critical Race Theory) was another example shared. Shortage areas such as special education teachers, speech language pathologists, and school psychologists were specifically noted as a critical need (i.e., the audience member stated, "We need more bodies" in those areas).

Theme 3: Giving more control to local Boards of Education - One audience member stated that local boards should have control over curriculum and funding. He described an adversarial role between the Board of Education and tax authorities. He also stated a perception that the role of teacher is for women, and the role of administrator is for men.

Response: The Senator explained that the state used to recruit Black educators from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) in the south, but that recruitment stopped in 1986 when the Education Enhancement Act was passed. He also noted that taking certification tests does not predict how well a teacher will teach, and that there are too many tests that teachers are required to take to obtain certification.



*Senator Douglas McCrory (left) goes on camera with WTNH-TV to discuss the forum.*



*(Left to right) Senator Douglas McCrory, CT Commissioner of Education Charlene M. Russell-Tucker, and Superintendent of Windsor Schools Dr. Terrell Hill*



*(Left to right) Senator Douglas McCrory, SERC Executive Director Dr. Ingrid M. Canady, and CT Commissioner of Education Charlene M. Russell-Tucker*



*(Left to right) CT Commissioner of Education Charlene M. Russell-Tucker, two Windsor High School student guests, and SERC Executive Director Dr. Ingrid M. Canady*