



## **2021-22 CABE Annual Report**

As we emerge from the COVID-19 crisis, the future of Connecticut’s children depends more than ever on the critical work of boards of education and CABE. CABE represents over half of all elected officials in the State. This constitutes approximately 90% of boards of education. Together our work is stronger and more effective!

CABE’s mission, “to assist local and regional boards of education in providing high quality public education for all Connecticut children through effective leadership”, drives the Association’s priorities and work. We strive to constantly improve the work of CABE as it will help Boards continuously improve their governance, decision-making, and achievement of their goals. Despite the economic uncertainties in 2021-22, CABE has continued to ensure its financial and human resources are consistent with the needs of our members.

Your Association’s work in 2021-22 is summarized below.

### **I. Advocacy**

#### **Supporting School Boards at the Legislature, State Board, and Congress**

CABE’s positions on a broad range of local, state and federal issues are adopted each year at the Delegate Assembly. The State Relations Committee then develops CABE’s Legislative Priorities, and Board Members and Staff implement the advocacy agenda. CABE was involved in discussions with legislative leaders and the Governor’s office, and partnered with many other organizations to promote public education. CABE advocacy work this year included:

- CABE staff participated in breakfast meetings with legislators throughout the state where board members illustrated the local impact of issues to be debated in the General Assembly.
- As we do annually, CABE went about its work in advocating and testifying on legislation. CABE tracked approximately 65 bills and testified or offered testimony on many of those bills. CABE’s school board leaders were supported by staff in delivering testimony in the virtual environment.
- In addition to weekly Advocacy Highlights, CABE provided legislative updates for board members at key points in the session.
- On March 10, CABE held its Day on the Hill and heard from the education committee leadership. Board member’s questions and comments helped legislators in crafting bills for final committee consideration.
- CABE was involved in State Department of Education briefings along with other educational partners on the changes in educating students. As Executive Orders and state guidance were being drafted by the State Department of Education and the Governor’s office, CABE was sought out to assist, and did influence the orders with the understanding of local needs. The balance of one size does not fit all as it weighs with creating a uniform solution was a constant consideration.

#### **Federal Relations Program**

At the federal level, CABE lobbied the Congressional delegation on bridging the digital divide in learning and the need for technology resources and accessibility; on full funding for IDEA on recruiting, retaining,

and securing diverse educators, and school infrastructure. With information from their local districts and input from the National School Boards Association (NSBA), members also lead conversations on creating a healthy and safe environment; issues promoting educational equity and policies that enhance the well-being of all students and fighting for public education investments to better prepare students with 21<sup>st</sup> Century life skills.

## **II. Legal and Labor Relations**

CABE's Legal and Labor Relations Department provides board members, superintendents, and superintendents' administrative professionals with information on a wide variety of legal issues and offers labor relations-related services. Staff respond to requests for legal information, present at workshops, conferences, board meetings, and collect data on collective bargaining and superintendent contracts.

2021-22 again offered a myriad of opportunities for CABE attorneys and support staff to work with boards of education and superintendents in support of their commitment to the success of all students. Requests for advice and information arriving shortly before a board of education meeting received a quick response by phone or email. Legal and labor related questions were addressed in the Board Chair Check-Ins and Updates.

### **Requests for Legal Information**

Staff responded to a variety of questions from board members, superintendents, and superintendents' administrative professionals. These questions sought information for issues that involved district policies and bylaws, state and federal law, new legislation, town charters, contracts, and Robert's Rules, among others.

The topics of these questions are wide-ranging, and department staff is always eager to assist districts by providing detailed, but practical, information for a district's particular issue. The most frequent topic is that of compliance with Connecticut's Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Specifically, questions related to board meeting requirements, including questions regarding agendas, quorums, minutes, voting, motions, "non-meetings," and executive sessions.

Over the past year, many questions pursuant to the FOIA have been specific to fully-remote and hybrid board meetings, and information was frequently requested that fell under the rules of Public Acts 21-2 and 22-3, the recent laws regarding remote meetings.

Questions were received on a variety of additional topics with which districts were grappling. These included:

- the limits of board of education and superintendent authority,
- board member conduct,
- re-employment of retired teachers,
- leave for teachers,
- homeschooled students and sports,
- adult education courses,
- religious holidays,
- board members as adjudicators,
- the permissibility of remote learning,
- ESSER funds,

- teacher lunch breaks,
- the relationship between boards of education and local governmental entities,
- superintendent contract provisions, and
- board member conflicts of interest.

Staff was frequently called upon by the media, including Channels 3, 8, 61, WTIC-AM, WNPR, the *Hartford Courant*, *New London Day*, *Meriden Record Journal*, *New Haven Register*, and *CT Mirror* to address legal issues.

### **Workshops and Presentations**

CABE's attorneys made presentations at state and national conferences, including the National School Boards Association (NSBA).

Additionally, legal staff delivered numerous in-district programs, addressing topics such as board governance, Freedom of Information Act requirements, school governance council roles, special education, legal issues, and legislative issues. We also facilitated board retreats and self-evaluations.

CABE attorneys are central in hosting the annual business meeting and the mid-year meeting of the Connecticut School Attorneys Council. We also organized and presented at CABE's annual Legal Issues and Collective Bargaining Workshops.

Department staff also presented at board of education meetings at the request of districts, on the topics of the FOIA, orientation of new board members, the First Amendment, and school governance councils.

Lastly, department staff presented at a variety of CABE-hosted events and webinars, including: Conducting a Board of Education Organizational Meeting, Board Meeting Fundamentals, New Board Member Orientation and Leadership Conference, Legislative Update, and two workshops for Superintendents' Administrative Professionals.

### **Collective Bargaining and Superintendent Contract Data Collection**

Efforts to collect contract data for certified and non-certified staff as well as superintendents continue. Department staff collect two types of data throughout the year, information on collectively bargained contracts and superintendent contracts. This information is then released to any member district who so requests it. This year, the superintendent contract data was requested more frequently than the collective bargaining data.

The superintendent contract data consists of salary, annuity, and any additional compensation details. The data can be organized by DRG, as it is useful for members to see salaries of superintendents in districts within the same socio-economic category.

Department staff also collect collectively bargained contract information for teachers and administrators. The information consists of several data points, including step increases, increments, health insurance, and other details that were bargained-for during negotiations.

### **III. Policy**

Recognizing that the core of the work of the board is rooted in policy, CABE continued to offer a number of policy-oriented services, as well as respond to individual requests in 2021-22.

### **Policy Highlights**

Twenty-seven issues of the email newsletter, *Policy Highlights*, were distributed bi-weekly to board members and superintendents, highlighting current educational topics with policy implications. The focus remained on issues pertaining to student achievement, especially as impacted by pandemic-related issues. This represented the twenty-first year of this newsletter.

### **Customized Policy Service**

Twenty-seven districts were under contract for *Customized Policy Services* for the review and development of new district policy manuals or updates to selected portions of the manual. CAFE policy staff provided individual support to help districts adopt an updated manual.

### **Policy Update Service**

One-hundred and one districts subscribed to the *Policy Update Service* publication. Subscribing districts received four mailings, hard copy and digitally, which reflected timely policy issues, including the need for new and/or revised policy topics based upon legislative action, judicial rulings or contemporary policy issues, especially in the areas of:

- challenging curriculum,
- gifted and talented students,
- FAFSA completion rates,
- minority teacher retention,
- age discrimination,
- therapy dogs,
- teaching controversial issues,
- children's mental health, and
- remote meetings.

The CAFE Policy Reference Core Manual, the *Core Manual*, containing approximately 450 sample policies and regulations, was continuously revised throughout the year. Moreover, new policy topics were added. It is easily "searchable" and remains accessible for CAFE members on the CAFE website in a multi-searchable user-friendly format.

### **Policy Audit Service**

Two districts had audits completed of their existing policy manuals. This service provides the district with a report on the strengths and weaknesses of their existing manual with recommendations of how to correct manual deficiencies.

### **Custom Policy Update Service**

Sixteen districts subscribed to the *Custom Policy Update Service*. In this service, CAFE assumes the responsibility for updating the district's existing policy manual. Major focus was placed on providing needed policies, administrative regulations and information. Among the topics included were:

- non-lapsing education fund,
- minority recruitment,
- drug and alcohol-free workplace,
- health assessments/immunizations,
- curriculum,
- FAFSA completion program,
- non-discrimination,

- flag display,
- controversial issues,
- therapy dogs,
- opioid overdose prevention,
- indoor air quality,
- truancy,
- school calendar,
- school resource officer,
- grade weighting, and
- reporting of child abuse.

### **Connecticut Online Policy Service (C.O.P.S.)**

Forty-nine districts subscribe to the *Connecticut Online Policy Service (C.O.P.S.)*. Manuals, which are kept current by CABE, are ADA compliant, easily accessible, and searchable online. Translation to a number of languages is available.

### **Policy Requests and/or Samples**

Approximately 620 requests for policy information and/or sample policies from member districts were addressed, usually on the same day the request was received. The website-based *Core Policy Manual* continues to receive a great number of “hits” for sample policies in addition to the district manuals that have been placed online through the CABE *Connecticut Online Policy Service (C.O.P.S.)*. Approximately seventy-three new or revised policies were made a part of the policy resource files, including policies regarding:

- Challenging Curriculum,
- Advanced Courses or Programs,
- Eligibility Criteria for Enrollment,
- Therapy Dogs,
- Controversial Issues,
- Armed Security Guards,
- School Calendar,
- Opioid Overdose,
- Indoor Air Quality,
- Remote/Online Courses, and
- FAFSA Completion Program.

## **IV. Professional Development**

Because professional development is key to fostering the continued growth of strong Board/Superintendent Governance Teams and increased student achievement, CABE continued to provide a variety of professional development opportunities in a number of ways in order to best meet the needs of our members. We provide professional development through:

### **In-Person Professional Development**

In August 2021, CABE provided its 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Summer Leadership Conference, our first in-person program since March of 2020. A number of mitigation strategies were in place to provide a safe and comfortable environment.

We continued to offer in-person opportunities on a myriad of topics, not only for the formal learning that takes place, but also for the much-missed networking opportunities that allow for additional learning. Among the programs that CAFE continues to provide is the bi-annual meetings of superintendents' administrative professionals, legal issues, collective bargaining, and summer leadership.

### **CAFE/CAPSS Convention**

After a hiatus in 2020 due to COVID-19, the annual CAFE/CAPSS Convention resumed in November 2021. As we welcomed our members back to the world of larger scale in-person professional development, the Convention Committee decided that out of an abundance of caution the 2021 Convention would be one day (rather than a day and a half) and registration would be capped. Additionally, a suite of mitigation strategies were in place to create a safe and comfortable environment.

We were pleased that to kick off the 2021 Convention with U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona providing the morning keynote session. A number of breakout sessions on timely topics were also provided.

### **Webinars**

In an effort to keep board members up-to-date on a number of topics, CAFE continued to provide webinars, and when appropriate, record them and archive them on our website for on-demand viewing. Archived webinars can be accessed on the CAFE website at <https://www.cafe.org/professional-development/cabes-webinar-on-demand-library>.

### **Listsers**

The Board Chair listserv has been a vital link to keep board chairs informed and to enable them to communicate with one other and CAFE staff. Chairs have been kept up-to-date about COVID-19-related topics such as mask wearing, meetings in public vs. remote, and guidance regarding the Governor's Executive Orders and SDE guidance. Additional topics of discussion included special education, budget processes, and budget development.

We also continued to provide a listserv for Alliance District board chairs to provide a platform for them to share information specific to their needs. Additionally, we continue to provide a frequently used listserv for superintendents' administrative professionals.

### **Individual Board Workshops**

CAFE staff continued to meet with individual boards to facilitate customized workshops including roles and responsibilities, superintendent search process, goal setting, FOI, legislative updates, and full-day board retreats. As we move out of the COVID-19 crisis, we are busy assisting boards to refocus on being more goal and policy oriented.

### **Lighthouse Project**

CAFE continued to work with the Connecticut State Department of Education to prepare the next generation of Lighthouse training. Through Lighthouse, CAFE has helped a number of districts improve student achievement through more effective board leadership. Our Lighthouse trainers have worked with eight other states and over 20 Connecticut school districts.

## **V. CAFE Search Services**

Hiring and evaluating the superintendent is the board's most important responsibility. CAFE Search Services is available to assist boards with this process.

As part of CAFE's ongoing effort to provide local boards of education with the resources they need to carry out their most important responsibilities, we continue to strengthen our Search Services program. As either former superintendents or board members, our search consultants are uniquely qualified to assist boards in recruiting and retaining key personnel such as superintendents, principals and other critical members of your district staff.

This year CAFE Search Services conducted and completed four successful searches which include Superintendent of Schools for Bozrah (part-time), Sterling (part-time), Hamden, and Region 1 (Assistant Superintendent).

## **VI. Communications**

We want to hear from our members! In order to facilitate two-way communication, CAFE periodically shares surveys to assess member feelings on various services, programs, and the impact of potential legislation at the local level. Additionally, we host Legislative Breakfasts which are an opportunity to make legislators and CAFE staff aware of your concerns. We can best meet member needs when we hear from you.

In an effort to share the most up-to-date information with members, CAFE continues to share a number of regular email blasts including the weekly *What's Going on at CAFE?*, *Policy Highlights*, and *Advocacy Highlights* emails.

CAFE's cornerstone publication, *The CAFE Journal*, continued to be printed and distributed six times a year, while all eleven issues were distributed digitally.

CAFE continued to work to strengthen a positive perspective of the public, the media and legislators on the essential nature and work of School Boards, as well as broaden the knowledge of the responsibilities of Boards of Education across the State. This was done through media interviews, our advocacy efforts and communications campaigns such as Board Member Appreciation month and I Support My CT Public Schools.

## **VII. Administration**

### **Unemployment Cost Control**

Our Unemployment Cost Control Program membership totaled 21 districts in 2021-22. This program, which is administered by Corporate Cost Control, offers consultation, claims processing and full administration of all unemployment compensation claims for a district.

### **Business Travel Insurance**

CAFE contracts to provide Business Travel Insurance to all school board members whose boards are CAFE members. This policy provides \$25,000 of Accidental Death coverage and is free of charge to CAFE members. Coverage is for any school board member traveling on school board business.

### **Looking Ahead**

As 2021-22 came to an end, long-time CAFE Executive Director Robert Rader retired. He successfully led the Association for 26 years, leaving CAFE in a better place than when he found it. His belief in public

education and support of boards of education never faded. We wish Bob a well-deserved happy and healthy retirement!

2022-23 starts a new chapter for CAFE as CAFE's former Deputy Director and General Counsel Patrice McCarthy now assumes the leadership as Executive Director and General Counsel. Our members can continue to count on CAFE to provide the quality services they depend on, as well as additional ways we can provide assistance in today's ever-changing world. CAFE's future continues to be bright!

We look forward to continuing to serve our members in 2022-23!