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Schools open with high hopes and new pathways for Connecticut's students



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Classrooms across Connecticut's public schools are filled with energy and high hopes for the students, faculty, administration, and staff who are embarking on the 2026-2027 school year.

As textbooks and laptops open on students' desks, new opportunities are opening as well, with the start of school coinciding with two important developments that will shape how Connecticut delivers on our constitutional promise of high-quality public education for all.

The Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE) is in all of those places, through the 1,400 volunteer members of local boards of education, who devote countless hours to make sure our schools succeed, and through our representation on two policy-focused commissions at the State Capitol.

Better career pathways

The Connecticut Career Pathways Commission, with members including university presidents, lawmakers, mayors, and education- and workforce-focused organizations, is tackling how education, training, and careers connect so that more students and workers can access pathways that lead to credentials and good jobs.

Connecticut's innovative and growing career pathway programs don't abandon the fundamentals of reading, writing, and arithmetic that have traditionally been the on-ramp to college. They open up parallel lanes that lead them into the future fully informed and equipped with real-world skills. Students entering college or going directly into the workforce will have durable skills to draw upon throughout their lives.

I was honored to represent CABE in late August at the opening of Plainville High School's Trades Academy, which is a four-year program that gives students training and experience that leads to careers in carpentry, electrical, and heating, ventilation, and air conditioning.

Danbury High School has its own career pathway programs, which are embodied in eight academies at the high school's two campuses. Seven academies focus on specific career themes: clean energy and green design; emerging technology and entrepreneurship; scientific innovation and medicine; art, engineering, and design; communication and design; information technology and cybersecurity; and professional and public service. An eighth "Exploratory Academy" helps incoming first-year students evaluate and choose which academy best suits their interests. The programs in Plainville and Danbury are examples of the innovations taking place in many Connecticut school districts, all focused on meeting student needs.

Overhauling school funding

No talk about public education can take place without examining funding. To that end, the Blue Ribbon Commission on K-12 Education Funding and Accountability was created in April to deliver a top-to-bottom overhaul of how Connecticut funds our public schools.

Windsor Board of Education member Leonard Lockhart, who is CABE's immediate past president, sits on that panel.

Leonard knows, as all board members do, that as costs rise and needs grow, school boards must balance fiscal responsibility with the obligation to provide the best education possible. School budgets are so much more than numbers on a page. They are priority statements of what local school districts value.

The Blue Ribbon Commission represents a critical chance to step back from annual budget debates and examine how to create a funding system that is predictable, transparent, and sustainable over time, provides equitable opportunities and support for students with differing needs, addresses disparities in local resources, and allows funding to keep pace with the costs of educating students today and in the future.

The commission is already hard at work, and its assignment is due on the governor's desk on Jan. 15, 2027.

The promise of public education for all is embodied in Connecticut's State Constitution, and it is being fulfilled every day by people setting and carrying out visions for the children in our classrooms.

Connecticut's public schools face challenges this year, and with the hard work and dedication of our 1,400 volunteer local Board of Education members and their partner superintendents, teachers, administrators, and school staff, they are prepared to provide the opportunity for all students to succeed.

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