



FROM POLICY TO PRACTICE: A LEGAL SUMMIT FOR SCHOOL LEADERS

# AGENDA

OCTOBER 9, 2025

8:30- 9:05 AM	<b>WELCOME &amp; OPENING ADDRESS</b> Mike McKeon, Director of Legal and Governmental Affairs - CSDE
9:10- 10:25 AM	<b>BREAKOUT SESSION 1 -</b> Latest Legal Developments in Special Education Abby Booth, Rebecca Santiago, and Julia Wilde - Shipman & Goodwin LLP
10:30- 11:45 AM	<b>BREAKOUT SESSION 2 -</b> Implementing the New Paid Sick Leave Law Dori Antonetti and Julie Reznik - Shipman & Goodwin LLP
11:45AM- 12:20 PM	<b>LUNCH</b>
12:25- 1:40 PM	<b>BREAKOUT SESSION 3 -</b> CT's New School Climate Mandates for 2025-26 Melinda Kaufmann and Mark Sommaruga - Pullman & Comley
1:45- 3:00 PM	<b>BREAKOUT SESSION 4 -</b> Social Media and Student Discipline Kim Catala and Zachary Schurin - Pullman & Comley

Many thanks to our presenters from:



## PRESENTERS



### ATTORNEY MIKE McKEON

Director of Legal and Governmental Affairs, CT State Department of Education

Mike is the Director of Legal and Governmental Affairs for the Connecticut State Department of Education, having been appointed by Governor Lamont in October 2021. As Legal Director, Mike reports directly to the Commissioner of Education, oversees five staff attorneys and two paralegals, and is responsible for handling a broad spectrum of legal responsibilities on behalf of both the CSDE and the State Board of Education, including but not limited to providing legal opinions, drafting guidance for districts and other stakeholders, conducting Section 10-4b investigations, and representing the CSDE in administrative hearings before the FOIC and the CHRO.

Prior to joining the State, Mike represented local and regional school districts across Connecticut for over 25 years, during which time he was repeatedly named a New England "Super Lawyer" in the area of School Law. He obtained numerous federal and state court decisions in favor of his client school districts, on both the trial and appellate levels, and successfully handled countless administrative proceedings before the CSDE and the CHRO. Mike also regularly spoke at both the national and state levels on a number of education and employment-law topics, including Title IX, special education, free speech, workplace investigations, and student discipline. Mike obtained his law degree from the University of Connecticut School of Law, where he was an editor of the Connecticut Law Review and the graduation-day speaker.



### DORI PAGÉ ANTONETTI

Counsel, Shipman & Goodwin LLP

Dori Pagé Antonetti is a member of the School Law Practice Group, representing public and independent K–12 schools in a wide range of education and employment law matters. Drawing on her background as both an educator and a labor relations hearing review officer, Dori brings a practical, balanced perspective to her legal work.

Dori helps schools identify potential legal issues early and develop creative, effective solutions. She has extensive experience in policy development and compliance, regularly advising on matters involving the FMLA, ADA, and FLSA. For independent schools, she drafts and reviews enrollment agreements, employee handbooks, and contracts, and counsels on topics including truth-in-lending obligations, federal funding, vaccine policies, and exemption issues.

Dori remains closely attuned to evolving legal developments affecting schools, recently advising on issues related to transgender and gender non-conforming student protections, Connecticut's immunization laws, marijuana policy changes, curricular exemptions, and workforce diversity. She also guides schools through compliance with mandated reporting, bullying prevention, FOIA, FERPA, and non-discrimination requirements. In addition, Dori advises higher education and organizational ombuds programs, helping them maintain independence, impartiality, and confidentiality.

Before joining Shipman, Dori served as a Hearing Review Officer for the New York City Office of Labor Relations and clerked for Magistrate Judge John M. Facciola in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia. A former Teach for America bilingual kindergarten teacher in Spanish Harlem, Dori now teaches as an adjunct professor at UConn's Neag School of Education and Quinnipiac University.



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### ABBY BOOTH

Associate, Shipman & Goodwin LLP

Abby Booth is a member of the firm's School Law Practice Group, where she counsels independent and public schools on an array of general education, special education, and labor and employment matters. She also has experience litigating employment disputes on behalf of public schools before the Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities, and state and federal court. Abby serves on the firm's Model Policy Committee, which provides a comprehensive set of model policies and administrative regulations, as well as model notifications and forms, for Connecticut boards of education and charter schools.

Before joining Shipman, Abby served as a law clerk to the Honorable Gregory D'Auria at the Connecticut Supreme Court. While in law school, Abby was the Symposium Editor of the Connecticut Law Review and Executive Director of the Connecticut Moot Court Board.



### KIMBERLY CATALA

Associate, Pullman & Comley

Kimberly Catala is an associate in the firm's Labor and Employment, Education Law, and Litigation practices. Since joining Pullman & Comley, Kim has gained valuable experience in labor and employment law, including advising on workplace policies, compliance issues, and employee relations. She has also participated in teacher negotiations, providing strategic support and insight to help clients navigate complex legal dynamics.

Prior to joining the firm, Kimberly served as a Law Clerk to Connecticut Supreme Court Justice Andrew J. McDonald in Hartford. Kimberly graduated first in her class, summa cum laude, from Quinnipiac Law School. Kimberly served as the Executive Managing Editor of the Quinnipiac Law Review.

During law school, Kimberly gained valuable experience through internships and externships at the Quinnipiac Law School Tax Clinic, New Haven Legal Assistance, and interning with United States District Court Judge Victor A. Bolden in Bridgeport, Connecticut, where she conducted research on a variety of legal issues, represented low-income individuals, performed client intakes, and prepared legal memoranda. She also interned at New Haven Legal Assistance.

Before beginning her legal career, Kimberly was an AP Language and Literature teacher at Achievement First Amistad High School and Arch Bridge School at Wellspring and also served in Teach for America Corps.



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### MELINDA B. KAUFMANN

Counsel, Pullman & Comley

Melinda Kaufmann is a trusted advisor to boards of education and employers, helping them navigate the ever-changing landscape of education and employment law. A skilled advocate, she represents clients in court and before administrative agencies with experience grounded in both law and education—she holds a Master's Degree in Special Education and previously taught special education and mathematics for five years.

Melinda successfully defended a board of education in the nation's first federal jury trial on special education, marking a significant legal precedent. She regularly represents boards before state and federal agencies, including the Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities, the EEOC, the State Boards of Mediation and Arbitration and Labor Relations, and the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights. She is also certified as a Civil Rights Investigator III through ATIXA.

Her practice includes defending employers and school officials in federal and state courts and before administrative bodies on matters involving discrimination, retaliation, harassment, and constitutional claims under Title VI, Title VII, Title IX, Section 1983, the ADA, FMLA, and related laws. She is also experienced in negotiating collective bargaining agreements.

A sought-after speaker and trainer, Melinda frequently conducts workshops for school districts on topics such as sexual harassment prevention, special education, Section 504, student discipline, discrimination, the ADA, the Family and Medical Leave Act, and FERPA. She also provides comprehensive Title IX training for educators and administrators.



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### JULIE P. REZNICK

Associate, Shipman & Goodwin LLP

Julie Reznick is a member of the firm's School Law Practice Group. She advises public school districts on a variety of general education, special education and labor and employment matters. Julie's legal practice focuses on a wide range of issues impacting educational entities, including personnel matters, special education and Section 504 matters and disputes, student and employee discipline matters, operational and policy matters, residency matters, issues concerning or related to DCF, and issues concerning the Connecticut Freedom of Information Act. As part of her practice, Julie regularly negotiates collective bargaining agreements on behalf of public boards of education, assists clients in responding to FOIA and FERPA requests, and represents public schools in an array of administrative proceedings, including in mediations and hearings before state labor agencies and in hearings before the Connecticut Freedom of Information Commission.

Prior to joining Shipman, Julie was a Judicial Intern to the Honorable Jeffrey Alker Meyer for the United States District Court for the District of Connecticut and a Certified Legal Intern for the New Haven Legal Assistance Association.



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### REBECCA RUDNICK SANTIAGO

Partner, Shipman & Goodwin LLP

Rebecca Santiago represents public school districts, regional school districts, RESCs, charter schools, and private schools across Connecticut in a wide range of labor, employment, and education law matters. As chief negotiator for many schools, she leads contract negotiations with teachers, administrators, and non-certified bargaining units—striving for fair and collaborative settlements. When agreements cannot be reached, she represents districts in mediation and interest arbitration. Rebecca also drafts employment contracts for superintendents and other unaffiliated employees and advises on documentation, discipline, evaluations, and separation agreements.

She provides practical guidance and training to school leaders on issues such as student discipline, harassment and bullying investigations, DCF reporting, wage and hour compliance, FMLA, ADA, and other personnel matters. Rebecca frequently assists clients with administrative hearings, including tenure and expulsion hearings, grievance arbitrations, and matters before the State Department of Education, State Board of Labor Relations, and Freedom of Information Commission.

A significant portion of Rebecca's practice focuses on special education law. She counsels boards of education on compliance with the IDEA and Section 504, providing representation at PPT meetings, mediations, and due process hearings. Her expertise helps districts develop sound strategies that support both legal compliance and student success. She also regularly conducts trainings on special education topics, including restraint and seclusion and transition planning.



### ZACHARY D. SCHURIN

Member, Pullman & Comley

Zachary Schurin's practice includes the negotiation of certified and non-certified collective bargaining agreements, representation at grievance and interest arbitration hearings, advocacy before state and federal courts, representation at student expulsion and residency hearings and the development of board of education and municipal policies and regulations. Zach regularly represents clients before a wide-variety of administrative agencies including the CT Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities (CHRO), the CT Freedom of Information Commission (FOIC), the Connecticut State Board of Labor Relations, the CT State Department of Education and the CT State Elections Enforcement Commission (SEEC) among others.

Zach has frequently written and spoken on education, labor and employment and education law issues. His written work has been published in The Connecticut Law Tribune, The Connecticut Public Interest Law Journal, the Connecticut Bar Association's Labor and Employment Law Quarterly, The CABA Journal and Pullman & Comley's Education Law Notes and Working Together blogs. He is a past-president of the Connecticut Council of School Attorneys, is chair of the Connecticut Bar Association Labor and Employment Law Section and is a member of the steering committee of Connecticut Valley Chapter of the Labor and Employment Relations Association (LERA).

Attorney Schurin is a graduate of the University of Connecticut School of Law and Hamilton College. Upon graduation from the University of Connecticut School of Law, Zach was awarded the Fleming James Jr. Award for excellence in labor law studies and the Connecticut Bar Association's Labor and Employment Law Section's annual scholarship award. While in law school Zach served as a legislative fellow in the Connecticut General Assembly's Office of Legislative Research. Since 2016 Zach has been continuously selected as a "Rising Star" in the field of schools and education by Super Lawyers magazine.





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### MARK J. SOMMARUGA

Member, Pullman & Comley

Mark Sommaruga has spent more than 33 years representing public agencies, schools—public, magnet, charter, and private—and employers across Connecticut. He focuses on labor, employment, education, municipal, and Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) matters, earning a reputation as a trusted advisor and “FOIA nerd.” Mark is the author of *Understanding Connecticut’s Freedom of Information Act* (Sixth Edition, 2023), published by Pullman & Comley and the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education, a leading guide for navigating FOIA’s complex requirements.

A member of the firm’s Labor, Employment Law and Employee Benefits Department and School Law Section, Mark counsels clients on issues including hiring, discipline, discrimination, compensation, accommodations, and policy development. He also advises schools on student discipline, special education, abuse and neglect, discrimination, free speech, and policy review, as well as disputes involving vendors, contractors, and municipal agencies.

Mark represents clients in state and federal courts, at both the trial and appellate levels, and before agencies such as the Connecticut and U.S. Departments of Education, the Department of Labor, the State Board of Labor Relations, and the Connecticut Freedom of Information Commission. He is also deeply involved in all stages of collective bargaining.

A frequent speaker and writer, Mark presents on FOIA, labor, and education law for organizations including CABA, the Connecticut Bar Association, and the FOIC. He received the 2023 JD Supra Readers’ Choice Award as a top education author and serves as co-chair of the firm’s Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee.



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### JULIA V. WILDE

Partner, Shipman & Goodwin LLP

Julia Wilde is a member of Shipman’s School Law Practice Group, advising public, charter, magnet, and independent schools on education, special education, and labor and employment matters. Drawing on her prior experience as Assistant Corporation Counsel for the City of Hartford, Julia takes a collaborative, proactive approach focused on resolving issues efficiently and in the best interests of schools and students.

Julia works with districts of all sizes—urban, suburban, and rural—bringing a deep understanding of Connecticut’s education landscape and school choice system. She regularly advises clients on policy development, internal investigations, and compliance with federal and state laws, including the ADA, FMLA, and IDEA. Her labor and employment practice includes guidance on employee discipline, ADA accommodations, non-renewals and terminations, discrimination claims, collective bargaining, and grievance arbitration.

In special education, Julia represents districts in PPT meetings, mediations, and due process proceedings under the IDEA and Section 504, and she frequently advises on Title IX investigations and compliance. She also represents schools before agencies such as the Connecticut Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities, the State Department of Education, and the State Board of Labor Relations, as well as in state and federal courts.

Julia served as co-counsel in the nation’s largest special education class action, addressing IDEA claims related to COVID-19 school closures. A frequent author and speaker, she presents for leading Connecticut education organizations and serves as an Adjunct Professor at the University of Connecticut’s Neag School of Education.

