

INTERAGENCY COUNCIL FOR ENDING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP
Hartford

DRAFT 3/16/2020
Minutes of Meeting
(Subject to Revision)
February 21, 2020

Call to Order

The Honorable Susan Bysiewicz, Lieutenant Governor, State of Connecticut, called the meeting to order at 1:05 p.m. The meeting was held in the North Plaza, Meeting Room D, at the Ella T. Grasso State Office Building, 450 Columbus Boulevard, Hartford, Connecticut.

Member agencies represented by:

Dr. Miguel A. Cardona, Commissioner, Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE)

Patrick L. Carroll III, Chief Court Administrator, Connecticut Justice Branch

Doug Casey, Executive Director, Connecticut Commission for Educational Technology (CCET), representing Department of Administrative Services (DAS)

Vannessa Dorantes, Commissioner, Department of Children and Families (DCF)

Dr. Deidre Gifford, Commissioner, Department of Social Services (DSS)

Shante Hanks, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Housing (DOH)

Kerry Kelly, Fiscal and Program Policy Section Director, Office of Policy and Management (OPM)

Seila Mosquera-Bruno, Commissioner, Department of Housing (DOH)

Mark E. Ojakian, President, Connecticut State Colleges and Universities

Charlene Russell-Tucker, Deputy Commissioner, CSDE

Glendowlyn Thames, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD)

Christine Velasquez, Health Program Associate, Department of Public Health (DPH)

Michael Williams, Deputy Commissioner, DCF

Guests:

Beth Bye, Commissioner, Office of Early Childhood (OEC)

Cherie Phoenix-Sharpe, General Counsel, Office of the Lieutenant Governor

John Frassinelli, Bureau Chief, CSDE

Sheila McKay, Senior Staff Associate, Connecticut Association of Boards of Education

Patricia Nunez, Program Manager, Connecticut Justice Branch

Kari Sullivan, Education Consultant, CSDE

I. Welcome and Introductions

Lieutenant Governor Susan Bysiewicz called the meeting to order and provided opening remarks with a brief overview of the statutory history and purpose of the Interagency Council for Ending the Achievement Gap (Interagency Council).

II. Interagency Council for Ending the Achievement Gap

Purpose and History

Presented by: Dr. Miguel A. Cardona, Commissioner of Education

The presentation began with an opportunity for council members and attendees to “turn and talk” with each other to identify where gaps might exist in outcomes based on race or poverty.

DCF – referrals, substantiated cases, length of time involved with agency, academic achievement.

DOJ – race/disparate practices, people of color go further into the justice system

DSS – not a gap – less than 2 percent of children and youth are uninsured. Gaps exist in access to health care services. The gaps are even wider for dental and vision services.

OEC – 44 percent of Connecticut’s population lives in a child care desert. Council on Women and Children is addressing this.

DOH – supportive services for children and youth in housing where 60 percent of adults are working two jobs. Need for supervision, afterschool programming, homework assistance and nutrition programs.

CSDE – sports and recreation camps, summer employment, job training and educational outcomes.

DECD – poverty/race/economics are a precursor to education attainment; underserved communities by geographical area/region and race; lack of access to capital to build businesses; jobs and quality of jobs with a living wage – access to employment to live comfortably.

Commissioner Cardona demonstrated the achievement gap between white students, students of color and high needs populations that included achievement on academic assessments and discipline rates. He indicated that although the achievement gap is closing, it will take until 2060 to close at the current rate.

Commissioner Cardona provided background on the Achievement Gap Task Force (AGTF), created in 2011, and its Master Plan for Ending the Achievement Gap, issued in spring 2014. The AGTF structured the Master Plan to identify strategy recommendations that should be considered both “Inside the School House” and Outside the School House.” The Interagency Council was established to address root causes of inequities, identified in the Master Plan, that lead to gaps.

Issues discussed by council members included:

- Universal preschool – indicator of success for children, e.g., efforts in Middletown;
- Poverty is an issue – but not entirely the cause of the gap (comparison of affluent black student to poorer white students);
- Comparison of Connecticut to neighboring states, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and New Jersey – need to develop an infrastructure for continuous growth;

- Strength of agencies in the Executive and Judicial branches working together – development of a new culture of interdependence of agencies;
- Addressing the minority teacher gap;
- Need for chronic absence data for PK;
- Impact of School-based Health Centers; and
- Inclusion of school attendance as a value indicator for health care program payments.

Featured Achievement Gap Task Force Recommendation

Chronic Absence

Charlene Russell-Tucker introduced the Interagency Council members to the AGTF Master Plan recommendation on chronic absence. The plan provided a results statement, rationale and policy recommendations for each strategy. The results statement for chronic absence is that “All students will attend school at least 90 percent of the school year.” The policy recommendations included:

1. Public Awareness
2. Attendance Tracking
3. Standard Definition
4. Chronic Absence Reports
5. Reports to Families
6. School Improvement Plans
7. Capacity Building
8. Interagency Resource Allocation and Coordination

To set the stage, Deputy Commissioner Russell-Tucker provided an overview of the definition of chronic absence, factors that contribute to chronic absence, and why attendance matters. She reviewed chronic absence trends from 2012-13 to 2018-19 where there has been a decline in overall chronic absence rates. The presentation included chronic absence trends and disparities for selected student groups and by grade level.

Connecticut has been recognized nationally for its strategic, collaborative approach at reducing chronic absence and its transformative impact. Connecticut’s approach was defined by “Six Strategies that Work.”

Strategy #1 – Build Awareness

Strategy #2 – Use Data to Promote Action

Strategy #3 – Cultivate Champions to Build State Infrastructure

Strategy #4 – Build Capacity

Strategy #5 – Identify and Leverage Bright Spots

Strategy #6 – Foster Accountability

Deputy Commissioner Russell-Tucker demonstrated how the “Six Strategies” were aligned with the nine AGTF Master Plan policy recommendations for chronic absence. She visually displayed how specific activities/priorities/initiatives of the agencies of the

Interagency Council aligned with the “Six Strategies” and supported the policy recommendations of the AGTF.

In her closing remarks, the Deputy Commissioner showed how the strategic collaboration of all levels of state and local government agencies can have a transformative impact.

III. Roundtable Discussion

Lieutenant Governor Bysiewicz facilitated a roundtable discussion asking each agency to identify agency priorities and initiatives that align to the AGTF policy recommendations. Responses included:

DECD – creating a pipeline for the next generation of business leaders; strategic partnerships with industry and K-12 education system; investing in underserved and marginalized communities (urban and rural); integrating nontraditional pathways for girls; and school-based manufacturing programs.

OEC – 500 Most Familiar Faces – linking data systems; changing language from achievement gap to opportunity gap; identifying and analyzing good outcome data; connecting data from early childhood settings with CSDE; accessing PK chronic absence data; expanding quality; reducing child care deserts; and preventing homelessness for families with children under age 5.

DOH – reviewing 211 systems and eliminating inefficiencies; Healthy Home initiative with CT Children’s Hospital – lead poisoning repairs and education; mixed income housing; providing supports in communities such as afterschool programs, space for doctors/nurses, diabetes prevention; self-sufficiency program rent increases into savings accounts; and leadership academy.

CCET – focus on equity of access of state broadband to all districts and public institutions; better data where the needs are “who is connected and who isn’t;” digital literacy skills, and resources for libraries.

DSS – children and youth have medically necessary coverage; improving accessing of services – bring services to families; 500 Most Familiar Faces – development of a new service delivery model; Executive Order #6, Medicaid – will be including student attendance as indicator; and expanding behavioral health services for kids.

DOJ – solid data informs policies at the judicial branch; acknowledging critical disparities in the criminal justice system; beneficial training for judges on implicit bias; partnering with DCF to reduce contacts with justice system; and improved accessed to health services in detention centers.

DOJ/CSSD – children in detention – making sure there is a matrix of accountability; cohesive and integrated system for kids; opioid issues – getting to

service quick – outside of the courts; supports and tools for older youth coming into the system through Raise the Age; unmet mental health needs – shortening wait list; creating safe communities for gradual release and services to meet their needs.

DCF – interagency partnership related to prevention programs; definition of prevention; strengthening families – Families First; racial justice efforts; timeline and evolution of understanding race and disproportionality – overlay with SDE data; clarifying the difference between education neglect and truancy; and post-secondary work – preparing for transition to success.

CT State Colleges and Universities – housing, food insecurity, transportation, employment disparities all continue into community colleges; wide disparity of students who complete math and English in the first year by race – indicator of success; connecting to middle and high schools to educate students and families of opportunities to go to college; chronic absence - find a way to partner with students who are parents – collaborative effort on educating parents on importance of school attendance; and dual enrollment high school/community college (Middlesex/Meriden).

In preparation for the next meeting, the Lieutenant Governor asked that each agency review the recommendations of the AGTF and prepare in writing any concerns, progress towards achieving the goals/recommendations and any new ideas/goals/programs that can influence the achievement gap.

IV. Roundtable Discussion

The next meeting will be scheduled in May after the close of the 2020 legislative session. A notice will be sent to all agencies.

V. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 3:00 p.m.