

INTERAGENCY COUNCIL FOR ENDING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP  
Hartford

Minutes of Meeting  
December 12, 2023, 1:00 p.m.  
[Meeting Recording](#)

**I. Opening Remarks and Roll Call**

The Honorable Susan Bysiewicz, Lieutenant Governor, State of Connecticut, called the meeting to order at 1 p.m. and welcomed all attendees to the December 12, 2023, meeting of the Interagency Council for Ending the Achievement Gap. She introduced Kari Sullivan Custer to conduct Roll Call.

Roll Call:

Kari Sullivan Custer recorded the following agency personnel present:

Office of the Lieutenant Governor: The Honorable Susan Bysiewicz, Lieutenant Governor, and Christine Jean-Louis, General Counsel

Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CSCU): Dr. Stephen Hegedus, Dean of the College of Education at Southern Connecticut State University

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

Department of Children and Families (DCF): Matt Foley, Superintendent of Schools, Unified School District #2

Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD): Tekowa Omara-Otunnu, Manager for Arts Education

Department of Housing (DOH):

Department of Public Health (DPH): Miriam Miller, Policy Director

Department of Social Services (DSS): Peter B. Hadler, Deputy Commissioner; Diana DiTunno, Astread O. Ferron-Poole, Daniel R. Giacomi, Anthony Judkins

Connecticut Judicial Branch (JUD): Patricia Nunez, Regional Manager, Court Support Services Division

Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE): Sinthia Sone-Moyano, Deputy Commissioner; John Frassinelli, Division Director; Chlo-Anne Bobrowski, Education Manager; Renee Kleinman, Education Consultant; and Kari Sullivan Custer, Education Consultant

Office of Early Childhood (OEC): Elena Trueworthy, Deputy Commissioner; Kimberly Paluska, Director, Early Care and Education; and Nicole Cossette

Office of Policy and Management (OPM): Holly Williams, Fiscal and Policy Section Director, Education and Workforce Development.

Lieutenant Governor reviewed the meeting agenda and objectives set forth. She shared that the focus of today's meeting will be a presentation by OEC on continuity of learning in the early years, Fatherhood Initiative and EBT by DSS, and an update on the maintenance of technology in schools since the pandemic investments by DAS.

She shared that we welcome the active engagement of our Council members, and we will continue to follow the format of our previous meetings where we will address policy recommendations from the 2014 Master Plan and seek input from Council members. She invited participants to ask questions or share anything that you would like to add.

## **II. Acceptance of Minutes and Follow-up from Last Meeting Discussion**

Lt. Governor shared that the Council last met on September 19, 2023. The minutes of that meeting were circulated to the Council in draft form for your review. Kari reported that we received one edit to the minutes, a change in an individual's title.

Participants were invited to make suggested changes at this time. Seeing and hearing none, Lt. Governor asked for any objections to the minutes as final. Seeing and hearing no objections, the September 19, 2023, minutes were accepted as final.

The Lt. Governor presented the 20223 draft annual report to the legislature. The last report was delivered on September 23rd, 2022. Since then, we've had five meetings, including this one, December 13th, 2022, March 7th, July 18th, September 19th and today December 12th, 2023. The report summarizes the discussion topics for each meeting in which the Council members led discussion of each of the subject matters.

Lt. Governor asked for any questions or comments about the 2024 annual report to the legislature. Seeing none, she reminded members that we had already circulated the report in draft prior to the meeting and that it's our intent to deliver the report to the legislature on Wednesday, December 20th. Any further edits or questions, please get them to Kari Sullivan Custer and Christine Jean Louie by 4:00 PM Monday, December 18th.

## **III. Continuity of Learning – Office of Early Childhood**

Deputy Commissioner Trueworthy and her team from OEC and CSDE shared a presentation on the transitions in early childhood education. Discussion on transitions in early childhood education. Highlights included:

- Importance of seamless transitions.
- Various transitions discussed, including Early Intervention, Birth to Three Program, and Transition into Preschool Special Education.
- Sparkler app introduced for families to track child's learning and development.
- Transition to kindergarten discussed:
- Emphasis on positive transition experiences.
- Importance of family engagement, social skills, and academic performance highlighted.
- OEC School Readiness Programs mentioned as preparation for school.
- The presentation concluded with a discussion on transition to kindergarten.

Overall, the meeting focused on strategies to ensure continuity of learning and smooth transitions for children in early childhood education.

This presentation and discussion can be [watched online](#).

#### **IV. Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) and Fatherhood Initiative – Department of Social Services**

Peter B. Hadler, Deputy Commissioner, introduced the team from DSS who presented on EBT first. Some highlights include:

- Pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer (P-EBT) program discussed, a joint venture between the Department of Social Services and the Connecticut State Department of Education.
- Background of the P-EBT program (PBT 1.0) explained: initiated during the 2019-2020 school year in response to the Families First Coronavirus Response Act of 2020 as a temporary emergency nutrition benefit.
- Originally intended as a short-term response but extended until 2023.
- Eligibility criteria: All children who would have received free or reduced-price meals through the National School Lunch Program if not for school closures lasting five or more consecutive days.
- Benefits provided: \$364.80 per eligible student, covering the period from March 17th, 2020 (governor's school closure date) until the average end date of the school year in June 2020.
- The benefit amount was calculated based on the reimbursement rates of the National School Lunch Program and the average school year end date.
- Over 300,000 public and private school students received benefits, including those in private schools participating in the National School Lunch Program.

This presentation and discussion can be [watched online](#).

Tony Judkins and Diana Tonneau, leaders of the Connecticut Fatherhood Initiative (CFI), presented an overview of the program and its work.

- The CFI aims to support fathers and their families statewide through a coordinated effort.
- The initiative emphasizes that its efforts are not at the expense of mothers; children are at the heart of the collaborative effort among state and local partners.
- Objectives of the legislation include supporting emotional and financial aspects of fatherhood regardless of marital status, focusing on the parent-child relationship.
- Collaboration is key, with multiple agencies and partners actively participating in the CFI's work.
- The CFI is seen as a national leader in fatherhood initiatives, emphasizing racial and gender equity and safe engagement.
- The presentation highlighted the strategic plan developed with the input of over 80 individuals from 50 agencies or entities in Connecticut.

This presentation and discussion can be [watched online](#).

**V. Maintenance of Technology in Schools – Department of Administrative Services**

Doug Casey, Executive Director, CCET, shared with the Council an update on sustaining increased computer usage during the pandemic. Some highlights included:

- Emphasis on the widespread use of technology in education and operations.
- Data showed a significant rise in one-to-one computer programs in schools.
- Questions were raised about potential cost-saving measures.
- Importance of effective solutions and digital equity were highlighted.

This presentation and discussion can be [watched online](#).

**VI. Next Steps**

Lieutenant Governor Bysiewicz provided an overview of the next steps going forward. The first quarterly meeting of 2025 will be on Tuesday afternoons including March 19, 2024. Quarterly meetings will be held on June 18, September 17, and December 17.

She reported that the agenda for the next meeting will provide an opportunity for open discussion on education legislation impacting children and families.

She invited members to offer any suggestions for guest speakers who can provide a particular insight on topics related to the Council's work.

**VII. Closing/Meeting adjourned**

Lieutenant Governor Bysiewicz expressed her and the Governor's appreciation of all the work put forth in this legislative session. We appreciate your time and talent and dedication, and we will see you next time. Thank you so much for your participation in our Interagency Council meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 2:50 p.m.