

INTERAGENCY COUNCIL FOR ENDING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP  
Hartford

Minutes of Meeting

December 17, 2024, 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 17, 2024, meeting of the Interagency Council for Ending the Achievement Gap. She introduced Kari Sullivan Custer to conduct Roll Call.

Roll Call:

The following agency personnel were present:

Office of the Lieutenant Governor: The Honorable Susan Bysiewicz, Lieutenant Governor, and Tracy Opoku, General Counsel

Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CSCU): Paula Talty, Interim Dean, School of Education, Central Connecticut State University (CCSU)

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

Department of Children and Families (DCF): Michael Williams, Deputy Commissioner; Matt Folan, Superintendent of Schools, Unified School District #2; and Stephanie Bozak, Psy.D., Behavioral Health Clinical Manager

Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD):

Department of Housing (DOH): Shante Hanks, Senior Advisor

Department of Public Health (DPH): Julie Vigil, Branch Chief

Department of Social Services (DSS):

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; Shannon Yearwood, Bureau Chief, and Kari Sullivan Custer, Education Consultant

Office of Early Childhood (OEC): Elena Trueworthy, Interim Commissioner, and Lorna Thomas-Farquharson, Program Manager, Behavioral Health Initiative

Office of Policy and Management (OPM): Peter Hopko, Budget Specialist

Lieutenant Governor reviewed the meeting agenda and objectives set forth. She shared today's attendees will have agency reports on youth social, emotional, and mental health and learn about child nutrition and hunger.

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

Lt. Governor shared that the Council last met on September 17, 2024. The minutes of that meeting were circulated to the Council in draft form for your review.

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 17, 2024, minutes were accepted as final.

### III. **Agency Reports on Youth Social, Emotional, and Mental Health**

#### *Central Connecticut State University (CCSU)*

- Paula Talty shared that CCSU has a Center for Excellence and Social Emotional Learning that collaborates with local school districts to provide support for faculty and staff.
- Planning a spring convening on mental health and wellness to be hosted at CCSU with participation from other CSUs and the community colleges as well.

#### *Commission for Educational Technology*

- Doug Casey highlighted efforts in digital citizenship and concerns regarding AI interaction among students.
- Discussed the Digital Equity Capacity Grant Program aimed at enhancing digital skills and safe technology use.

#### *Department of Children and Families (DCF)*

- Dr. Stephanie Bozak reported on the Connecting to Care grant, aimed at integrating school-based mental health supports.
- Outlined tiered school supports and initiatives such as CBITS (Cognitive Behavioral Intervention for Trauma in Schools) and Bounce Back (for elementary students).
- Piloting a peer-to-peer mental health support model in schools.
- Collaboration with DMHAS on suicide prevention strategies.

#### *Department of Housing*

- Shante Hanks emphasized stable housing as critical to student success.
- Reported on meetings with Fairfield and New Haven developers to address rising housing insecurity for families.

#### *Department of Public Health (DPH)*

- Julie Vigil shared data on mental health screenings at 103 school-based health centers in 2022-23.
- 67,967 mental health visits were recorded, resulting in 3,942 referrals.

#### *Department of Social Services (DSS)*

- Talitha Coggins reported on expansions in medical coverage for non-citizen children and increased eligibility periods for family assistance programs.

#### *Judicial Branch*

- Patricia Nunez shared updates on Forensic Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (FCBT) training for juvenile probation officers.
- Highlighted a Restorative Practices Symposium at Quinnipiac Law School, where Bridgeport students demonstrated successful peer-led restorative circles.

#### *Office of Early Childhood (OEC)*

Elena Trueworthy & Dr. Lorna Thomas-Farquharson discussed:

- Pyramid Model for social-emotional development.
- Suspension & Expulsion Prevention Committee.
- Sparkler app for early childhood mental health screening.
- Ongoing mental health webinars to reduce stigma.

#### *Office of Policy and Management (OPM)*

- Peter Hopko noted ongoing budget preparations with a focus on children’s behavioral health infrastructure.

*State Department of Education (SDE)*

Sinthia Sone-Moyano provided updates on:

- Chronic absenteeism decrease by 2.3% statewide.
- LEAP home visiting program, with 29,000 family contacts and documented improvements in attendance.
- \$3 million Behavioral Health Pilot across 48 school districts.
- \$26.5 million invested in school-based mental health specialists.

**IV. Child Nutrition and Hunger**

SDE Child Nutrition Programs

Shannon Yearwood (SDE) & John Frassinelli discussed:

- \$150 million invested in school lunch programs.
- State-funded school breakfast expansion.
- Ongoing advocacy for universal free meals.
- 37,000+ children served by Summer EBT to combat food insecurity.

Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program

Julie Vigil (DPH) shared:

- 28,983 participants statewide.
- 40% of U.S. infants receive WIC benefits.
- Expanding breastfeeding support and nutritional resources.

Lt. Governor Bysiewicz emphasized the urgent need to quantify unmet student meal needs and the connection between nutrition and academic performance.

**V. 2025 Meeting Schedule & Closing Remarks**

The 2025 meeting schedule was announced:

- March 18, June 17, September 16, and December 16 (all at 1:00 PM).
- Agencies were invited to submit suggestions for guest speakers.

Lt. Governor Bysiewicz and Governor Lamont expressed gratitude for the Council’s work. The meeting adjourned at 2:05 PM.

**VI. Next Steps**

Lt. Governor Bysiewicz invited suggestions for topics and speakers for the next quarterly meeting, scheduled for March 18, 2025.

**VII. Closing/Meeting adjourned**

The meeting adjourned at 2:05 p.m.