

Interagency Council for Ending the Achievement Gap

Hartford

Minutes of Meeting

March 17, 2026, 1:00 p.m.

[Meeting Recording](#)

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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 March 17, 2026, meeting of the Interagency Council for Ending the Achievement Gap. Lieutenant Governor Bysiewicz wished members a happy Saint Patrick's Day and asked 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

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

Department of Children and Families (DCF): Matt Folan, Superintendent of Schools, Unified School District #2; and Vincent J. Russo, Chief of Government Relations and Policy

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

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

Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE): Sinthia Sone-Moyano, Deputy Commissioner; John Frassinelli, Division Director; and Kari Sullivan Custer, Education Consultant for Attendance and Engagement

Lieutenant Governor Bysiewicz reviewed the meeting agenda. She noted that the Council would accept the minutes from the previous meeting, review Council updates, conduct a legislative roundtable, hold a cross-agency discussion, identify next steps, and adjourn. Members were invited to participate actively and raise questions or relevant updates during the discussion.

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

Lieutenant Governor Bysiewicz shared that the Council last met on December 16, 2025. At that meeting, members received an update from the Governor's Kids Cabinet and a presentation on the release of the 2024–25 Next Generation Accountability Results.

The minutes of the December 16, 2025, meeting were circulated to the Council in draft form for review. No edits were received in advance of the meeting. Participants were invited to make suggested changes at this time. Seeing and hearing none, Lieutenant Governor Bysiewicz asked for any objections to accepting the minutes as final. Seeing and hearing no objections, the December 16, 2025, minutes were accepted as final.

III. Legislative Roundtable

Lieutenant Governor Bysiewicz invited member agencies to provide brief updates on bills and budget items from the current legislative session that may positively affect student outcomes and support the Council's work to close the achievement gap. She noted that the 2026 legislative session is a short session scheduled to end on May 6.

a. Connecticut State Department of Education

John Frassinelli from CSDE noted that the agency is tracking a significant number of bills across several legislative committees, including the Education Committee. He highlighted continued funding in the Governor's budget for the Learner Engagement and Attendance Program (LEAP), including \$7 million in FY 2027 to support continuation and potential expansion of the program.

Mr. Frassinelli shared that LEAP has supported 78,000 home visits for approximately 46,000 students and that approximately 34,000 more students are now attending school regularly. He noted that the program has been independently evaluated and has been shown to support students in reconnecting to school. LEAP is currently operating in 25 districts, including many Alliance Districts such as Hartford, Manchester, East Hartford, Danbury, and Windham. Kari Sullivan Custer offered to share the full list of LEAP districts in the meeting chat.

Mr. Frassinelli also discussed proposed legislation related to student cell phone use during the school day. He described the Governor's proposal as a "bell-to-bell" restriction from the start of the school day through the end of the school day, with district flexibility for instructional use and exceptions for students who require devices for special education, Section 504, or health-related reasons. He noted that

a separate legislative proposal on student cell phones was also under consideration and that both proposals had recently been voted out of committee.

Finally, Mr. Frassinelli highlighted school meals investments in the Governor's budget, including approximately \$12 million to support free breakfast for all students and approximately \$523,755 to eliminate lunch costs for students eligible for reduced-price meals. He noted that approximately 12,998 students are eligible for reduced-price meals and that the breakfast investment would provide access to free breakfast for approximately 164,000 students who did not previously have access.

b. Department of Children and Families

Vincent J. Russo from DCF provided an update on legislation the department is tracking. He highlighted House Bill 5004, related to child welfare accountability and transparency. He noted that DCF operates a postsecondary education program for eligible youth who were in care when they turned 18 and for adopted youth, supporting college or vocational school costs at the Central Connecticut State University rate. He explained that proposals to expand this program are often discussed, but any expansion would require additional funding beyond the Governor's proposed budget.

Mr. Russo also discussed DCF's collaboration with the Judicial Branch on language related to the Juvenile Justice Education Unit. He explained that the unit works with youth who are incarcerated through the Department of Correction or in Court Support Services Division detention centers. The goal is to ensure that youth receive consistent educational services, that credits earned in those settings are tracked, and that credits are transferred between the institution and the local education agency. The proposal would support more timely information-sharing when a youth enters detention and help ensure immediate connection with the local education agency.

c. Department of Administrative Services

Doug Casey from DAS and the Connecticut Commission for Educational Technology provided an update on student technology-related legislative proposals. He referenced proposals related to restrictions on student cell phones and personal technology in schools, as well as broader efforts to promote a positive school climate.

Mr. Casey also highlighted legislation related to social media use and youth privacy, including proposals to limit the collection of data from minors and protect minors from unsolicited contact. He identified Senate Bill 4 as a broader consumer privacy proposal with specific provisions for minors. He also discussed Senate Bill 5, an artificial intelligence proposal that would create a Connecticut AI Academy and invest in teacher preparation programs to support effective and appropriate use of artificial intelligence in classrooms. Mr. Casey noted that DAS is also tracking several school construction-related bills.

d. Office of Policy and Management

Peter Hopko from OPM reviewed several investments included in the Governor's proposed midterm budget adjustments that relate to student outcomes and closing achievement gaps. He highlighted \$12 million for universal free breakfast and approximately \$500,000 to eliminate reduced-price lunch fees.

Mr. Hopko also highlighted \$5 million in FY 2027 for CSDE to continue a mental and behavioral health pilot that began with COVID relief funds. He noted that CSDE anticipates operating the program in 20 districts and shared examples of positive outcomes from Norwalk, including reductions in expulsions and suspensions, behavioral incidents, suicide attempts, and suicidal ideation.

In addition, Mr. Hopko discussed \$4.5 million to establish a statewide network of literacy coaches to help improve reading outcomes, with an estimated reach of 50 districts and approximately 16,000 K–3 students. He also noted \$2 million to continue a teacher apprenticeship program intended to strengthen the teacher pipeline, particularly in high-need districts.

e. Connecticut Judicial Branch

Patricia Nunez from the Court Support Services Division of the Judicial Branch provided an update on work connected to juvenile justice and education. She highlighted collaboration with DCF's Juvenile Justice Education Unit and noted that the work grew from the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee's reentry planning efforts. A reentry success plan was developed to support students returning from detention or out-of-home residential treatment, with components such as education, vocational planning, and housing.

Ms. Nunez emphasized the importance of careful discharge planning, transfer of credits earned in out-of-home placement, and warm handoffs to the student's local

education agency or an appropriate educational setting. She also discussed the federal Consolidated Appropriations Act requirements related to youth who qualify for Medicaid coverage, including screening and assessment for physical and behavioral health needs in congregate care settings and targeted case management as youth transition back to the community and reconnect to education.

IV. Cross-Agency Discussion: Opportunities for Alignment

Lieutenant Governor Bysiewicz thanked the agencies that provided updates and noted that agencies not represented at the meeting would be invited to share any additional legislation that may support efforts to close the achievement gap. She asked members to identify opportunities for alignment, coordination, collaboration, or shared messaging related to the legislative items discussed.

During the discussion, Lieutenant Governor Bysiewicz suggested that the Council receive a future presentation on the Rural Health Transformation Grant/Rural Health Initiative. She noted that the initiative includes significant federal funding to increase access to health care in rural communities and includes activities related to public health vaccinations, mobile health units, and youth mental health. She highlighted the relevance of these initiatives to families and students, particularly in rural parts of the state.

John Frassinelli offered to reach out to the organizers of the Rural Health Transformation Grant at the Department of Social Services and the Department of Public Health to help coordinate a presentation for the Council's next meeting. Lieutenant Governor Bysiewicz welcomed the offer and emphasized the importance of ensuring Council members are aware of this opportunity and its relevance to students and families.

V. Next Steps

Lieutenant Governor Bysiewicz shared the remaining quarterly meeting dates for the year: June 16, September 15, and December 15. All meetings will be held virtually on Tuesdays at 1 p.m. Members were invited to share suggestions for future guest speakers or topics related to the Council's work.

VI. Closing/Meeting adjourned

Lieutenant Governor Bysiewicz thanked Council members and their agencies for their work during the legislative session. She noted that at the June 16 meeting, the Council will be able to discuss legislation that passed and was signed into law. The meeting adjourned at approximately 1:34 p.m.