

Interagency Council for Ending the Achievement Gap

Hartford

Minutes of Meeting

June 16, 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 approximately 1 p.m. and welcomed attendees to the June 16, 2026, meeting of the Interagency Council for Ending the Achievement Gap. Lieutenant Governor Bysiewicz 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
- Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CSCU): Paula Talty, Academic Affairs
- Department of Administrative Services (DAS): Doug Casey, Executive Director, Connecticut Commission for Educational Technology
- Department of Children and Families (DCF): Nicole Taylor, Chief Administrator of Behavioral Health and Well-Being; Michael Carone, Legislative Program Director, and Matt Folan, Superintendent of Schools
- Department of Housing (DOH): Shanté Hanks, Senior Advisor
- Department of Social Services (DSS): Astrid Ferron-Poole, Chief of Staff; and Julie Vigil, Deputy Director of Operations, Rural Health Transformation Program
- Connecticut Judicial Branch (JUD): Patricia Nunez, Regional Manager, Court Support Services Division
- Office of Early Childhood (OEC): Commissioner Elena Trueworthy; David Morgan, Deputy Commissioner; Maggie Adair, Communications and Legislative Program Manager; and Rachel Rusnak, Director of Family Bridge
- Office of Policy and Management (OPM): Peter Hopko, Budget Specialist
- Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE): Sinthia Sone-Moyano, Deputy Commissioner; John Frassinelli, Division Director; Chloe Cummings, Coordinator of Systemic Implementation; and Kari Sullivan Custer, Education Consultant for Attendance and Engagement

Lieutenant Governor Bysiewicz reviewed the agenda. She noted that the Council would accept the minutes from the previous meeting, receive a presentation on the Rural Health Transformation Program, conduct a legislative roundtable, hold a cross-agency discussion, identify next steps, and adjourn. Members were invited to participate actively and share questions or relevant information during the discussion.

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

Lieutenant Governor Bysiewicz shared that the Council last met on March 17, 2026, during the legislative session. The draft minutes were circulated to Council members for review, and no edits were received in advance of the meeting. Members were invited to suggest corrections. Seeing and hearing none, Lieutenant Governor Bysiewicz asked whether there were any objections to accepting the minutes as final. Seeing and hearing no objections, the March 17, 2026, minutes were accepted as final.

III. Rural Health Transformation Program

Lieutenant Governor Bysiewicz introduced Julie Vigil, Deputy Director of Operations for the Rural Health Transformation Program at DSS, and John Frassinelli, Division Director at CSDE. She noted the significance of the federal investment and its potential to improve access to quality health care in Connecticut's rural communities.

Ms. Vigil reported that Connecticut received \$154.3 million for the first year of the new federal Rural Health Transformation Program. The national program provides \$50 billion over five project years, from 2027 through 2031, to improve health outcomes and transform health care in rural communities. Connecticut's work is concentrated primarily in the northwestern and northeastern regions identified as rural under the federal Health Resources and Services Administration definition.

Ms. Vigil described four areas of work: population health outcomes, workforce development, data and technology, and care transformation. The state's 30 projects include outdoor recreation, mobile clinics, services for older adults, expansion of universal nurse home visiting, certified nurse aide and medication administration training, a health workforce pipeline, efforts to bridge the digital divide, support for rural providers' participation in the statewide health information exchange, the Program of All-Inclusive Care for the Elderly, and high-acuity school-based health services. DSS is leading the initiative in collaboration with 11 other state agencies and must obligate the first-year funding by October 30, 2026. Regional collaboratives and stakeholder engagement in

northeastern and northwestern Connecticut will help ensure that projects respond to community priorities.

Connecticut State Department of Education

Mr. Frassinelli explained that CSDE will expand a behavioral health pilot first implemented in seven districts in 2024. The model examines districtwide mental health systems, school-level implementation and partnerships, and individual student strengths and needs through the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment. He reported that the pilot was associated with reductions in suicidal ideation, behavioral incidents, suspensions, and expulsions. All 41 districts in the targeted rural regions will be invited to apply, with implementation supported by the Child Health and Development Institute, regional educational service centers, and other partners.

Mr. Frassinelli also discussed a regional model that uses mobile or floating social workers to serve multiple schools, building on work in northwestern Connecticut and seeking to extend a similar approach to eastern Connecticut. CSDE anticipates that as many as 20,000 students across the two regions could gain access to services. Telehealth behavioral health services will also help address transportation barriers. CSDE expects to receive approximately \$4 million annually for its portion of the initiative.

Office of Early Childhood

Commissioner Trueworthy described plans to expand Family Bridge, a universal nurse home visiting program delivered through a five-agency partnership. Registered nurses and certified community health workers provide in-home physical assessments, screenings, education, and connections to community resources for families with newborns. The evidence-based Family Connects International model is offered at no cost to participating families. Family Bridge currently operates in Greater Bridgeport and eastern Connecticut and has served nearly 3,000 families.

Rachel Rusnak shared that the expansion will extend services in eastern Connecticut and establish services in northwestern Connecticut. OEC expects the expanded service area to include approximately 2,000 families annually, with an initial goal of serving 20 percent and a longer-term goal of at least 60 percent to support population-level maternal and infant health outcomes. Implementation partners include the United Ways of Southeastern and Northwestern Connecticut, the Thames Valley Council for Community Action, and the Community Health and Wellness Center of Greater Torrington.

During discussion, Lieutenant Governor Bysiewicz emphasized the importance of maternal and infant health supports in rural communities that have experienced reduced access to maternity care. Ms. Vigil noted that future federal funding will be tied to performance and that agencies are developing key performance indicators. She also highlighted related projects involving psychiatric consultation and referral support for school-based care, services for individuals with autism spectrum disorders, and 23-hour crisis stabilization units.

IV. Legislative Roundtable

Lieutenant Governor Bysiewicz invited member agencies to summarize legislation and budget items from the 2026 legislative session that may affect students and support efforts to close the achievement gap.

Connecticut State Department of Education

Chloe Cummings from CSDE highlighted legislation expanding the definition of aspiring educators to include individuals underrepresented in the teaching profession. She also noted requirements for CSDE to issue guidance on multi-tiered systems of support for students struggling to read and to convene an American Sign Language working group.

Ms. Cummings reviewed several state budget investments, including \$5 million for behavioral health, \$12 million for school breakfast, \$7 million for the Learner Engagement and Attendance Program, \$2 million for literacy coaches, and \$2 million for high-dosage tutoring. She also noted that Public Act 26-139 updated math pathways and assessment provisions. Lieutenant Governor Bysiewicz added that municipalities and school districts received approximately \$300 million beyond the funding included in the Governor's original budget proposal and noted strong legislative support for universal school lunch in the future.

Office of Early Childhood

Commissioner Trueworthy highlighted an additional investment of approximately \$320 million in the Early Childhood Education Endowment, bringing the total endowment to more than \$600 million. The funding will support access, quality, workforce stability, and expansion of early care and education. She noted that Connecticut added more than 1,000 child care spaces through Early Start Connecticut and Smart Start and increased provider rates to help strengthen compensation and benefits for the child care workforce.

Commissioner Trueworthy also reported that Birth to Three providers received their first rate increase since 2017 and that a pediatrician was added to the Early Childhood Cabinet.

Maggie Adair added that the per-child rate for Smart Start increased from \$5,000 to \$6,500. Commissioner Trueworthy explained that beginning in FY 2028, families earning \$100,000 or less will receive free child care through state-funded programs, while families earning more than \$100,000 will pay no more than 7 percent of their income. OEC estimates that approximately 19,000 to 20,000 families will receive free or substantially reduced-cost care.

Department of Children and Families

Michael Carone from DCF discussed Public Act 26-37, also known as House Bill 5468, concerning parent-managed learning. Beginning in the 2028-29 school year, parents or guardians of most school-age children will annually indicate whether their child will attend public school, attend a nonpublic school, or receive parent-managed learning. Beginning in the 2027-28 school year, a parent or guardian seeking to withdraw a child from public school will be required to appear in person and sign a withdrawal form.

Mr. Carone explained that, after receiving a withdrawal form, the school district must request a DCF records check concerning adults residing in the child's home. The district must make the request within two days, and DCF must respond within five business days. If the check identifies an adult on the child abuse and neglect registry or an open DCF investigation, the withdrawal may not proceed at that time, and the district must notify the parent or guardian of the reason and the process for challenging the finding. The act also designates DCF as a state educational authority for purposes of receiving relevant education records under FERPA. The act was signed by the Governor and is effective July 1, 2027, with specific requirements phased in during later school years.

Department of Social Services

Astrid Ferron-Poole from DSS highlighted Public Act 26-26, which establishes a Child Welfare Policy and Oversight Committee. The DSS Commissioner or designee will serve on the committee, which will make recommendations concerning the operations, policies, and service outcomes of state agencies supporting child welfare. She also discussed Public Act 26-11, which establishes a task force to study methods and programs for improving affordability for children, families, and young professionals, including cash assistance, education, employment, and other cost-reduction strategies. The DSS Commissioner or designee will also serve on that task force.

Department of Housing

Shante Hanks from DOH discussed House Bill 5259, concerning the education of children and youth experiencing homelessness. She explained that the legislation strengthens Connecticut's implementation of the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act by reinforcing educational stability and improving access to enrollment, transportation, and school continuity. Ms. Hanks noted that the legislation complements the preventive work of the Head Start on Housing program and demonstrates how DOH, CSDE, and OEC can align housing, early childhood, and education systems to support the whole family and prevent housing instability from becoming an educational barrier.

Department of Administrative Services

Doug Casey from DAS highlighted Public Act 26-15, concerning online safety and artificial intelligence. The act creates an AI Academy that will provide AI and digital literacy supports at no cost, establishes requirements for AI providers to identify and flag harmful interactions involving self-harm or harm to others, and addresses parental consent for minors' use of AI tools.

Mr. Casey also discussed school construction provisions in Public Act 26-68, including \$15 million for school construction, a 95 percent reimbursement cap, and a reimbursement bonus for districts with enrollment growth of 20 percent or more over a 10-year period. In addition, he noted that Public Act 26-1 removes certain district reporting requirements related to student data privacy that were no longer being used, reducing unnecessary administrative work.

Office of Policy and Management

Peter Hopko from OPM noted that several key budget investments had already been discussed, including behavioral health grants, school meals, the Early Childhood Education Endowment, and approximately \$193 million for school districts outside the Education Cost Sharing formula. He shared that OPM will be involved in implementing these and other initiatives reviewed during the meeting.

Connecticut State Colleges and Universities

Paula Talty from CSCU reported that the system received additional support from the Peter and Carmen Lucia Buck Foundation to expand Excellence in Teacher Residencies and help prepare highly qualified teachers. She also highlighted additional CSDE funding for the teacher apprenticeship program, which will provide stipends to students during student teaching. CSCU will continue expanding dual-credit opportunities, and the Dual Credit

Advisory Committee has recommended that the Board of Regents address significant cost barriers affecting high school dual-credit programs.

V. Cross-Agency Discussion: Opportunities for Alignment

Lieutenant Governor Bysiewicz thanked the presenters and invited members to identify additional legislative items or opportunities for collaboration, coordination, or future discussion. No additional items were raised. Agencies that were unable to provide updates during the meeting were invited to submit information for inclusion in a future Council communication.

VI. Next Steps

Lieutenant Governor Bysiewicz shared the remaining quarterly meeting dates for 2026: September 15 and December 15. Both meetings will be held virtually on Tuesdays at 1 p.m. Members were invited to suggest future guest speakers or topics related to the Council's work.

VII. Closing/Meeting adjourned

Lieutenant Governor Bysiewicz thanked Council members and their agencies for their work during the legislative session and for their continued efforts to close the achievement gap. The meeting adjourned at approximately 2:01 p.m.