STATE OF CONNECTICUT

STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Connecticut State Advisory Council for Special Education

Full Council Committee Meeting

Date: April 22, 2026

Time: 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Location: Goodwin University (Community Room), 1 Riverside Drive, East Hartford, CT

Zoom Meeting:
https://ctserc.zoom.us/j/95578174843?pwd=3DSmDHbW8hjY5SvjAMSJtOPnwZuBsK.1
Meeting ID: 955 7817 4843
Passcode: 882105

Meeting Minutes

Members Present: Allison Kopie, Brandalyn Williams (Vice Chairperson), Brian K. Smith, Catherine Summ, Goviana Morales, Jeffry Spahr, Jennifer Lussier (Secretary), Jonathan Metcalf, Eve Hurley, Lori Fortuna, Missy Wrigley (Chairperson), Nachi Bhatt, Susan Yankee, Tom Cosker, Kim Williamson, Meghan Gallagher, Sean Cronin (CSDE), Bryan Klimkiewicz (CSDE)

Members Absent: State Representative Dan Gaiewski, Dimpy Malvania, Jake Shumbo, Lena Esposito, Louis Tallarita, Mary Beth Bruder, Michael Scanlon, State Representative Robin Comey, Stacey Palker, Amy Messinger, Ana Wittig, Denise Drummond, Evan Simlack, Nancy DeCrescenzo, State Senator Sujata Gadkar-Wilcox

SERC Administration: Christine Kuehlewind, Lauren Johns

I. **Call to Order and Welcome: 10:08 a.m.**

II. **Council Purpose and Function**

III. **Introduction/Roles**

IV. **Public Comment: 10:12 a.m.** No Public Comment

i. SAC meetings are public meetings; members of the public may participate by calling in:
Call In: 1-929-205-6099
Meeting ID: 955 7817 4843

Participant Code: 882105

V. Consent Agenda: 10:13 a.m.

i. Approval of Full Council Minutes, March 25, 2026

Tom Cosker motions to approve the meeting minutes as amended with corrections, Jennifer Lussier seconds, unanimous in favor to approve.

Old Business

VI. Executive Matters: 10:15 a.m.

i. Draft Review of the Policy & Procedure Manual: The members reviewed the draft SAC Operational Procedures Manual intended to support future leadership and committee operations. The manual remains in draft form and will undergo additional revisions prior to final approval. Members were asked to submit written feedback by May 12 in advance of the Executive Committee meeting scheduled for May 13.

The members discussed the following sections and topics: Executive Committee procedures, leadership roles and succession, quorum and governance, Membership Committee procedures, Legislative Committee revisions, CSDE section review, administrative and clerical support, accessibility and FOIA compliance, meeting schedules and templates, new SAC members orientation and resource materials, and travel reimbursement and public comment procedures.

VII. Membership/Nominating Report/Updates: 10:58 a.m.

i. Nominating Committee Update: The current Secretary and Vice Chair are willing to continue serving if no additional candidates emerge. Chair nominations remain open prior to the May meeting.

ii. Membership Committee Update: The Membership Committee reviewed 16 applications and recommended candidates representing: students, charter schools, and special education teachers. Recommendations will be forwarded to the Executive Committee.

The Council also reviewed current vacancies, including: student positions, parent positions, Legislative representatives, special education teacher representative, charter school representative, and Department of Corrections representative

Members discussed revising the application process to: improve accessibility of the surveys, gather more detailed applicant information, and better balance the representation across grade levels.

VIII. Legislative Report/Updates: 11:15 a.m.

i. Discussion of SAC Table at Capital on Monday April 20th : SAC members reported on a successful outreach event at the Capitol focused on: building relationships with legislators, raising awareness of SAC responsibilities, and discussing Section 504 protections and special education advocacy. Members discussed improving outreach materials and establishing consistent communication channels for legislators and stakeholders.

ii. Legislative Update: The Council reviewed current legislative activity affecting special education, including: education cost-sharing measures, cell phone restriction legislation with IEP-related exceptions, restraint and seclusion updates, homeschooling legislation, American Sign Language (ASL) curriculum and certification proposals, and educator preparation requirements related to behavior management training.

New Business

I. Roundtable: 11:30 a.m.

i. A new "Unified Arts" initiative involving schools in Westbrook, Old Saybrook, and Lyme-Old Lyme: Students from different districts collaborate on inclusive community-based art projects. The initiative focuses on community, inclusion, and student connection. Members expressed interest in expanding the program statewide.

ii. Recognition of a statewide Autism Acceptance event: Members acknowledged activities promoting autism acceptance and inclusion. A gubernatorial proclamation supporting Autism Acceptance was noted.

iii. Discussion of newly passed police training legislation: The law requires police officers to receive training on interacting with individuals with disabilities, including autism. Topics include recognizing disability-related behaviors and using de-escalation techniques. Funding has been allocated for implementation. Members discussed improving future language so autism is not framed solely under "mental or emotional disability" terminology.

II. BSE Updates/Review Activity

WestEd Evaluation Implementation:

Key initiatives:
Process mapping

Reviewing and improving how guidance documents are developed, approved, and published
Talent mapping
Assessing staff expertise, organizational structure, and internal capacity.
CT-SEDS usability review
Reviewing challenges educators face using the Connecticut Special Education Data System for: IEP development documentation and service management

Special Education Staffing Shortages and Monitoring:
The Bureau provided extensive updates on statewide staffing shortages affecting special education services.

Topics Included:
Increased complaints related to failure to implement IEPs and missed services due to vacancies.

Complaint rates are reportedly: approximately 20% higher than last year

Current mandatory vacancy reporting applies only to: approved private special education programs and RESC Alliance programs

Public school districts currently rely on: surveys, complaint investigations, and monitoring visits

CSDE also described: regular monitoring meetings with larger districts, vacancy tracking systems, and expectations for parent notification and compensatory education planning

Recruitment and Retention Initiatives:

The Bureau reviewed statewide efforts to recruit and retain special education staff.

Programs and supports mentioned: statewide special education job posting system ("CTCs"), recruitment marketing campaigns, mentorship and onboarding programs, paraeducator career pathway initiatives, professional learning communities, and communities of practice

A major example highlighted: Bridgeport Public Schools reportedly reduced vacancies from 43 to 2 through coordinated HR and special education efforts

Behavioral Support Data Collection:

CSDE discussed expanded data collection regarding:

Functional Behavioral Assessments (FBAs)
Behavioral Intervention Plans (BIPs)
Restrictive placements

Concerns included: possible overuse of exceptions allowing placement changes without FBAs, inconsistent statewide reporting, and need for stronger monitoring data

IDEA Grants and Competitive Funding:

Updates included:
IDEA grant applications becoming available
Upcoming competitive grants focused on:
Trauma-informed supports
Inclusive special education programming
Capital improvements

Call Center and Complaint Data Trends

The Bureau reviewed March special education call center data:

56 family contacts received
Most common concerns:
IEP implementation
Placement disputes
Educational benefit
Dispute resolution
10 cases required escalation to bureau consultants

The Bureau stated this data helps guide: technical assistance, guidance documents, and future training priorities

Professional Development & Training Initiatives:

CSDE presented a broad overview of statewide professional development efforts, including: charter school training, early childhood educator training, IEP quality initiatives, MTSS rollout, dyslexia/SLD training, paraeducator supports, and secondary transition resources

Partners mentioned: SERC (State Education Resource Center), RESC Alliance (Regional Education Service Center), and 321 Insight

Training formats included: workshops, online modules, videos, task force, and updated guidance documents

Family Engagement and Parent Resources:

CSDE and SAC discussed improving support for families navigating special education.

Planned or discussed supports: parent-friendly guides, onboarding resources, disability-specific materials, mentor/peer systems, videos and interactive tools, and improved transition support from Birth to Three into school-based services

The council members emphasized that many families currently experience the process as: overwhelming, confusing, and difficult to navigate independently

Adjourn: 1:58 p.m. Tom Cosker motions to adjourn, Jonathan Metcalf seconds, vote unanimous in favor.

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State Advisory Council Meeting Dates/Locations:

Meeting	Date	Time	Location
1.	September 24, 2025	9:00-10:30 am	Virtual Meeting
2.	October 15, 2025	10:00 am-2:00 pm	Legislative Office Building, 300 Capitol Ave #5100, Hartford (Room: 1C)
3.	November 19, 2025	9:00-10:30 am	Virtual Meeting
4.	January 28, 2026	9:00-10:30 am	Virtual Meeting
5.	February 25, 2026	10:30 am -12:00 pm	Virtual Meeting
6.	March 25, 2026	9:30 am-12:30 pm	Lyceum Resource & Conference Center, 227 Lawrence St, Hartford
7.	April 22, 2026	10:00-2:00 pm	Goodwin University, 1 Riverside Drive, East Hartford
8.	May 20, 2026	9:00-10:30 am	Virtual Meeting