



**JJPOC Meeting Minutes**

February 15, 2024  
2:00-3:30 PM  
LOB – 300 Capitol Avenue Hartford, Room 1E  
Virtual Option Available

**Attendance**

Amy Marracino	Renee Cimino	<b>TYJI Staff</b>
Betty Ann MacDonald	Robyn A. Porter	Brittany LaMarr
Charles Hewes	Sharmese Walcott	Erika Nowakowski
Craig Washington	Tais Ericson	Paul Klee
Jodi Hill-Lilly	Tammy Nguyen O’Dowd	
Lisa P. Sementilli	Thea Montanez	
Maurice Reaves	Toni Walker	
Melanie Dykas	Véron Beaulieu	
Miriam Miller	Vin Duva	
Paul Cicarella		
Ray Dancy		

**Welcome and Introductions**

Representative Toni Walker and Co-Chair Maurice Reaves welcomed all in attendance to the meeting.

**Acceptance of JJPOC Meeting Minutes**

Representative Toni Walker sought a motion for the approval of the January 2024 meeting minutes. A correction was requested to strike “Education Workgroup” and replace it with “Incarceration Workgroup” under the *Incarceration Workgroup, Reentry Subgroup* section of the *JJPOC 2024 Recommendations Vote*. The correction was duly noted. Following the correction, the motion was moved, seconded, and unanimously approved.

**Overview of Meeting and Announcements**



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Erika Nowakowski welcomed everyone to the meeting and provided an overview of the agenda. The meeting agenda contained two presentations; the first presentation was presented by Dr. Charlene Russell-Tucker, Commissioner for the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) and John Frassinelli, Division Director for CSDE to update the JJPOC on school accountability, attendance, and discipline. The second presentation was presented by Dr. Glen Worthy, Education Administrator; John Tarka, Assistant Superintendent; and Tina Mitchell, Assistant Superintendent on the Department of Children and Families (DCF), Juvenile Justice Education Unit (JJEU) School Accountability Report.

### **Education Update on School Accountability, Attendance, and Discipline**

Dr. Charlene Russell-Tucker thanked the JJPOC for providing the opportunity to present and began by introducing Thomas Anderson, Superintendent of East Hartford Public Schools. Following this, John Frassinelli, the Division Director for CSDE provided an outline of the presentation which covered (a) Connecticut accountability system results, (b) attendance/chronic absenteeism results and initiatives, (c) school discipline data and actions, (d) and social-emotional and behavioral supports.

Ajit Gopalakrishnan presented on the accountability system results. The accountability system is a holistic system that analyzes multiple indicators of student engagement and student outcomes while omitting certain test scores. Reporting results from the 2022-2023 school year, chronic absenteeism has declined for the first time since the pandemic. While chronic absenteeism numbers are still significantly high, it is beginning to trend downwards. Math and science scores have improved, postsecondary readiness and six-year graduation rates for students with high needs have improved, and participation in art courses has increased. Eight Focus schools and two Turnaround schools who receive state support have exited their classification which indicates that they have demonstrated continuous improvement. 153 schools of Distinction were announced, including 38 schools within Alliance Districts which means that schools that are high performing or demonstrating high growth exist in districts across the state.

While there have been several improvements across school districts, challenges still remain. Academic achievement remains lower than pre-pandemic levels and growth has slowed. On-Track to high school graduation statistics, which analyzes students in ninth grade to determine if they are earning requisite credits (six credits) to predict if they will graduate on-time, remains low and four-year graduation rate has declined for the first time after roughly ten years of continuous growth. Additionally, postsecondary entrance, which includes two-year college programs, certificate programs, as well as four-year college programs, has declined since the pandemic, most notably for low-income families, and physical fitness has declined and also is below pre-pandemic levels.

Statistics for On-Track graduation rates in ninth graders shows a 3.8% decrease in students who do not have high needs earning adequate full-year credits since the 2018-2019 school year from 96.8% to 93.0%. For students with high needs, which is classified as a student



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who is either an English second language (ESL) student, a student with a disability, or a student from a low-income family, there has been a 5.8% decrease over the same time period from 79.7% to 73.9%. This decline represents an early indication of disconnection, especially for high needs students.

This data is inputted into EdSight Secure, a secure platform that provides authorized district users with longitudinal, student-level data (enrollment, demographics, attendance, discipline, test scores, FAFSA, etc.) to provide early identification of students who may need support to remain On-Track by the end of grade nine. Factors used to identify students that may need support include attendance, behavior, course performance, mobility, test scores, and other student/district characteristics.

Several statewide initiatives to strengthen postsecondary success are in place including (a) the Automatic Admission Program which allows students in the top 30% of high school GPA to seek automatic admission, (b) free community college, (c) dual credit grants which allow students to earn college credits while still in high school, (d) the Aspiring Educators Diversity Scholarship Program, and (e) the Connecticut FAFSA Challenge.

The Chronic Absenteeism trend from the 2018-2019 school year through October 2023, indicates a 7.4% increase in chronic absenteeism overall for all students. In 2018-2019, the chronic absenteeism rate was 10.4%. This rate increased to as high as 23.7% in 2021-2022 and as of October 2023, has decreased to 17.8%. For students with high needs, the chronic absenteeism rate was 16.1% in 2018-2019. This rate increased to a high of 34.0% in 2021-2022 and since then has decreased to 23.8%. A student is considered “in attendance” if they were present for at least half of the instructional school day and is considered “chronically absent” if they miss at least ten percent of school days.

Initiatives that CSDE has undertaken to improve attendance include (a) Talk Tuesdays, (b) High School Bright Spots, (c) the Learner Engagement and Attendance Program (LEAP), (d) “School is Better with You” attendance awareness campaign, and (e) targeted supports for Alliance Districts.

*Talk Tuesdays* are one-hour, biweekly sessions that allow state agency, district, and school staff to engage in open dialogue around student attendance and engagement. Objectives include remaining up-to-date on state policies and practices, sharing successes, trouble-shooting concerns, and providing support. *Bright Spots* briefs aim to improve high school student attendance by providing an in-depth look at cross-cutting themes, ongoing challenges, recommendations, and summaries of schools that were interviewed. This brief helps shift the narrative that when students are absent, the concerns lie with them and instead begins to discuss the external factors attributed to chronic absenteeism. *LEAP* is a DSDE research-based, relational home visit model that has been proven to increase student attendance and family engagement. Fourteen districts receive LEAP funding and to date, there have been 54,806 visits targeting 27,804 students. For the 2023-2024 school year, there have been 17,603 visits with 10,612



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students. Data from the CCERC study on the LEAP program found that in-person visit had a greater impact on attendance than virtual visits or phone calls. One month following an initial home visit, there is a 4%-point increase in attendance. Six months following an initial home visit, there is a 10%-point increase for Pre-K through grade five and a 20%-point increase for grades six through twelve. These results did not differ based on the title of the person conducting the home visit or whether or not the home visitor was staff from the school or from a community-based organization. Twelve of the fourteen LEAP districts report lower chronic absenteeism for the 2022-2023 school year as compared to the 2021-2022 school year. The “*School is Better with You*” social media campaign aims to remind students about the importance of in-person learning.

Thomas Anderson, the Superintendent of East Hartford Public Schools briefly mentioned the importance of a humanistic approach to chronic absenteeism. He stated that building trust and improving relationships with families is vitally important to addressing chronic absenteeism and getting parents to understand that two absences a month can have wide-ranging consequences.

### *2023 School Discipline Data*

School discipline data for all school districts in Connecticut encapsulates three types of sanctions; in-school suspension (ISS), out-of-school suspension (OSS), and expulsion (EXP). Since the pandemic, rates of ISS have decreased and rates of OSS and EXP have increased. During the 2018-2019 school year there were 48,431 in-school suspensions, 32,681 out-of-school suspensions, and 745 expulsions. During the 2022-2023 school year, there were 44,820 in-school suspensions, 37,376 out-of-school suspensions, and 979 expulsions.

The three highest number of incidents reported by schools for the 2022-2023 school year were school policy violations (41,785), physical and verbal confrontation (20,616), and personally threatening behavior (8,755). Since the 2018-2019 school year, only school policy violations have decreased (-4.8%). Weapons, physical and verbal confrontation, and drugs, alcohol, and tobacco incident types have the highest rate increase since the 2018-2019 school year.

Suspension rates by race/ethnicity indicate that 7.0% of all students, or roughly one in fourteen, received a suspension during the 2022-2023 school year. When disaggregated by race, punitive disparities become present. For the 2022-2023 school year, 13.2% of Black or African American students, 9.5% of Hispanic/Latino students, and 4.3% of White students received at least one suspension.

The total number of sanctions reported for students in Pre-K through grade two have decreased since the pandemic but continue to steadily increase. In 2018-2019, there were 1,032 reported instances of ISS and 894 reported instances of OSS. These numbers decreased to 395 and 599 respectively in 2021-2022 but increase to 560 and 738 in 2023-2023. There have been no expulsions reported since the 2015-2016 school year for this grade range. The number of



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students that have been suspended or expelled in Pre-K through grade 2 have decreased slightly for certain grades. In 2018-2019, 7 Pre-K students, 198 Kindergarten students, 337 students in grade one, and 504 students in grade two were suspended/expelled. In 2022-2023, 0 Pre-K students, 197 Kindergarten students, 202 students in grade one, and 354 students in grade two were suspended/expelled.

The School Discipline Collaborative, which was established by CSDE in 2018, is working to address the issue of school discipline. They are currently studying current school discipline practices, including practices that lead to students becoming justice-involved. By July 1, 2024, the School Discipline Collaborative will submit a report to the joint standing committee of the General Assembly regarding results of this study and recommendations for reform. They intend to develop strategies to reduce OSS and expulsion rates of students in Pre-K through grade two and they also intend to identify evidence-based and developmentally appropriate definitions and examples of conduct that is violent or sexual in nature that can lead to OSS for students in Pre-K through grade two.

Following the presentation, questions were raised and brief discussions were held regarding the material that was presented. There was discussion surrounding how the information and data gathered here is used to benefit the school districts. Since the pandemic, data on school discipline and chronic absenteeism is generated on a monthly basis, rather than a yearly basis, to foster a more proactive approach to these issues. By analyzing the data monthly, problematic situations that arise can be addressed more quickly, resulting in supports being provided much sooner than in previous years. Additionally, the data is used to categorize districts into four tiers. Each tier focuses closely on unique factors that allow for interventions to be put in place that target the districts immediate needs.

A question was raised regarding how CSDE partners with local and state agencies to address the more complex needs students have as they are identified within the LEAP program. Partnerships with agencies such as the Department of Social Services (DSS) and the Department of Administrative Services (DAS) were established during the pandemic to address food insecurity needs and internet connectivity issues. Furthermore; multiple home visits occur to identify what the individual needs are of each family and to provide them with the supports and services that are integral to getting the students back into school on a regular basis. Additional agency partnerships include the Office of Early Childhood, Department of Housing, and more.

### **DCF-JJEU 2024 School Accountability Report**

The agenda for the School Accountability Report presentation includes (a) a review of the work, (b) star assessment overview, (c) star reading and math data, (d) reentry/transition, (e) building a network of schools, and (f) recommendations for system improvements. The work conducted is split into four sectors: Data and Academic Accountability Measures, Reentry/Transition, Creating a Network of Schools to Support Teachers and Administrative Effectiveness, and Support for Vocational Training.



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The Star Assessment, which is used by all facilities, is used to help answer questions about students' growth and achievement and to identify students who are in need of additional supports to meet their goals. The Star Assessment is used by seven facilities; Journey House, Hartford Detention, Hamden CPA, Hartford CPA, Bridgeport, CJR, and Manson Youth Institute. 95% of all students have been tested with 72% being identified as special education students. Star Assessment data was compiled from Manson Youth Institute which shows that from June 2023 to October 2023, 57% of students showed growth in reading and 51% of students showed growth in math.

Combining DOC and CSSD performance data indicates that for math, 52% of students are in need of urgent intervention, 31% are in need of intervention, 7% are on watch, and 10% are at or above benchmark. Upon analyzing data for reading performance, it becomes evident that 69% of students are in need of urgent intervention, 12% are in need of intervention, 10% are on watch, and 9% are at or above benchmark.

There are eight Pupil Service Specialists (PSS) that work with students to prepare them for reentry into their home community. The process by which Pupil Service Specialists operate is broken up into four phases. *Phase one* consists of the intake process while the student is in detention. The Pupil Service Specialist reviews all educational records and attends all MDT and PPT meetings. *Phase two* is the planning phase for the students release and reentry into the community. This phase begins the setup process for the JJEU Reentry Circle. The Specialist connects with community and family supports and identifies school supports that are needed, facilitates meetings between care providers, the student, and their family, and meets weekly with the student and their family in preparation for their release. Phase three is when the student is released and reenters their community. The Specialist ensure that the students school schedule is aligned with the students credits and transcripts, that IEP and 504 plans are implemented properly, and that the student has a schedule of all meetings with support staff. *Phase four* consists of monitoring the students' progress and making any needed modifications to the service plan based off of evolving needs. Advocacy, support, and an emphasis on reducing recidivism and student engagement are the main areas of focus in this phase.

Between August and December 2023, PSS's have held 42 reentry/transition meetings. On average, there were six correspondences between the PSS and the receiving school district regarding reentry/transition to home communities. Throughout these correspondences, the PSS's provided the district with advance notice of possible release dates, progress made in credit recovery, and assistance with parent outreach.

There are three key areas of emphasis throughout the JJEU Reentry Circle Process. (1) Embracing the student at their receiving school to ensure there is no negative stigma and that the process feels restorative in nature, (2) ensuring the student knows their daily support network in the school community, and (3) addressing any logistical barriers such as transportation scheduling, and time management, as well as connecting all stakeholders for the student's daily engagement in education.



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Between March and December 2023, PSS's engage with families, on average, four times per month. During this same time period, PSS's engaged with families of students in Regions and MYI 193 times and 123 respectively, prior to release. Following release, PSS's engaged with Regions families 198 times and with MYI families 116 times.

Over a ten-month period, Regions PSS's connected with their students' community supports, which include Juvenile Probation Officers, project longevity, mentors, DMHAS, and more, three times per months, on average. Over an eight-month period, MYI PSS's connected to students' community supports, on average, four times per months. Regions and MYI PSS's are, on average, corresponding with receiving schools four times per month. These connections are in preparation for the students release into the community and building their school community so that they are established by the time the student is released.

Creating a network of schools to support teachers and administrator's effectiveness is the main goal of the PSS program. Monthly network meetings to update and discuss priorities, and professional learning sessions are held. Learning Walks, which monitor instruction provided to students, allows for a tight feedback loop and future planning. Standing weekly, biweekly, and monthly meetings with teachers, CPO's, clinicians, counselors, administrators, and CSSD staff are continually taking place to further emphasize the creation of supportive networks for teachers and administrators.

### *Recommendations*

The presentation outlines two barriers and one need to further increasing the success of the program. The first barrier discussed was students entering the facilities far below grade level in reading and math. To address this, JJEU recommends (a) extending the school day to allow for more reading and math intervention, (b) exploring the possibility of obtaining a specialized teaching staff for reading and math intervention, including scheduling modification for intervention periods, and (c) implementing Professional Learning Communities with emphasis on response to intervention and scientific based instructional strategies. The second barrier discussed was how students are entering the facilities over-age and under-credited. To rectify this concern, the JJEU recommends a uniform credit recovery program that is available to all students in all facilities. Further, they recommend after-school programming for further credit attainment, and implementing credit recovery programs during the summer months as well, similar to school districts ESY program. Finally, JJEU identified the need for consistent collaboration with districts in the State regarding student reentry. It is being recommended that collaboration opportunities between all districts regarding student reentry is continued and that additional opportunities for training and relationship building between already identified district reentry liaisons and transition specialists are provided as well as expanding to smaller districts where there are currently no identified reentry liaisons.



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**Next Meeting**

Hybrid Model Option (In-person and available over Zoom)

March 21, 2024

2:00-3:30PM