

THIS MEETING DID NOT CONTAIN A PRESENTATION

JJPOC Education Workgroup Meeting Summary

10/27/2025

1:00-2:30

Web Based Meeting- Zoom

Attendance

Agata-Raszczyk Lawska	John Frassenelli	Nancy DeCrescenzo	TYJI Staff
Ait Gopalakrishnan	John Saccu	Sadie Witherspoon	Andrew Zhebrak
Amy Vatner	John Tarka	Shirley Ellis-West	Brittany Lamarr
Andrew Feinstein	Kari Sullivan Custer	Simone Harris	Erika Nowakowski
Bryan Klimkiewicz	Kathryn Meyer	Tina Mitchell	Paul Klee
Dominique Winston	Kim Traverso	Victor Jones	
Eilsabeth Cannata	Kylie Heneghan	Zoe Masters	
Erica Bromley	Lillian Olanrewaju		
Fran Rabinowitz	Lisa Ariola-Simoe		
Glen Worthy	Lisa Simone		

Meeting Objectives:

The Education Workgroup discussed potential recommendations. The first included proposing free public transportation for all K–12 students in Connecticut. An internal JJPOC recommendation directs CSDE to analyze statewide expulsions by March 1, 2026, including detailed data on causes, timelines, and educational outcomes. Additional proposals under discussion focus on students with disabilities, including mandated screening at first court contact, trauma-informed training for staff, diversion programs, and transportation policies to reduce unnecessary police involvement.

Meeting Summary:

1) Transportation Recommendation

- There is a comment noting that in surrounding states, students have free access to public transportation, while Connecticut's disparities still persist. Access to a bus pass could open opportunities for youth in underserved communities that they otherwise would not have access to.
- There is a comment addressing the dimension of security and safety, as the youth in most need of the bus passes live in unsafe areas, discouraging them from walking to school.

University of New Haven

- There is a question asking if there is a cost figure for the recommendation?
 - Not currently, but there is discussion regarding why DOT was not in support of this Bill in the prior session.
 - DOT perceives it as a revenue loss, but there is a point raised that it would expand access for youth that currently cannot afford the cost of the fare, thus not impacting the revenue acquired from the fares.
 - There is a point raised that there would be a cost, as DOT would send additional funds to the bus company, indicating higher costs.
 - Next steps would include communicating with legislators on the Appropriations Committee and OLR
 - There is a question on if this applies to the entire state, or across specific cities?
 - At this point just cities, as the 2-mile limitation only exists within urban areas, though it's worth considering smaller cities as well.
 - There is a comment on the necessity to acquire factsheets from SB 1243, and that there may be additional administrative costs for this measure, as there would be new routes and stops.
 - There is a comment noting that the inclusion of the free transport should be treated as an investment into Connecticut's future, and this program could make the difference between a child missing school, and a child ready to learn
 - There is a comment for emphasizing after school opportunities on framing this issue, as more youth would be able to participate in them without transit fare.
- 2) The recommendations under discussion for students with disabilities include requiring screening for intellectual, learning, and behavioral disabilities at the first point of juvenile court contact, with mandatory linkage to IDEA services when appropriate. Members also discussed funding trauma-informed training for teachers, officers, and probation staff, and expanding diversion programs that incorporate academic remediation, mentorship, and vocational skill-building for youth with special needs. Staff working with these students should be trained in evidence-based, problem-solving behavioral models, with clear policies ensuring appropriate personnel are available on school transportation to prevent unnecessary police involvement.
- There is a comment noting that a significant portion of youth who encounter the juvenile justice system also have disabilities, yet Connecticut's educational and juvenile systems continue to function in silos. Members emphasized that improved coordination between special education procedures and justice processes could identify needs earlier, prevent escalation, reduce arrests, and create pathways for intervention long before a young person enters the system.

- There is a comment explaining that behavioral challenges are frequently tied to underlying disabilities, particularly emotional disturbance, ADHD, autism spectrum disorders, and trauma-related conditions. Members note that schools often respond to behaviors with discipline rather than support, which results in a cycle of exclusion, suspension, and ultimately court referral. Several members state that without understanding the disability-related roots of certain behaviors, punitive approaches almost always worsen the situation.
- There is a question asking if disability related screenings should occur at a youth's first interaction with police or juvenile court?
 - A screener could help identify students who were previously undiagnosed or who have unmet needs contributing to the behavior that resulted in an arrest or referral.
 - Screenings conducted during moments of crisis may not capture an accurate picture of a student's functioning.
 - It is unclear who would conduct the screening, whether it would consist of police, probation officers, school staff, or contracted clinicians, and what training they would have to ensure reliability.
 - Schools often are not even notified of initial police contact unless the incident occurred on school grounds, raising questions about communication and data-sharing infrastructure.
 - A universal screening requirement could unintentionally conflict with existing PPT/IEP timelines, which were designed to ensure that evaluations occur under stable conditions.
 - There is a comment suggesting that perhaps the most feasible approach is to require an automatic PPT referral upon a student's return to school after any arrest or juvenile court involvement, unless a PPT has already been held recently. Members indicate strong interest in exploring a statutory provision that would treat justice involvement as a formal "trigger" for consideration of special education eligibility
- There is a question asking if the group should advance recommendations for trauma informed and deescalation training for educators?
 - There is a comment that many districts already train specialized staff, including school psychologists, social workers, behavior specialists, and crisis team members, but general education teachers, who are often the first adults involved in day-to-day behavioral incidents, frequently do not receive this specialized training
 - A statewide, evidence-based training requirement could reduce unnecessary suspensions and improve behavior support in general education classrooms.

- However, training mandates without implementation support or accountability measures often fail to change practice.
 - Effective training must emphasize non-punitive strategies, relationship-building, verbal intervention techniques, environmental modifications, and culturally responsive behavior supports.
 - Members note that the most serious behavior escalations typically begin with small misunderstandings or unmet needs in the classroom. Therefore, early intervention by trained general educators could prevent later crises.
 - There is a comment that current state law allows districts to choose any approved training model, resulting in wide disparities in quality. Some districts use research-supported systems while others rely on outdated or punitive models. Members express interest in the state developing a menu of vetted, no-cost trainings accessible to districts.
- There is a question on if diversion programs should be required to include academic remediation, vocational training, and mentorship for youth with disabilities?
 - Diversion providers generally want to offer academic or skill-building supports but the lack the sustainable funding to do so
 - Many youth entering diversion programs have significant gaps in literacy, numeracy, or executive functioning, and without structured support they are likely to reoffend or miss diversion requirements
 - Implementing such a model would require collaboration with JBCSSD, as schools do not administer these programs
 - A more formalized model could help youth succeed academically while addressing the underlying conditions that contribute to justice system involvement.
 - Funding remains a major obstacle, and members highlight the need for additional conversations about cost structures and possible state support.
- **There is a question on what concerns exist regarding special education transportation and the high number of police calls originating from buses?**
 - There is a comment explaining that many behavioral incidents begin on school buses, particularly for students with emotional and behavioral disabilities, because buses often lack trained staff, clear protocols, or capacity to intervene early.

- There is discussion that private transportation contractors frequently call the police for behaviors that should be addressed through behavioral supports, crisis intervention, or individualized planning.
- Drivers are typically not trained in trauma-informed practices or de-escalation.
- School districts often believe that the transportation company is responsible for handling incidents, while transportation companies believe these matters fall under district policy. This results in gaps where no adult with appropriate training is accountable.
- Because most districts contract transportation services, schools have limited authority unless the state sets universal requirements for contractors serving students with disabilities.
- There is a comment highlighting the frequency of cases in which students with behavioral disabilities are suspended or arrested due to behavior that occurred during transport. Members describe instances where a student's IEP clearly required behavioral supports that were not implemented on the bus, resulting in preventable crisis
- There is a comment proposing that the Workgroup explore statutory requirements for
 - Baseline trauma-informed and behavior-support training for all transportation staff serving students with disabilities.
 - Clear protocols governing responses to behavioral incidents on buses, including mandatory communication with parents and schools before involvement of police.
 - Explicit prohibitions on unnecessary police contact arising from predictable disability-related behaviors.
- There is a question on if there is research indicating how many incidents on school buses require police involvement?
 - While statewide data is limited, there is some anecdotal evidence from advocates, attorneys, and families suggests a large number of juvenile referrals originate with transportation issues.
 - National studies indicate that students with disabilities, particularly those with emotional or developmental disabilities, experience a disproportionate number of disciplinary actions during school transportation.
 - Several members express interest in seeking data from SDE and the Judicial Branch to better quantify the issue, possibly through the Workgroup's upcoming SDE data request.
- There is a question regarding the feasibility of disability related legislation this session?

- A full statewide overhaul of trauma-informed training may be too complex for this session, given cost and implementation challenges.
- Mandatory disability screening at first court contact requires significantly more research, including legal, procedural, and resource considerations.
- Transportation-related reforms appear the most actionable, particularly because they address a clear problem area with immediate juvenile-justice implications and can be implemented through contractor requirements without disrupting district operations.
- Some members suggest focusing first on transportation and data transparency while continuing to develop longer-term proposals for training and diversion support
- There is a comment reminding the group that any recommendations must directly connect to the Workgroup's mission under JJPOC—meaning proposed changes must demonstrably influence juvenile justice outcomes, not simply general education practice.

Next Meeting: 11/24/25

