

Draft JJPOC Education Workgroup Meeting

November 24th, 2025, 2:00 – 3:30 PM

Zoom

1. JJPOC Education Workgroup Recommendations Discussion
 - a) Transportation Recommendation
 - b) Trauma Informed and Evidence Based Models Recommendation
2. Draft on Recommendations Report and Timeline
3. Next Meeting: TBD by Workgroup Chairs based on Recommendations Report and Timeline



Draft Transportation Recommendation for the JJPOC Education Workgroup

Problem Statement

Enshrined within state law, Connecticut requires each local or regional board of education to provide transportation to school-aged children wherever reasonable and desirable, identifying transportation as a necessary “school accommodation” that boards must supply as part of their obligation to the communities they serve. For most urban public school districts in Connecticut, high school students are only eligible for school bus transportation if they live more than two miles from school, based on the assumption that a student can safely walk or otherwise secure transportation within that radius. This standard fails to acknowledge that many youth reside in some of the most dangerous communities in Connecticut and may feel unsafe walking to and from school.

When youth are able to attend school consistently, they have opportunities to build positive interpersonal relationships and engage in structured, pro-social activities, which reduces the risk of delinquent behavior. Improving school attendance rates may be a key causal factor in lowering youth involvement in delinquency. By accessing transportation, attending classes, and participating in supportive extracurricular or community programs, students at risk of disconnection can decrease their likelihood of entering the juvenile justice system altogether.

Earlier this school year, a 13-year-old girl was sexually assaulted while walking to Bassick High School. After the school relocated to the University of Bridgeport campus, the route changed, forcing students to travel through a raised railroad track and an industrial district, an isolated area lacking pedestrian traffic and exposing youth to unnecessary risk. Under Bridgeport ISD’s two-mile walking policy, students must walk long distances through unsafe zones without transportation support, disproportionately affecting under-resourced communities. This incident could have been prevented had the student had access to a public bus line. Every student deserves a safe commute to school without navigating avoidable dangers.

Urban neighborhoods outside the two-mile radius lack coverage by traditional school bus lines, disproportionately impacting under resourced communities and contributing to chronic absenteeism and juvenile delinquency. CT Transit currently offers youth ages 0–18 a discounted fare of \$1.40 per ride; weekly usage amounts to roughly \$14, or \$504 annually, excluding additional trips for extracurricular activities, community centers, social services, jobs, and internships. While insignificant for some families, \$504 is a significant hurdle for families in Connecticut’s most economically disadvantaged communities. About one quarter of residents in Hartford, Bridgeport, Waterbury, and New Haven live at or below the poverty line, and roughly one quarter of households lack access to a personal vehicle. Reducing the cost burden would help youth attend school and remain engaged.



Ensuring youth mobility is central to addressing disparities in educational access. Students require transportation to academic opportunities, after school programs, internships, jobs, and community activities. Without affordable mobility, many face increased risk of long-term disconnection. The 2024 Disconnected Youth Report highlighted how these trends disproportionately affect under resourced areas. Providing youth with free, universal access to public transportation is a necessary step toward addressing chronic absenteeism and disconnection in inner city schools, enabling inner city youth to actualize their full social and academic potential.

Proposed Solution

Allowing students to access public bus lines before and after school hours would increase freedom and opportunity to explore personal interests, build social connections, and participate in academic support, strengthening engagement and graduation likelihood. The State of Connecticut should ensure all high school-aged youth residing in underprivileged districts have free access to public transportation systems including buses, trains, and other qualifying services. Removing cost barriers would unlock human capital by enabling students to build stronger peer connections, engage in opportunities beyond the classroom, and access resources without transportation serving as a limiting factor.

Literature Review

Providing free transit passes to students produces multiple downstream benefits that positively impact educational outcomes, families, and communities. The most immediate effect is increased attendance and mobility, allowing access to opportunities previously limited by transportation barriers. Expanded access supports enrichment, extracurricular participation, and community engagement such as employment or involvement in youth programs, collectively increasing on-time graduation and post-secondary enrollment while reducing risks associated with chronic absenteeism, including teen pregnancy, criminal activity, and substance abuse. Families benefit from increased disposable income and reduced transportation costs. Over time, these effects can strengthen financial stability and improve neighborhoods. This framework aligns with the social determinants of health model, as improving educational access can uplift interconnected domains affecting quality of life.

In 2022, Governor Lamont eliminated bus fares statewide using federal funds to offset pandemic-related challenges. Ridership rose sharply: 52% in Hartford, 37% in New Haven, 28% in Waterbury, and 40% in Stamford. When fares were reinstated, ridership dropped significantly. These results indicate ridership would rise again if fares were removed, especially among populations most impacted by transportation costs.



Students in New Haven and Hartford later secured ARPA funding for high school transit passes. Peak usage occurred at 7:00 AM and 3:00 PM on weekdays, indicating students used the passes for school commute. Additional data from student testimony is forthcoming. Several metropolitan areas instituted similar policies with positive outcomes. Sacramento's "RydeFreeRT" program launched in 2019, enabling all 275,000 K–12 youth within SacRT's service area to access light rail and bus services at no cost. Student ridership rose significantly, with youth becoming one of the most price-impacted groups. UT Austin researchers found significant increases in students using regional transit for commuting and broader community mobility; 41% reported using transit for destinations beyond school. Lower-income youth participated most. However, outreach gaps decreased ridership among Spanish-speaking youth, a factor Connecticut must consider.

Connecticut's climate intensifies the need for accessible transit. Winter temperatures often fall below freezing, and research shows students are 34% more likely to miss school on days below 30°F. Under current policy, students within the two-mile radius, especially those without cars, may walk 40 minutes in freezing temperatures. Eliminating transportation barriers could improve absenteeism more than observed in Sacramento.

Factors for Eligibility

As Connecticut considers program design, several variables emerge: chronic absenteeism; free/reduced-price lunch eligibility; car-ownership rates; and population density thresholds indicating urban transit availability. These can be used in either a simple pass/fail model or a composite index. Additional variables, local crime rates, environmental hazards, Title I eligibility, prevalence of single-parent households, could strengthen the index but add complexity.

Developing a full index requires substantial data work but may strengthen credibility with policymakers and DOT. SB 1243's broad scope previously raised DOT concerns about fiscal impact. Narrowing eligibility to student (which only comprise of 8% of transit users) and providing a clear, data-driven framework may reduce opposition. The proposed program would carry a smaller fiscal note than SB 1243's estimated \$3 million.

Potential Objections

Testimony on SB 1243 identified several concerns related to implementing a statewide fare-free transit program. Although the current recommendation is far narrower, limited only to high-school students in qualifying municipalities, the issues raised in earlier testimony still provide useful context.

One concern involved the absence of such a program from the proposed 2026–2027 biennial budget, which raised questions about financial feasibility. Revenue loss was cited as a challenge for both CTtransit services and the twelve independent transit districts, particularly



given that earlier fare-free initiatives relied on one-time federal relief funds to cover funding gaps. At the same time, available data indicates that students comprise a relatively small share of transit revenue: youth fares are \$1.40, and riders ages 5–17 make up approximately 6% of daily ridership. A prior OFA estimate suggested that providing free transportation to all youth statewide would cost roughly \$3 million. A program limited to high school students, designed with needs based eligibility and geographic restrictions, would likely carry substantially lower costs.

Another issue raised was the possibility of service reductions if fare revenue declined. However, only 8% of riders use the bus for school transportation, suggesting that students do not represent a major share of operating revenue. More detailed youth-fare revenue data would allow for a clearer assessment of potential impacts.

The structure of Connecticut's transit network was also noted as a factor. CTtransit is directly state operated, while twelve additional transit districts function independently with their own fare structures, fare policies, and service contracts. Despite this variation, prior statewide programs such as U-Pass successfully negotiated participation with all districts, indicating that coordinated implementation is possible. Understanding student ridership levels in each district would assist in projecting program costs more accurately.

Another consideration involved ADA paratransit requirements. Federal regulations mandate that paratransit fares be tied to fixed-route fares and that eligible populations receive equivalent benefits. Extending fare-free service to a defined student population could therefore increase demand and associated expenses, though the number of high-school students who qualify for paratransit is likely limited.

Finally, the introduction of new discount fare categories requires compliance with federal processes, including a financial impact analysis, identification of a funding mechanism to replace lost revenue, a Title VI fare equity analysis, and public hearings. Reviewing how prior statewide fare programs completed these steps could help clarify procedural expectations for a more targeted high-school initiative.

If adopted in 2025–2026, Connecticut would be the *first state* to ensure all high school aged youth in under-resourced districts can access transit free of charge. While no statewide precedent exists, smaller-scale and temporary programs offer relevant evidence.

The state could project reduced rates of chronic absenteeism, increased rates of academic engagement, and improvements in mobility within impacted school districts. This would open doors to opportunities previously restricted by transportation barriers. Expanded access enables participation in enrichment activities, extracurricular programs, and community engagement such as employment or youth initiatives. Collectively, these factors promote on-time graduation and post-secondary enrollment while reducing risks



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linked to chronic absenteeism, including teen pregnancy, criminal involvement, and substance use.

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Transportation Recommendation 1	Workgroup Feedback and Revision
(A) Effective July 1, 2027, the Commissioner of Education, in consultation with the Commissioner of Transportation, provide a grant-in-aid to local and regional boards of education for the purpose of purchasing bus passes for students enrolled in grades nine to twelve, inclusive, for use on state-owned or state-controlled public bus transportation services. (B) Not later than October 1, 2026, the Commissioner of Education, in consultation with the Commissioner of Transportation, shall submit an implementation plan to the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee. Such plan should include, but need not be limited to, criteria for determining qualifying school districts, inclusive of: (1) that the district is located within an urban area, as defined by the United States Census Bureau; (2) that the district has an above-average chronic absenteeism rate for the 2024– 2025 school year, as compared to the statewide average; (3) that the district has an above-average rate of eligibility for free or reduced-price school lunch, as compared to the statewide average; and (4) that the district has access to public transportation during the two-hour period immediately preceding the start of the regular school day; and the four-hour period immediately following the end of the regular school day. (C) The Department of Education, in consultation with the Department of Transportation, shall develop and maintain an implementation and data-tracking system for the program established under this section. Local and regional boards of education participating in the program shall report all required data annually to the Department of Education, which shall, in turn, submit such data and an annual summary report to the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee.	



Justification for Option 1: This language mirrors the successful implementation of the pilot program created through HB 5523, which was sourced through temporary ARPA funds. Through this new framework, individual qualifying school districts could negotiate with transit districts over determining the quantity of bus passes necessary for under-resourced youth. Prior to the passage of this language, the Education Workgroup would determine the qualifying school districts and estimate the projected demand for each student that could qualify for this program. If we could propose a funding framework to these school boards prior to the start of session, we could reuse the language from the legislation.

Transportation Recommendation 2

Workgroup Feedback and Revision

(I) Not later than August 1, 2026, the Commissioner of Transportation, in consultation with the Commissioner of Education, shall expand the U-Pass program to include eligible high school students in order to ensure equitable access to public transportation services for underprivileged youth. Under this expansion, free access to bus and rail transportation services shall be provided to all high school students who reside in any school district that meets all of the following criteria

1. **(A)** The district is located within an urban area, as defined by the United States Census Bureau;
2. **(B)** The district has an above average chronic absenteeism rate for the 2024–2025 school year, as compared to the statewide average;
3. **(C)** The district has an above average rate of eligibility for free or reduced-price school lunch, as compared to the statewide average; and
4. **(D)** The district has an above average proportion of single-vehicle households or car-free households, as compared to the statewide average.

The commissioner may negotiate and enter into agreements with any school district, board of education or educational institution to provide access to public transportation services pursuant to this subsection, on such terms and conditions, and in return for such compensation or reimbursement, as the commissioner deems necessary or advisable. The commissioner may take all actions necessary to



implement and administer the program established under this subsection.	
Justification: Connecticut already operates the U-Pass program for public college and university students, charging them a \$40 per semester fee in exchange for unlimited statewide transit access. While effective, the program currently benefits students who typically come from significantly wealthier families (median parental income at UConn is \$119,760) compared to the high school students who would be served under this proposal. This language was lifted from the Department of Transportation's attempt to give the statutory authority to contract with private Universities, as under the current language (find it) the DOT lacks this ability. The language would also compel the commissioner to create and administer this program by incorporating it as part of their professional responsibilities, enforced through a time sensitive schedule.	
Transportation Recommendation 3	Workgroup Feedback and Revision
Effective July 1, 2026, All high school students who reside in any school district that meet all of the following criteria shall be exempt from payment of the lawful fare for any state-owned or state-controlled bus public transportation service, provided such student presents to an employee of the Department of Transportation, a third-party contractor with fare inspection duties, or the operator of such bus, as applicable, a valid student identification card issued by the local or regional board of education or such other credential as the Commissioner of Transportation may approve: 1. (A) The district is located within an urban area, as defined by the United States Census Bureau; 2. (B) The district has an above average chronic absenteeism rate for the 2024–2025 school year, as compared to the statewide average; 3. (C) The district has an above average rate of eligibility for free or reduced-price school lunch, as compared to the statewide average; and 4. (D) The district has an above average proportion of single-vehicle households or car-free households, as compared to the statewide average.	
Truancy Recommendation 1	Workgroup Feedback and Revisions



Remove Truancy language from CT General Statutes	
Truancy Recommendation 2	Workgroup Feedback and Revisions
Amend Truancy language in CT General Statutes.	
Training Recommendation 1	Workgroup Feedback and Revisions
(1) Trauma-Informed Staff Training- Provide funding for teachers, officers, and probation staff on trauma, disability, and de-escalation best practices.	
Training Recommendation 2	Workgroup Feedback and Revisions
(4) Require staff to be trained in evidence-based models that emphasize problem solving as the primary treatment components (understanding behaviors, behavior plans, appropriate interventions in advance of escalating behaviors).	



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**JJPOC Education Workgroup
November 24th, 2025
2:00 PM – 3:30 PM
Web Based Meeting- Zoom**

Attendance

Agata Raszczyk-Lawska	Kathryn Meyer	Stella Dugue
Andrew Feinstein	Kari Sullivan-Custer	Tina Mitchell
Ann Smith	Kelly Orts	Toni Walker
Amy Vatner	Kim Traverso	Victor Jones
Charles Hewes	Lisa Ariola-Simoes	Vin Duva
Emuna Patterson	Maryann Khan	Virginia Brown
Gwen Samuel	Nancy DeCrescenzo	Zoe Masters
Jeana Bracey	Nieka Thompson	
Joanne Tremblay- Jackson	Olu Oluborode	
John Saccu	Sadie Witherspoon	

TYJI Staff

Andrew Zhebrak
Erika Nowakowski
Paul Klee
Qurana Guy

Meeting Objectives:

The November 24th, 2025 JJPOC Education Workgroup met to discuss and review the recommendations brought forward in the last meeting which included the Transportation Recommendation as well as the Trauma Informed and Evidence Based Models Recommendation. The overall goal of this meeting was to discuss possible recommendations to bring forward and to continue discussions from the last meeting.

Meeting Summary:

- Transportation Recommendation
 - The meeting opened up with a recap discussion on two bills that were introduced to the legislature in 2024, and 2025. One of the bills was around public transportation just for high school students, and the other bill known as Senate Bill 1243 combined public transportation services for veterans and high school students as well as low-income individuals. Senate Bill 1243, which received the most traction, placed responsibility on the Department of Transportation with a deadline of August 1, 2025. The Department of Transportation was tasked with

creating a program that would allow certain public school students grades 9-12 to ride state owned or state-controlled public busses for free or at a reduced rate. Additionally, Senate Bill 1243 included provisions that would have allowed veterans and low income individuals to ride buses at no cost; however, the bill did not pass.

- There are 3 Transportation Recommendations that were drafted. The first recommendation gives the onus to the Commissioner of Ed in consultation with the Commissioner of Transportation to provide a grant in aid to local regional boards of education for the purposes of purchasing bus passes for students enrolled in grades 9-12. There are 4 criteria districts must meet to qualify for services. 1) The district is located within an urban area as defined by the United States Census Bureau. 2) The district has an above average chronic absenteeism rate based on the most recent school academic data. 3) The district has an above average rate of eligibility for free or reduced-price school lunches. 4) The district has access to public transportation. The duration of accessibility for students utilizing these services would be 2 hours before the start of school and 4 hours after the end of school.
- Recommendation 2 would instead give the Commissioner of Transportation the lead in consultation with the Commissioner of Education. The criteria would remain the same as Recommendation 1. Recommendation 2 would also expand on the U Pass.
- Lastly, Recommendation 3 would be a mirror of last year's legislation of Senate Bill 1243. Where Senate Bill 1243 encompassed a wide scale of people (veterans and all low-income people in CT as well as students), our proposal would be to limit services just to high school students ages 14 to 18, up to grade 12 which would greatly lower the financial impact. Students would qualify for these services if they meet all of the following: 1. Chronic absenteeism; 2. Eligibility for free or reduced school lunch; and 3. Living in areas with more carless households than the state average.
 - Regarding Recommendation 3, DOT cited the potential fiscal impact as a key concern.
 - Questions were raised about implementation and responsibility, including whether it would fall to the Department of Transportation, the State Department of Education, or both.
 - A concern to address is that walking to school may be unsafe for some students living within a 2-mile radius because of conditions in the neighborhoods. Providing access to city bus transportation would offer a safer alternative.
 - Would eligible students receive physical or digital bus passes?
 - There was a question as to how much of the funding for the U Pass Program, which allows eligible students attending Universities to use public transportation, is actually used.
- There were 5 conceptualized ideas brought forward in the last meeting which were narrowed down to 2 focus areas. These ideas were around trauma informed

staff training for teachers, police officers, and probation staff just to name a few as well as disability and de-escalation practices. Discussions were around training which emphasizes problem solving as the primary treatment components, understanding behavior, behavior plans, and appropriate interventions in advance of escalating behavior.

- Legislation has been passed regarding trauma-informed training for school staff through the RESCs, although it is limited in scope. Previous legislation did not allow much action on trauma-informed care. Feedback that followed this discussion was:
 - Trauma can impact children's abilities and, in some cases, contribute to learning disabilities.
 - Education systems often do not explore trauma-informed care extensively.
 - Typically, only one staff member (often the social worker) is trained, while teachers – the first to notice issues in the classroom are not trained.
 - There is an interest in addressing this issue in the bill.
- Continuing the discussion on trauma informed training, Jeana Bracey from the Child Health & Development Institute (CHDI), who leads the school and community initiatives, provided an update on the Uplift Model. In 2022, legislation required RESCs to develop a statewide trauma-informed training program for public schools to address trauma. The Uplift Trauma Program was funded through June 2025. While the statewide funding has ended, the Cooperative Educational Services (CES) in Trumbull still offers trauma-informed training for a fee.
- Following this update, Jeana Bracey discussed CHDI's broader work with schools and districts across various initiatives focused on training, early intervention, and support for trauma-informed programs, particularly within comprehensive school mental health. CHDI provides guidance on recognizing basic warning signs and on developing internal systems that connect students to the most appropriate care, whether in-school, out-of-school, through school-based health centers or other services.
- There are 3 primary areas ("buckets") under which CHDI currently provides training. These include the School-Based Diversion Initiative, a program established in 2009 focused on keeping youth out of the juvenile justice system and engaged in school, through which trainings are provided for all school staff; Educate SMART, an online, asynchronous training portal developed by CHDI for districts and schools that includes 11 modules and approximately 20 lessons, including trauma-focused content on recognizing trauma and its effects on learning and behavior, trauma-sensitive schools, and staff wellness; and Kids' Mental Health Training, an asynchronous training portal available through CHDI's website that offers evidence-based training on a range of children's behavioral health topics.
 - Feedback was given that intervention training/preventative training needs to be a huge focus in schools.

- Someone also brought up the point that we can pick the schools that we see are the main feeders for kids within the juvenile justice system, and those populations are the ones we should focus on.

Next Meeting: Dec. 19th, via zoom

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