



Draft JJPOC Education Workgroup Meeting

December 19th, 2025, 12:00 – 1:00 PM

Zoom

1. JJPOC Education Workgroup Recommendations Discussion
 - a) Transportation Recommendation

THIS MEETING DID NOT CONTAIN A PRESENTATION

JJPOC Education Workgroup Meeting Summary

12/19/2025

1:00-2:30

Web Based Meeting- Zoom

Attendance

Agata-Raszczuk Lawska	Kari Sullivan Custer
Amy Vatner	Kim Traverso
Andrew Feinstein	Maryam Khan
Charles Hewes	Tina Mitchell
Emma Patterson	Werner Oyanadel
Erica Bromley	Zoe Masters
Erica Bromley	
Glen Worthy	
Joanne Tremblay Jackson	
John Tarka	

TYJI Staff

Andrew Zhebrak
Erika Nowakowski
Paul Klee

Meeting Objectives:

The Education Workgroup meeting focused on finalizing recommendations for the 2026 Legislative Session, and in clarifying the language for the transportation recommendation. The workgroup discussed clarifying the intent, narrowing the scope, and aligning the program with local district needs. Participants emphasized ensuring equity considerations, maintaining flexibility for districts, and preventing unintended legal or fiscal consequences.

- ☐ Agata Raczkozy-Lewska
- ☐ Amy Vatner
- ☐ Andrew Feinstein
- ☐ Charles Hewes
- ☐ Emma Patterson
- ☐ Erica Bromley
- ☐ Glen Worthy
- ☐ Joanne Tremblay Jackson
- ☐ John Tarka
- ☐

Meeting Summary:

University of New Haven

- The discussion opened with a clear statement that, from the beginning, the agency broadly supports efforts to ensure that students can get to school. Transportation was framed as a foundational access issue that directly affects attendance, engagement, and opportunity. Participants noted that this position is consistent with prior conversations within the Education Workgroup and reflects a shared understanding that transportation barriers remain a persistent challenge for many students.
 - Participants expressed appreciation for amendments proposed by the State Department of Education to the draft recommendation language, particularly amendments addressing equity considerations. SDE indicated that equity concerns stood out early in its review of the proposal and required clearer articulation. The amended language was intended to better define the population being discussed and to avoid misinterpretation that the recommendation was broader in scope than intended.
 - Clarifying questions were raised regarding whether the equity-related amendments were meant to apply across the board or only within the limited context of the pilot.
 - This prompted discussion about the importance of precise statutory and policy language, especially when recommendations may later be translated into legislation or regulatory guidance. Participants emphasized that lack of clarity at this stage could result in confusion during legislative drafting or fiscal analysis.
 - A significant portion of the discussion focused on the pace and scale of any potential expansion of the transportation pilot. It was repeatedly stated that expansion should not occur too far, too fast, or too soon.
 - This caution was not framed as opposition to the concept, but rather as a recognition that pilots are intended to be evaluated incrementally.
 - Participants stressed that expanding prematurely could undermine the ability to assess effectiveness, equity impacts, and cost implications.
 - At the same time, there was acknowledgment that transportation challenges exist statewide. Members noted that many students and families across Connecticut face transportation barriers that extend well beyond the limited population addressed by the pilot.
 - Particular concern was raised regarding eastern Connecticut, where transportation infrastructure gaps are longstanding. It was explicitly stated that the proposed recommendation does not provide a major solution for those regions, and that this limitation should be clearly acknowledged in any justification or supporting materials.
 - Participants emphasized the importance of being transparent about what the recommendation does and does not address.

- Overstating the impact of the pilot was viewed as potentially harmful, both to legislative credibility and to communities whose needs would remain unmet. SDE's amendments were seen as helping to narrow the framing and reduce the risk of such misinterpretation.
- After outlining these issues, the discussion was intentionally paused to allow for broader input. Members were encouraged to ask questions and seek clarification to ensure shared understanding.
 - A key clarification offered during the discussion was that the proposed recommendation does not change existing boards of education transportation obligations. It was stated that providing additional access to transportation, such as free or reduced-cost bus use for a targeted population, does not alter the statutory responsibilities currently assigned to local or regional boards of education.
 - Specific reference was made to Connecticut General Statutes Section 10-186, which governs student transportation obligations. Based on review of this statute, it was expressed that the recommendation does not modify eligibility requirements or mandate new transportation services. Participants noted that questions raised by legislators regarding potential obligation shifts were thoughtful and well-intentioned, but that such concerns may not ultimately be implicated by the proposal as drafted.
 - Further clarification was sought regarding whether advancing the recommendation could unintentionally amend or reinterpret existing law.
 - In response, examples were provided to illustrate how transportation responsibility already varies based on district context. In some districts, particularly those without sidewalks or with rural layouts, all students are transported unless they live immediately adjacent to the school.
 - In contrast, urban districts were discussed where it has long been standard practice for students living within a certain distance to walk to school when sidewalks and pedestrian infrastructure are present. Several participants referenced personal experiences growing up in such districts, noting that these norms have been consistent over time and are widely understood by boards of education and families.
 - It was emphasized that the recommendation is not intended to alter these longstanding practices. Rather, the goal is to supplement existing systems by allowing targeted use of public or municipal transportation where appropriate. SDE noted that its requested amendments, including changes to Section 2 of the draft recommendation language, were specifically intended to clarify

this point and avoid any implication that boards of education would assume new responsibilities.

- Additional examples were shared from smaller and rural districts, where a single late bus was historically built into transportation budgets to accommodate students staying after school.
 - This approach allowed districts to support participation in extracurricular and academic enrichment activities without expanding overall transportation obligations. Similar practices were described for athletic transportation, where districts provide transport to events but families manage return transportation.
- Participants observed that these models mirror current practices in urban districts such as Hartford and Waterbury, where students already rely on a mix of walking, biking, public transportation, and family support. The recommendation was framed as consistent with these mixed transportation models rather than a departure from existing norms.
- The discussion also referenced transportation policies implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic, when certain transportation services were made free of charge. Participants noted that many residents, including young people, took advantage of these opportunities. During periods of free transportation, youth were able to access employment, after-school programs, and community resources that would otherwise have been difficult or impossible to reach.
- Transportation access was repeatedly described as a gateway to opportunity, particularly for young people seeking employment or structured activities after school hours. Participants emphasized that this access can have preventive benefits by increasing engagement and reducing isolation. However, it was reiterated that the recommendation seeks to maintain access rather than create new statutory entitlements.
- SDE reiterated that the proposal in front of the workgroup does not address broader statewide transportation reform. Those issues were explicitly identified as outside the scope of the recommendation. The amendments requested by SDE were intended to reinforce this limitation and ensure that the recommendation is not interpreted as a step toward a statewide mandate.
- Throughout the discussion, members stressed the importance of narrow framing and consistent messaging. Clear articulation of intent was viewed as essential to prevent confusion during legislative drafting, fiscal note development, or public discussion. The recommendation was repeatedly described as limited, supportive, and optional.

- Participants also discussed the importance of flexibility. Districts retain discretion in how transportation resources are used, and the recommendation does not require uniform implementation. This flexibility was viewed as a strength that allows districts to respond to local conditions without triggering compliance concerns.
- Attention was given to avoiding unintended fiscal implications. Members noted that ambiguity in statutory language can lead to broad fiscal assumptions. SDE's amendments, including clarification in Section B and Section F, were seen as important safeguards against such outcomes.
- The discussion concluded with affirmation that there was shared understanding among participants regarding the intent, scope, and limitations of the recommendation. Expressions of appreciation were exchanged, and there was general agreement that, as amended, the recommendation supports student access while remaining consistent with existing law and practice.

Next Meeting: January 21st

Draft Transportation Recommendation Language

a) Effective July 1, 2026, the Commissioner of Education, in consultation with the Commissioner of Transportation, shall establish a two-year pilot grant-in-aid program to provide funding to ten local and regional boards of education for the purpose of purchasing public transportation bus passes for students enrolled in grades nine to twelve, inclusive. Such bus passes shall be valid for use on state-owned or state-controlled public bus transportation services.

(b) A local or regional board of education shall be eligible to receive a grant pursuant to this section only if the school district served by such board meets all of the following criteria:

1. The district has a chronic absenteeism rate for the 2024–2025 school year that exceeds the statewide average, as determined by the Department of Education;
2. The district has a rate of student eligibility for free or reduced-price school lunch that exceeds the statewide average, as determined by the Department of Education;
3. The district has access to public transportation services during the two-hour period immediately preceding the start of the regular school day; and
4. The district has access to public transportation services during the four-hour period immediately following the end of the regular school day.

(c) Notwithstanding the provisions of subsection (b) of this section, and in order to promote regional equity, the Commissioner of Education shall expand eligibility for the pilot program to three non-urban school districts out of the ten selected school districts that are served by established public bus routes, as determined by the Commissioner of Transportation.

(d) The Department of Education, in consultation with the Education Workgroup of the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee, shall develop an index to assess and rank the relative urgency of need for participation in the pilot program established pursuant to this section. Using such index, the department shall select not more than ten school districts to participate in the pilot program prior to the commencement of the 2026–2027 academic year.

(e) Each eligible school district selected pursuant to subsection (d) of this section shall be allocated an amount of funding not to exceed [\$,XXX,XXX], for the duration of the pilot program. Such allocation shall be contingent upon selection through the process

developed by the Department of Education in consultation with the Education Workgroup of the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee and administered by the State Department of Education.

(f) A local or regional board of education receiving funds pursuant to this section shall distribute public transportation bus passes to high schools within the district based on demonstrated student demand, as determined by the results of a student survey administered at the beginning of each school year during the pilot program. The Department of Education may prescribe the form, content, and administration requirements of such survey.

(g) Each high school participating in the pilot program established pursuant to this section shall develop and maintain a data-tracking system to monitor the distribution and usage of public transportation bus passes. Such high school shall submit quarterly reports to the Department of Education, in such form and manner as the department may prescribe, provided any data reported shall be aggregated and de-identified in compliance with applicable state and federal privacy laws.

(h) The Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee, in consultation with the Department of Education, shall conduct an evaluation of the pilot program, which shall include:

1. A quantitative analysis of program outcomes, including, but not limited to, changes in student attendance rates, chronic absenteeism, extracurricular participation, and graduation rates; and
2. A qualitative assessment based on interviews with participating students, families, school administrators, and other relevant stakeholders.

Such evaluation shall include a comparative analysis of participating school districts and similarly situated nonparticipating school districts.

(i) Not later than June 30, 2027, the Education Workgroup shall submit a report on the findings of such evaluation, including any recommendations for program continuation, expansion, or modification, to the Juvenile Justice and Policy Oversight Committee as established by Public Act 14-217, Section 79.