

Draft JJPOC Education Workgroup Meeting

January 21st, 2026, 2:00 – 3:30 PM

Zoom

1. Review Final Education Workgroup Recommendations
 - a) Transportation Recommendation
 - b) Truancy Recommendation

THIS MEETING DID NOT CONTAIN A PRESENTATION

JJPOC Education Workgroup Meeting Summary

1/21/2026

2:00-3:30

Web Based Meeting- Zoom

Attendance

Agata-Raszczyk Lawska	Lenore Gagin	TYJI Staff
Amy Vatner	Maryam Khan	Andrew Zhebrak
Andrew Feinstein	Nancy DeCrecenzo	Brittany Lamarr
Ann Smith	Sadie Witherspoon	Erika Nowakowski
Charles Hewes	Simone Witherspoon	Paul Klee
Dominique Winston	Victor Jones	
Erica Bromley	Virginia Brown	
Fran Rabinowitz		
Glen Worthy		

Meeting Objectives:

The primary objective of this meeting was to review and finalize the two Education Workgroup recommendations ahead of their submission and anticipated vote at the following day's JJPOC meeting. Given an accelerated timeline, the workgroup used the session to surface any remaining concerns, solicit feedback, and discuss the possibility of friendly amendments prior to the vote.

Meeting Summary:

1) Discussion for Truancy Recommendation

- The workgroup reviewed the finalized language of the truancy recommendation, which proposes the repeal or removal of existing truancy statutes in Connecticut.
 - The recommendation was expanded to include a broader range of partners affected by the change, and intentionally uses both truant and truancy given that both terms appear across existing statutes.
 - A key consideration in the drafting was the relationship between truancy language and chronic absenteeism. The group noted that some truancy statute language currently requires districts to respond early when youth begin missing school before they reach the threshold for chronic absenteeism, and that this early

- intervention function should be preserved in some form even if truancy language is removed.
- The workgroup expressed general support for removing the truancy language, noting that the term carries negative connotations and that Connecticut has been moving toward decriminalization of truancy for several years. Existing statutes still penalize both youth and parents, and this recommendation is part of a broader cleanup effort.
- It was noted that youth experiencing truancy are often better served through community-based diversion and support services rather than formal legal mechanisms, and that the shift toward using chronic absenteeism as the primary metric is viewed as a more appropriate and less stigmatizing framework.
- A concern was raised about the limited number of administrative stakeholder groups listed for consultation in the recommendation language — specifically, that it named only two groups alongside two state agencies.
 - There was discussion about whether the recommendation language was narrow enough to unintentionally restrict collaboration with diversion workgroups, community-based organizations, and other partners involved in youth re-engagement.
 - Questions were raised about the downstream impact on referral processes currently guided by truancy statute, and whether removing the statutory language could overwhelm existing community systems if not carefully managed.
 - It was suggested that the stakeholder consultation language be broadened to reference 'interested stakeholders, including but not limited to' relevant organizations, rather than limiting it to a specific named list — allowing greater flexibility and inclusion.
 - A member proposed that CYSA (Connecticut Youth Services Association) be referenced as a representing body for Youth Service Bureaus, which would effectively capture that network without listing each bureau individually.
- The group acknowledged that while the recommendation language is largely finalized, a friendly amendment along these lines could be introduced at tomorrow's JJPOC meeting.
 - General consensus was that the direction of the recommendation is sound and supported, with the understanding that implementation planning would involve workgroup members, diversion chairs, DCF, CSDE, and other key partners.

2) Transportation Recommendation

- The workgroup reviewed the transportation recommendation, which proposes a two-year bus pass pilot program for high school youth in selected Connecticut districts.
- Due to funding timelines, the pilot will not launch during the current legislative session. Implementation is now targeted for the 2027–2028 school year, with evaluation and a report on efficacy due by June 2028.
 - Key structural elements of the proposal include

- The Commissioner of Education would consult with the Commissioner of Transportation to develop the pilot.
 - Ten local boards of education would be selected encompassing seven urban districts and three rural ones using an eligibility index that accounts for chronic absenteeism rates, rates of youth eligible for free and reduced-price meals, and the presence of public transit within two hours before and four hours after the school day.
- Youth would apply individually for bus passes, which would be distributed through schools by June 30, 2026 (for planning purposes).
- Each participating school would establish a data tracking system to monitor usage and report to the Department of Education.
- Following the first year, TYJI, in consultation with CSDE, would conduct a comprehensive evaluation including quantitative outcomes (attendance, chronic absenteeism, extracurricular participation, graduation rates) and qualitative assessments (interviews with youth, families, and school staff).
- The program builds on prior pilots in Hartford and New Haven, where bus passes were successfully used by youth for commuting to school, internships, after-school programming, and extracurricular activities.
 - It was noted and confirmed that the recommendation intends the bus passes to be valid on both city-operated and state-operated public transit, a clarification needed, as current draft language references only state-owned or state-controlled services. A friendly amendment was flagged to correct this at tomorrow's JJPOC meeting.
 - A current student, Olu, will present this recommendation at the JJPOC meeting the following day, which was received with enthusiasm by workgroup members.
- A representative from CSDE acknowledged support for the spirit of the proposal but raised several operational questions that the department felt needed further exploration before full endorsement.
 - Feedback gathered from districts that participated in the original Hartford/New Haven pilot indicated that the majority of bus pass usage was for after-school programming, internships, and extracurricular activities rather than direct school transit, raising questions about the extent to which the pilot would meaningfully reduce chronic absenteeism.
 - A safety concern was raised based on a report from one pilot district, where a female student experienced an incident on a public bus that led the district to shift its district-wide policy on bus passes.]
 - Questions were raised about whether the proposal was too prescriptive in its current form, and whether more operational details should be worked out with individual districts prior to formal legislative adoption.
 - A concern was raised that districts might use pilot funds to offset existing transportation budgets rather than to expand student access. The group agreed this is a risk that needs to be explicitly guarded against.
 - It was clarified that the pilot is not intended to operationalize a permanent transportation solution, but to expand a previously successful pilot and generate data to inform future decisions. Districts would have flexibility in how they implement the program within their schools.

- It was emphasized that the pilot is not intended to replace existing district-provided transportation, but to serve youth who do not currently receive transportation because they live within walking distance thresholds.
- A suggestion was made to individually meet with each of the 10 selected districts prior to implementation to develop tailored plans that account for each district's capacity and specific needs.
 - It was noted that ARCGIS could be used to map bus stop proximity to schools within selected districts, supporting the targeting and planning process.
- Federal regulations around free and reduced-price meal eligibility were raised, noting that programs cannot specifically target youth who qualify for those benefits, and that the pilot would need to be open to all eligible students in participating districts.
- CSDE raised a concern that they may lack the operational capacity to conduct extensive qualitative and quantitative studies of this proposed program
 - It was clarified that the primary responsibility for the evaluation rests with TYJI, with CSDE in a consultative role, which was received as a partial relief.
- Members acknowledged that while questions remain, the recommendation moves Connecticut ahead of most other states in providing free city bus transportation to urban youth and that the data generated by the pilot will be essential in determining whether and how to expand the program.

Next Meeting: 4/22/26

JUVENILE JUSTICE POLICY AND OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS IN BRIEF



DRAFT JJPOC 2026 Recommendations in Brief

Recommendation	Draft Legislative Language	Policy/ Legislative Recommendation
JJPOC Education Work Group Recommendation #1	A. It is recommended that the Commissioner of Education, in consultation with the Commissioner of Transportation and the education workgroup of the JJPOC shall develop a plan and recommendations for 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. The plan shall be delivered to the JJPOC by July, 1 2026. B. The plan shall include a local or regional board of education to 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 previous 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 previous academic year. E. The plan shall include a fiscal note on the cost per district included in the pilot program. 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 an application. The Department of Education shall create the application by June 30th, 2026, and may prescribe the content and administration of the form.	
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	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: a. A quantitative analysis of program outcomes, including, but not limited to, changes in student attendance rates, chronic absenteeism, extracurricular participation, and graduation rates; and b. A qualitative assessment based on interviews with participating students, families, school administrators, and other relevant stakeholders. i. Such evaluation shall include a comparative analysis of participating school districts and similarly situated nonparticipating school districts. I. Not later than June 30, 2028, the Education Workgroup shall submit a report on the findings of such evaluation, including any recommendations for program continuation, expansion, or	
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	modification, to the Juvenile Justice and Policy Oversight Committee as established by Public Act 14-217, Section 79,	
JJPOC Education Work Group Recommendation #2	1. The Education Workgroup of the JJPOC shall explore the use of the terms “truant” and “truancy” both nationally and in Connecticut and, in consultation with CSDE, DCF, CAPSS, and CAS, develop recommendations by January 1, 2027 for the possible repeal of Connecticut statutes which refer to truants or truancy and the inclusion of appropriate provisions of such repealed statutes in existing Connecticut statutes which address the reduction in absenteeism from school. The recommendations shall include but need not be limited to transition supports for agencies and school districts affected by any recommended repeal or amendment of statutes.	
JJPOC CEW Work Group Recommendation #1	It is recommended that: 1. Amend C.G.S. § 54-125a(g) to repeal the October 1, 2005 qualifying sentencing date. This ensures that all individuals who committed crimes while under age 21 are eligible for parole review based on their age at the time of the offense and their demonstrated rehabilitation, regardless of the calendar date of their sentencing. 2. Required Planning for Future Expansion (Report Due July 1, 2026) The JJPOC shall convene a working group, including representatives from the Judicial Branch, Board of Pardons and Paroles (BOPP), the Department of Correction (DOC), the Office of Victim Services (OVS), the Office of the Chief Public Defender, the Division of Criminal Justice, as well as directly impacted representatives and	

	community stakeholders, to develop a comprehensive plan for the responsible expansion of emerging adult protections up to age 26. This plan shall be delivered to the JJPOC by July 1, 2026 with an effective date of October 1, 2027. The plan shall include consideration for: a. Framework for Enhanced Victim Support and Engagement: The working group shall develop a detailed framework to ensure victims are fully supported, informed, and engaged in the parole review process for emerging adults, without compromising the integrity of the review. This framework shall include recommendations for: b. Statutory changes to mandate enhanced, trauma-informed notification processes that clearly explain the nature of emerging adult reviews. c. Designated advocates within OVS to provide dedicated, end-to-end support for victims navigating hearings. d. Processes to ensure victim statements are considered by the Board in a manner consistent with the principles of restorative justice and the overall goals of the policy. 3. Framework for Sentencing Considerations: The working group shall develop recommendations for statutory amendments to C.G.S. § 54-91g, requiring courts to consider "Miller" factors (brain science, maturity, capacity for change) at the time of sentencing for all defendants under age 26 facing serious felony charges,	
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	ensuring upstream alignment with the parole reforms. 4. Framework for Presumptive Release: The working group shall develop a detailed framework for implementing a rebuttable presumption of suitability for parole release for eligible emerging adults. This framework shall specify: a. The evidentiary standard required to rebut the presumption (e.g., clear and convincing evidence of current unreasonable risk). b. The specific criteria and risk assessment tools that will be used to evaluate current risk, ensuring they are developmentally appropriate and validated for this population. c. The procedural mechanisms for how the burden shift will function in practice during parole hearings. 5. Comprehensive Study to Inform Future Expansion (Due Dec 1, 2026) The JJPOC, shall conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the implementation and outcomes of existing statutes expanding parole eligibility for individuals under age 21 (pursuant to P.A. 23-169). The study shall include, but not be limited to: a. Parole grant vs. denial rates for the under-21 population since implementation. b. Recidivism outcomes for individuals released under these provisions compared to the general population. c. An analysis of the administrative capacity required by the BOPP to process these reviews.	
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	d. Recommendations and a projected timeline for the responsible expansion of these protections to emerging adults up to age 26, incorporating findings on brain development and public safety. e. The findings and recommendations shall be delivered to the JJPOC by December 1, 2026 and shall inform the planning for emerging adult protection under Part 2 inclusive of subsections 1-3	
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