



## Task Force to Study the Comprehensive Needs of Children in the State

### MEETING MINUTES

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 6, 2024

3:00 PM VIA ZOOM AND [YOUTUBE LIVE](#)

#### **Members in Attendance:**

Dr. Alicia Roy, Retired Educator, Formerly Principal, North Canaan Elementary School, Co-Chair

Dr. Christopher Trombly, Interim Dean, Southern CT State University, Co-Chair

Anne Marie Cullinan, Cheshire Board of Education and Education Consultant

Tracy Duran, Program Manager, Clinical & Educational Services, Judicial Branch

Matt Geary, Superintendent, Manchester Public School District

Tanya Hughes, Esq., Executive Director, Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities

Jennifer Jones, Education Consultant, Office of Early Childhood

Irene Parisi, Chief Academic Officer, CT State Department of Education

Tammy Vanega, Department of Developmental Services

Christine Velasquez, Health Program Associate, Department of Public Health

The meeting was called to order at 3:02 p.m. by Co-Chair Dr. Alicia Roy.

Dr. Roy welcomed all attendees, including Mr. Geary, who joined as the Superintendent Representative appointed by the House Majority Leader. Dr. Roy asked if Mr. Geary had any remarks to share before proceeding, to which he responded that he was pleased to be there. Dr. Roy then shared her screen with the previous meeting's minutes, allowing participants a moment to review them. After Dr. Roy called for a motion to approve the minutes, Dr. Trombly moved for approval, and Ms. Jones seconded the motion. The minutes were then approved unanimously.

Dr. Roy transitioned to the primary agenda item of reviewing the draft report and legislative recommendations. She expressed gratitude to Dr. Trombly for his efforts, as he had taken the lead in developing the report based on the legislative charges. The report highlighted findings from a recent

survey conducted among school counselors and community action agency leaders. According to Dr. Trombly, one of the major insights was that the COVID-19 pandemic had significantly exacerbated existing challenges related to student mental health and educational disparities rather than creating new issues. He described how respondents indicated that social and emotional supports, food assistance, and technology access had been critical during the pandemic and should be sustained by state funding moving forward. Members showed agreement with these findings, noting that the continued support for these areas would be essential to address ongoing challenges in schools and communities.

Dr. Roy then invited Dr. Trombly to delve into the survey's findings. Dr. Trombly shared that they had sent the survey through the Connecticut School Counselor Association, yielding responses from six school counselors, and through the Connecticut Community Action Alliance, resulting in replies from seven community action leaders. He explained that although the sample was small, the responses offered significant insights. The key themes highlighted by respondents included the need for sustained mental health counseling services for youth and families, academic and enrichment programs outside school hours, food assistance programs, and ongoing support for school staff who have been particularly affected by pandemic stresses. Dr. Trombly summarized that the survey data demonstrated a widespread consensus on these issues, with respondents emphasizing that COVID-19 had intensified pre-existing needs in the community.

Ms. Parisi raised a concern about the representativeness of the survey sample, given that there are over 1,600 school counselors in the state. She suggested that the limited participation might raise questions when presenting the report. Dr. Trombly acknowledged the point, clarifying that the survey responses, while not exhaustive, served as illustrative examples of critical needs. Ms. Parisi agreed but advised that the report should anticipate potential questions regarding the survey's breadth.

The discussion then moved to the section of the report outlining state-funded programs that were initially supported by federal COVID-19 relief funds. Dr. Trombly explained that he had reviewed the extensive list of federally funded programs and identified those most aligned with the Legislature's charges, categorizing them under five tenets related to student well-being and development: health, safety, engagement, support, and academic challenge. Dr. Roy and other members acknowledged the importance of clearly indicating which programs require ongoing funding to avoid any assumptions that previously funded initiatives were permanently secure. Ms. Velasquez from the Department of Public Health commented that some readers might mistakenly believe certain programs are permanently funded, emphasizing the need to clarify in the report that several programs are still time-limited unless state funds are allocated.

Dr. Trombly then raised the issue of legislative guardrails, noting that even though the legislature had expressed interest in identifying programs to maintain with state funding, current fiscal constraints could hinder these efforts. He questioned whether the report should explicitly address these guardrails, acknowledging that if the legislature aims to fund these initiatives long-term, adjustments to fiscal policy may be necessary. Dr. Roy suggested tabling this decision for further consideration, proposing that Dr. Trombly draft potential language on this point for review at the next meeting.

Dr. Roy reiterated the next steps in that the clerk would gather updated funding data before the next meeting, which would help refine the recommendations. Ms. Parisi agreed to provide additional district-level data that might further contextualize the report's findings. The meeting concluded with a shared

understanding of the need to finalize and present the report in a way that comprehensively addresses the key issues and anticipates potential legislative questions regarding the data and funding limitations.

With no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 3:48 p.m.