

INTERAGENCY COUNCIL FOR ENDING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP
Hartford

Draft Minutes of Meeting (Subject to Revision)
November 7, 2013

Call to Order

Lieutenant Governor Wyman called the meeting to order at 9 a.m. The meeting was held in Hearing Room 1C of the Legislative Office Building.

Members present were: Stefan Pryor, Commissioner, Department of Education
Stephen Tracy, Department of Children and Families
Jeffrey Beckham, Department of Administrative Services
Leah Grenier, Office of Policy and Management
Robin Tousey-Ayers, Department of Public Health
Raymond Singleton, Department of Social Services

I. Welcome, Introductions and Announcements

Lieutenant Governor Wyman announced that there will be a forum focusing on chronic absence at the Legislative Office Building on Tuesday, November 12, 2013, from 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

II. Acceptance of Meeting Minutes from February 28, 2013

Minutes were unanimously approved, with one correction.

III. Defining Chronic Absence, Trends and Impact on Achievement

Charlene Russell-Tucker, Chief Operating Officer, State Department of Education, and Ajit Gopalakrishnan, Chief, Bureau of Data Collection, Research and Evaluation presented on the definition of chronic absence, the most recent data and the impact on student achievement and high school graduation in Connecticut. The data show that chronic absence measured at 11.0 percent in 2011-12. These numbers translate to approximately sixty-thousand students each year who are missing at least 10 percent of their total school days enrolled. When the data are disaggregated by subgroups based on race, ethnicity, free/reduced lunch status, special education status and English language learners, they indicate that students from these traditionally underperforming subgroups evidence substantially higher rates of absenteeism than their peers who are not in these subgroups.

IV. Connecticut Communities Addressing Chronic Absence with Local Agencies and Community Partners

Laura Downs, Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, provided an overview of strategies that are happening at the local level at the district, community and classroom level. Current efforts are underway in New Britain, Hartford, Torrington, Meriden and Vernon. Schools are looking at regular data reports, convening teachers and partners and identifying the students at risk or already chronically absent. The work has uncovered the causes of chronic absence to include: health issues; chronic asthma; school safety; neighborhoods with high lead; transportation; inadequate housing and mobility.

A team presentation from Meriden Public Schools included Dr. Mark Benigni, Superintendent of Schools; Mr. Tom Giard, Assistant Superintendent; Ms. Donna Mik, Director of Pupil Personnel; Dr. Miguel Cardona, Performance and Evaluation; and Ms. Melanie Wilde from the Community Health Center. The presentation highlighted the success of the community partnerships in Meriden to provide supports to families and neighborhoods to increase academic achievement. Some examples include: universal breakfast for all students; piloting a supper program in the extended-day middle school programs; family-school liaison teams to remove barriers that prevent students from learning or attending school; and a partnership with Community Health Center to provide dental hygiene programs; mental health services; and medical services in the schools.

V. Discussion: Aligning Allocation of State Resources

Charlene Russell-Tucker facilitated a roundtable discussion on the programs and services that are provided by state agencies that can support school districts in the reduction of chronic absence and improve academic achievement. Some of the programs and services discussed included: school-based health centers (DPH); school-based social workers (DCF); mobility/housing (DOH); community revitalization/business (DECD); SNAP and Cash Assistance (DSS); Fatherhood (reading programs/sponsored father/child events) and co-parenting (DSS); connect with local departments of health on lead issues, school readiness, juvenile justice review board diversion strategies, child care certificates for high school students (DPH); and healthy eating and wellness committees (UCONN-4H).

VI. Achievement Gap Task Force Master Plan Development

Miguel Cardona, Co-Chair of the Achievement Gap Task Force, provided an update on the development of the Master Plan. The committee has heard presentations and testimony from over 50 groups. A working group has been formed to write the report and it is close to completion. A forum will be planned to release the report when it is completed.

VII. Public Act 13-64: An Act Concerning Community Schools

John Frassinelli, Chief, Bureau of Health/Nutrition, Family Services and Adult Education provided an overview of Public Act 13-64, An Act Concerning Community Schools.

VIII. Next Meeting

The next meeting is March 13, 2014, 9 to 11 a.m., Room 307A, State Office Building, 165 Capitol Avenue, Hartford.

IX. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 10:40 a.m.