



CT Office of Early Childhood Parent Cabinet Meeting Minutes November 24, 2025

Time & Location: 6pm, Zoom

Co-Facilitators: Parent Cabinet members: Regan Allan (region 1) & Tiffanie Allain (region 3)

Members Present at start: Regan, Jenny C. (region 1), Shannon, Raquel (region 2), Tiffanie, Jessica and Christina (region 3), Tricia, Cris, Kelly S. (region 4), Mallory, Amber and Jocelyn (Region 5), Stephanie and Jennifer S. (region 6)

Mission: *To build strong connections, listen intentionally, and partner with Connecticut families of young children, communities, and OEC to incorporate the expertise of all parents throughout the early childhood system to ensure family-driven equitable policies and programs.*

Meeting Purpose (*Why is this meeting needed?*): To continue to strengthen relationships and communication, and ensure members have tools and information needed to succeed on mission

Intended Outcomes (*What do we want to achieve by the end of this? What will success look like?*):

- Members have clarity on OEC and Federal updates and any questions answered
- Members hear update on subcommittees progress including OEC Parent & Caregiver Survey final numbers
- Members have better understanding on the expectations with Community Outreach and Local Governance Partners and share any feedback
- Members help improve the family messaging for Help Me Grow and have update on updated flyer to share out.
- Members learn about the end result of project to align the work of OEC and the Parent Cabinet

Agenda Item/Topic	Facilitator	Notes	Key Takeaways and Implications for Parent Cabinet Members
Welcome & meeting logistics	Chenae Russell, Parent	• Reminded attendees that the meeting is public and only members and presenters may speak	

	Cabinet Coordinator, OEC	- Encouraged camera use, use of chat, reactions, and raised hand features. - Reiterated group norms and collective agreements. - Shared this is last meeting of the year - Acknowledged upcoming December birthdays: Jenny Canepa (Dec 18).	
Connect Question (Slido)	Tiffanie Allain, PC member	Gratitude for Loved Ones Members shared heartfelt reflections: - Children's smiles, creativity, and support - Family resilience during job transitions - Acts of kindness like checking lunchboxes - Emotional support from spouses and children Pride in Self Members expressed pride in: - Career changes and risk-taking - Self-care and mental health - Earning certifications (e.g., Culinary Arts) - Modeling resilience and balance for their families	
OEC Announcements & Updates	Chenae Russell, Parent Cabinet Coordinator, OEC Interim Commissioner Elena Trueworthy, Maggie Adair, Legislative and Communications Director, OEC	Co-Creation Toolkit - Released Co-creation of a parent cabinet toolkit documenting the Parent Cabinet's formation during COVID with parent and community leaders on the design team. - Includes practical steps, lessons learned, and parent quotes. - Intended as a model for other states and agencies.  Farewell to Jennifer St. John - Stepping down due to new role with Bristol LGP as the Family and Community Engagement Coordinator supporting Parent Ambassadors and early childhood programs. - Will continue supporting the Cabinet in a different capacity. - Replacement process underway per bylaws to look at the next highest scoring and ranking applicant from selection committee since not a recruitment year  Early Start CT & Press Conference 1,000 new early childhood spaces announced for January 2026 through a	- Explore toolkit as a resource to share - Share out about the RFA with programs - More to be shared on the public hearing- if a PC member wants to testify let Coordinator know - Members check the Parent Cabinet Padlet & Resource Padlet for information. - Encourage members to share what they're

	Karen Pascale, Head Start Collab Office Director, OEC	Request for Applications (RFA) ○ Request for Applications (RFA) Application portal is live. Early Start CT Expansion Request for Application (RFA) Endowment - Connecticut Office of Early Childhood ○ Payment rates for Early Start programs will increase. ○ A press conference was held with: ▪ Governor Ned Lamont ▪ Senator Matt Lesser ▪ Representative Liz Linehan ▪ OEC leadership and Parent Cabinet member Tricia Hamlin, who spoke on behalf of families. • Interim Commissioner Elena Trueworthy praised Tricia's confident and impactful remarks, noting how far the agency has come in elevating parent voice in public forums. • Early Childhood Education Endowment Advisory Board ○ The Advisory Board recently met to discuss: ▪ The purpose and mission of the endowment. ▪ Investment strategies for long-term sustainability of early childhood programs. ○ Chris Jimenez, a Parent Cabinet member, represents families on the board. ○ A public hearing is scheduled for December 10, 2025 at 6 PM at the Legislative Office Building (also available virtually). ▪ Purpose: Public testimony on early childhood investment priorities ▪ Parents are encouraged to testify or submit written comments. ▪ Suggestion: Jenny suggested preparing short scripts in English and Spanish to support non-native speakers. •  Federal Shutdown Response • Governor Lamont allocated funds to cover WIC for November (~\$200,000/day). ○ OEC covered November costs for two Head Start programs (ADVANCE and CLC) to prevent closures.	hearing from families and request additional resources if needed. • Head Start/Parent Cabinet resource document to be shared and added to Binder Padlet & Resource Padlet
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		○ \$3 million allocated to FoodShare to support families not eligible for SNAP. ○ The legislature passed a bill to set aside \$500 million in the Rainy Day Fund to cover future federal aid disruptions. ● Maggie emphasized the bipartisan support for these measures and the importance of safeguarding families. Head Start Program Support ● OEC ensured that two Head Start programs with November 1 grant cycles received funding despite the federal delay. ● Other programs with January 1 start dates are expected to receive their awards in December. ● OEC is hosting the Connecticut Head Start Association at the agency to strengthen collaboration. ● A new reference document is being developed with support from Parent Cabinet member Mallory to connect Parent Cabinet members with Head Start programs in their region. ○ Includes contact info and links. ○ Will support more systematic collaboration between the Cabinet and Head Start policy councils.	
Subcommittee & Survey Updates	Veronica, UConn School of Social Work Amber, PC member region 5 Mallory PC member region 5	Parent & Caregiver Survey (Veronica Hanna, UConn SSW) ● Survey closed Nov 23 with 4,158 responses. ● Regional breakdown shared; Region 3 had the highest participation. ● Preliminary results expected in January; full report by March. ● Thanks to Parent Cabinet members for outreach and feedback. 💡 Access & Affordability subcommittee (Amber) ● Care 4 Kids moving to paperless communication by 2027. Subcommittee helping to inform communication and more. ● Care 4 Kids Waitlist (Enrollment List) Clarifications- ○ Website to check enrollment status updates: Care 4 Kids Enrollment List Status – CT Care 4 Kids	

		○ Website for Processing time: Processing Status – CT Care 4 Kids ▪ Current wait time: ~7 months. ▪ As of October 31, 2025: • 4,087 families on the waitlist. • 5,287 children, mostly infants and toddlers. ▪ Funding limitations, not processing delays, are the primary reason for the waitlist. ▪ Payments can begin 15 days prior to the date a family is invited off the waitlist. ▪ Clarification: No need for a Parent-Provider Agreement (PPA) until a family is invited off the list. ○ Care 4 Kids updates Newsletter just launched. Subcommittee will inform these ongoing • CT Early Learning Standards (CTELs) being updated after 14 years. • Amber emphasized including parent voice in CTCL rollout.  Family & Community Engagement Subcommittee (Mallory Paige) • Focus on behavioral health and provider-family engagement. • Mission and vision statements created. • Highlighted Lorna’s impactful webinars on housing and mental health.	
Local Governance Partner (LGP) & Community Outreach	Malissa Griffith, Program Manager-Parent Outreach Initiative, OE + Cheneae, PC Coordinator OEC	LGP System Updates (Melissa Griffith) • Onboarding Phase: LGPs are still within the first five months of onboarding. Many are actively hiring parent ambassadors, liaisons, and engagement staff. • New Staff Support: Shine has hired a Connecticut-based project manager to provide on-the-ground support and increase capacity for LGP coordination • New LGP website from Shine Early Learning is coming in new year • In-Person Meeting 11/25: An in-person meeting for all LGPs and Shine (the intermediary organization) was scheduled at OEC to deepen understanding of LGP responsibilities. • LGP trainings: Family Engagement + Parent Leadership ○ In person convenings- regional ▪ Dates: December 8 (Norwich Three Rivers CT State Comm. College), 9 (Hartford-LOB), and 11 (Danbury-Western CT State	Key Takeaways LGP are at varying stages of development, and flexibility is key. Parent Cabinet members play a vital role in bridging families and systems. • Attending one LGP community table meeting to introduce yourself for now then occasionally in the

		University) ▪ Purpose: Equip LGP coordinators, parent ambassadors, and liaisons with tools and shared understanding. ▪ Format: Regionalized to reduce travel burden; same content across all sessions. • Resources Shared: ○ Early Start Connecticut fact sheets ○ LGP fact sheets ○ All materials available on the OEC website and in the Parent Cabinet Resource Padlet Parent Cabinet Engagement Expectations (Chenae Russell) • Initial Mapping: Chenae has been conducting regional check-ins to map out which towns have LGPs and which do not in spreadsheet. Members decide which towns they will cover. • Engagement Goals: ○ Each Parent Cabinet member is expected to: ▪ Contact the LGP town they have decided to cover and contact liaison for community table meeting information to attend at least one LGP community table meeting for now then occasionally in the future • Introduce themselves, explain their role, and offer to be a partner on the state level ▪ Rotate attendance across towns with LGPs in their region they have selected to cover • Strategic Focus: ○ Prioritize towns without LGPs to uplift underrepresented voices. ○ Prepare for potential shifts in LGP coverage based on Early Start CT RFA outcomes in January. Member Reflections on LGP Meetings Christina P. • Attended a meeting and found it welcoming and informative. • Reconnected with familiar faces and appreciated the laid-back atmosphere. Tiffanie Allain (Killingly, CT)	future • Continued advocacy is needed to ensure inclusive representation on community tables (e.g., healthcare, special education). Prioritize towns without LGPs to uplift underrepresented voices.
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Help Me Grow	Luz Rivera (OEC Family Support Division)	• Help Me Grow Messaging Feedback (Luz) • Help Me Grow (HMG) is not a standalone program but a network of services and supports that connects families to local resources for children from prenatal through age 5. ○ The initiative is focused on early childhood development, screenings, parenting tools, and community-based support. • HMG Connecticut has been working on a strategic plan to improve how the initiative is communicated to both providers and families. ○ Reviewed draft messaging for families and providers. ○ Finalized Provider Message ▪ “We are Help Me Grow Connecticut — a network of dedicated	→ Share updated family messaging based on feedback → Share 1 pagers → Follow up on a Parent Cabinet member to be on the Help ME Grow Advisory Committee

		providers supporting families as early as prenatally and with young children up to the age of 5 around their early childhood development. Providers can help families connect to Help Me Grow through 211 Child Development by calling 1-800-505-7000.” ○ Draft Family Message (Presented for Feedback) ▪ “Help Me Grow Connecticut connects parents and caregivers with play activities, developmental screenings, parenting tools, and local support so children can learn, play, and grow. Help Me Grow serves parents and caregivers as early as pregnancy and with young children up to age 5. By partnering with trusted community providers, Help Me Grow helps find the resources that fit the family best to nurture and build confident children. Parents and caregivers connect to Help Me Grow through 2-1-1 Child Development by calling 1-800-505-7000.” ○ Feedback included: ▪ Language Suggestions: • Replace “learn, play, and grow” with “develop to their fullest potential” to avoid repetition. • Rephrase “serves parents and caregivers as early as pregnancy...” to improve clarity (e.g., “serves families from prenatal through age 5”). ▪ Format Suggestions: • Use bullet points for easier readability. • Shorten the message for accessibility and translation. ▪ Translation Considerations: • Ensure the message translates well into other languages, especially Spanish. ▪ Tone & Clarity: • Ensure the message is warm, clear, and empowering for families. • One-pager finalized; Spanish version in progress.	
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OEC + Parent Cabinet Alignment work update	Presented by Katherine Mercado & Shaunice Falkner , Third Sector Consulting	OEC + Parent Cabinet Alignment work update Third Sector is a national nonprofit consulting organization that partners with government agencies to: • Reshape policies, systems, and services • Improve outcomes for all people, especially those historically underserved • Center lived experience in decision-making • Confront inequity and catalyze sustainable change Third Sector was contracted by the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) to support stronger collaboration between OEC staff and the Parent Cabinet. Contract ending in current month. Their work focused on three main goals: Project Goals: • Strengthen collaboration between OEC and Parent Cabinet • Develop sustainable tools and processes • Center lived experience in decision-making Project Wins: • Tools created to support staff-parent collaboration • Case study drafted with Avani Strategies • Parent Input at the Center-Special thanks to Jenny, Mallory, Jennifer, Tricia,	• Share the case stud • Coordinator to share tools and processes developed. • OEC continue embedding parent voice in OEC decision-making structures.

		Christina, and Chris for their input → Chenaë Russell emphasized the importance of this work in shifting the Parent Cabinet from a “side project” to a central part of OEC’s operations. → tools developed will be used by: ○ OEC leadership and directors ○ The Parent Cabinet coordinator ○ Future Parent Cabinet cohorts Tricia shared that the experience was “very positive,” and praised Third Sector for being “thoughtful and responsive.”	
Closing		▪ Holiday Poll ○ Majority voted “Yes” for a virtual holiday gathering in December. ○ Optional, casual, and fun—details to follow. ▪  Evaluation ○ Members encouraged to complete the meeting evaluation. ○ Feedback helps shape future meetings. ▪  Acknowledgments ○ Huge thanks to co-facilitators Tiffany and Regan for leading the last two meetings. ○ Thanked all participants and presenters, co-facilitators ○ Meeting ended with appreciation and reminders to enjoy the upcoming holidays.	Complete post-meeting survey. Look out for follow-up emails with materials and updates.