

# CT OFFICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD PARENT CABINET NEWSLETTER



## WELCOME TO THE FIRST ISSUE OF THE PARENT CABINET NEWSLETTER!

The Office of Early Childhood (OEC) Parent Cabinet is a diverse, parent-led, 15-member advisory group to the OEC to help make improvements to the lives of children and families across the state. Parent Cabinet members are taking an active and public role in supporting the agency's goal of increasing the voice of parents and families at local and state tables.

Nationally, Connecticut is being called upon to present and share our work with other states. For more information on the impact of the OEC Parent Cabinet, please visit [ctoec.org/parent-cabinet](http://ctoec.org/parent-cabinet).

## RECAP OF HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE INAUGURAL PARENT CABINET MEMBERS

In its first 2.5 years, the Parent Cabinet has advised on a variety of important projects such as the OEC Parent Survey, a kindergarten age change memo to families, and the Governor's Blue Ribbon Panel on Child Care. Parent Cabinet members presented at a variety of conferences, including the National Association of the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Conference and the Office of Special Education (OSEP) Conference CT. You can find more of the previous years accomplishments on the website [Parent Cabinet Membership - Connecticut Office of Early Childhood](#).

## WORDS FROM THE INAUGURAL PARENT CABINET

"I got to work hand-in-hand with some other dedicated parent leaders who had similar mindsets as me. They wanted to make a change."

- Ruth-Ann

"Our voices were really heard. And that made it that much easier when talking to families. You could really speak from a place of truth."

- Krysta

"I feel like we were able to grow as we thought through what the Cabinet should be. And we got opportunities to go out and meet the community and speak in public and go to trainings..."

- Casey



## CELEBRATING THE INAUGURAL PARENT CABINET MEMBERS

OEC Speakers included Honorable Susan Bysiewicz, Lieutenant Governor of Connecticut; Elaine Zimmerman, ACF Region 1 Administrator; Parent Cabinet Design members; Parent Cabinet members; Commissioner Bye; and the Deputy Commissioner Elena Trueworthy who shared words of appreciation to acknowledge the time, dedication, and work the parent leaders have done these past 2.5 plus years. Governor Ned Lamont issued signed proclamations thanking and recognizing members for all of their efforts. All members also received a certificate for their time served and serving.

The OEC is forever grateful for the service and dedication this first group provided around improving policies and programs based on parent input, elevating the voices from those locally to the state, and sharing about OEC services to families and communities. We look forward to the next phase in the partnership in an alum leadership pathway!



*A special thanks to our speakers for the event! Parent Cabinet Members: Casey Russo, Ruth-Ann Bucknor, Symone Maguire, and Caitlin McNamara. Design Committee Members: Caroline Austin and Stephan Palmer. Thank you to our other Design members pictured: Janine McMahon, Mary McAllister, Malissa Griffith, and Joyce Bosco.*



## NEW NEWS!

We are excited to welcome our new cohort of Parent Cabinet members! Applications were open from February 6, to March 21, 2024. We received a total of 148 applications to fill 15 roles statewide. Selection committees included 28 individuals that represented OEC staff, current Parent Cabinet members, and community members who helped to get to the final 15 members after a rigorous process.

The final Parent Cabinet was confirmed in June 2024. Those not selected at this time were provided other opportunities for family engagement and leadership. Members serve a 2.5-year term. Half of our new members were seated in July 2024, but officially began in September 2024, while the other half will begin in January 2025. To help new members feel supported, understand their role, and to answer any questions, recent Parent Cabinet alumni and remaining members will mentor the new members.

There was an onboarding for our Stamford Parent Cabinet member on September 13th. The first Parent Cabinet Onboarding Retreat took place on September 14, 2024. This was designed by a few current members to help onboard new members and have an opportunity to build relationships between the parent leaders and OEC staff. We were joined by Commissioner Bye, Deputy Commissioner, Nicole Cossette (Part C Coordinator), Karen Pascale (Head Start Collaboration Office Director), Malissa Griffith (Program Manager - Parent Outreach Initiative), Chenae Russell (Statewide Parent Cabinet Coordinator), and Dhvani Pandya (IT Manager).



## PARENT CABINET IMPACT (JANUARY TO AUGUST 2024)



**469**

**HOURS SPENT  
ACROSS ACTIVITIES**

Ex. Giving feedback, presenting/speaking, collecting data and relationship building.



**93**

**HOURS IN  
LOCAL OUTREACH**

Including meeting with Parent Ambassadors, community groups, and tabling at events.



**MOST  
DISCUSSED TOPICS**

Child care, community voice, ECE workforce, health, K-12 & early childhood, parenting supports, special needs

## 2024 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- ✓ Helped give feedback on a Kindergarten age change guidance joint memo for families.
- ✓ Nurturing the Nurturer: Behavioral Health Initiative webinar series. Some Parent Cabinet members were on a panel on parental self-care.
- ✓ An Evaluation Report was done on the Parent Cabinet & a Logic Model was co-developed with the members.
- ✓ Parent Cabinet members co-planned and helped with the 2Gen Parent Academy on June 8th, 2024.
- ✓ Members learned about and gave feedback on the Child Care Development Fund Plan.
- ✓ Members helped facilitate Care 4 Kids listening sessions in English and Spanish.
- ✓ Joshua shared his positive experience at the New England Fathering Conference, emphasizing the importance of inclusivity and equity in fatherhood.

- ✓ Nurse Family Partnership Conference. Ruth-Ann shared her appointment as a Parent Ambassador for the National Service Office, where she discussed the importance of parent voice in home visiting programs.
- ✓ Parent Cabinet members attended, helped plan and were on a panel at the CT Parent Leadership Summit.
- ✓ Presented at the Smart Start Conference in Greensboro, NC; Child Care Aware Symposium in Arlington, VA; and Office of Special Education Program Conference in Arlington, VA.
- ✓ Gave feedback on Early Start CT Local Governance Partners and parent/community voice in structure.
- ✓ Parent Cabinet members Josh and Cris attended the Governor's press event announcing changes to help increase access, affordability, and reduce benefit cliffs through additional state-funded early care and education spaces and the Care 4 Kids program establishing 1,500 new Care 4 Kids spaces, capping the family fee at 7% and families able to remain on Care 4 Kids until household income reaches 85% of the state median income.
- ✓ Members attended an event by OEC and Governor Ned Lamont that brought together state governance and advisory leaders, policy makers and early childhood experts at the State Capitol's Legislative Building for the event "Shaping Connecticut's Tomorrow: A Conversation with Early Childhood Leaders.."



## MISSION STATEMENT

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.





## OEC PARENT CABINET ALUMNI

Bianca Shinn, Stamford (Region 1)  
Ruth-Ann Bucknor, Uncasville (Region 3)  
Krysta Chambers, West Hartford (Region 4)  
Christina Augliera, Torrington (Region 5)  
Casey Russo, Meriden (Region 6)

## CURRENT OEC PARENT CABINET MEMBERS

Kaitlyn Heffernan, Stratford (Region 1) (Alumni 2025)  
Regan Allan, Stamford (Region 1)  
Symone Maguire, Hamden (Region 2) (Alumni 2025)  
Raquel Sanchez-Ramirez, New Haven (Region 2)  
Marinda Monfilston, Cromwell (Region 3) (Alumni 2025)  
Tiffanie Allain, Brooklyn (Region 3)  
Jessica Stark, Middletown (Region 3)  
Caitlin McNamara, Manchester (Region 4) (Alumni 2025)  
Tricia Hamlin, West Hartford (Region 4)  
Cris Jimenez, Tolland (Region 4, At-Large)  
Maria Del Pilar Vargas, Danbury (Region 5) (Alumni 2025)  
Joshua Vaughn, Naugatuck (Region 5) (Alumni 2025)  
Amber Alessandro, Danbury (Region 5)  
Ivoni Montes, Wethersfield (Region 6) (Alumni 2025)  
Jennifer St. John, Bristol (Region 6)

## OEC PARENT CABINET MEMBERS INCOMING JANUARY 2025

Jenny Canepa, Stamford (Region 1)  
Shannon Knox, New Haven (Region 2)  
Christina Pace, Colchester (Region 3)  
Kelly Sorrow, Vernon (Region 4)  
Kelly Collier, Newtown (Region 5)  
Mallory Paige, Danbury (Region 5)  
Stephanie Thompson, Cheshire (Region 6)



*Thank You!*

The Parent Cabinet would like to formally thank all of our supporters who help uplift the parent voice. Learn more about the Parent Cabinet at:

[ctoec.org/parent-cabinet](http://ctoec.org/parent-cabinet)