JANUARY–JUNE 2026 ISSUE 4

CONNECTICUT Early Childhood
Parent Cabinet
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CT OFFICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD **PARENT CABINET NEWSLETTER**

Welcome to the latest edition of the CT Office of Early Childhood (OEC) Parent Cabinet Newsletter! The OEC Parent Cabinet is a diverse, parent-led 15-member statutory advisory committee to OEC (P.A. 23-160, Sec. 40).

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.

This 2nd cohort of Parent Cabinet leaders continue to:

- Strengthen relationships with each other, OEC, and local communities
- Elevate family voice to help improve statewide OEC systems and communications
- Expand their knowledge of OEC, partner state agencies, and regional services and initiatives, while growing their leadership skills

CT Parent Cabinet leaders enjoyed a spring retreat with OEC staff in Hamden. The gathering was an opportunity to reconnect in person, reflect, and strengthen relationships.





Pictured in the far left photo are Jessica S. – Region 3, Amber A. – Region 5, Mallory P. – Region 5, Chenae R. – OEC Parent Cabinet Coordinator, Kelly S. – Region 4, Yesenia F. – Region 6, and Raquel S.R. – Region 2.

Pictured in the far right photo are CT OEC Deputy Commissioner David Morgan, Raquel S.R., Karen Pascale (CT Head Start Director), Amber A., Yesenia F., Chenae R., Becca Smith (Birth to Three, Child Find), Kelly S., Malissa Griffith (Parents Connecting Parents Program Manager), OEC Data Scientist Coral Wonderly, Jessica S., and Mallory P.

COMMUNITY AND STATE ENGAGEMENT AND OUTREACH

Outcomes: Growth in Leadership Skills + Increased Awareness of Family and Community Challenges, OEC, and OEC Parent Cabinet



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1. *Tiffanie (Region 3) and Jessica (Region 3) at the Child First Groton Family Resource Fair in February 2026.*
2. *Tricia (Region 4) tabled at the Manchester Early Childhood Fair in February 2026. She is pictured on the left with Parent Cabinet alum and Manchester LGP staff Caitlin McNamara, and Parent Ambassador Ann Morgan and her family. Pictured to the right at the OEC Parent Cabinet table are two little boys, backs showing, wearing Parent Cabinet shirts.*
3. *Mallory (Region 5), pictured at the OEC Parent Cabinet Wellness, Engagement, and Lasting Leadership (W.E.L.L.) Subcommittee, led a regional Family Check-In Community Conversation in Danbury, CT, on February 28, 2026.*
4. *Tiffanie (Region 3) and Raquel (Region 2), pictured with Parent Cabinet Coordinator Chenae, both tabled at the Disability Summit in March 2026 at Great Wolf Lodge.*
5. *Regan (Region 1) and Jenny (Region 1) pictured alongside Behavioral Health Manager Lorna Thomas-Farquharson and Parent Cabinet Coordinator Chenae (OEC) at the OEC Parent Cabinet Wellness, Engagement, and Lasting Leadership (W.E.L.L.) Subcommittee. Regan and Jenny led a regional Family Check-In Community Conversation in Stamford, CT, on April 18, 2026.*
6. *Yesenia (Region 6) and Amber (Region 5) attended the Wolcott Family Event in Wolcott on May 30, 2026, with OEC staff Kimm Paluska, Becca Smith, Christy Gademsky, and Maria Bautista.*
7. *Raquel (Region 2) pictured with Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro at the annual Community Resource Fair in New Haven, CT, in May 2026.*
8. *Jenny (Region 1) pictured with her son at Stamford Day in May 2026, an annual free family-friendly event hosted by the Mayor's Multicultural Council and the Mill River Park Collaborative.*

STATE TO LOCAL CONNECTIONS: LOCAL GOVERNANCE PARTNERS

OEC Parent Cabinet leaders in different regions have been able to connect with some Local Governance Partners (LGPs) to attend community table meetings as parent leaders and build relationships with Parent Ambassadors. Many have been helping with the development of LGP's Local Needs Assessments (LNA) and distributing them to families.

CONNECTICUT Early Childhood Parent Cabinet

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PARENT CABINET COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT DATA

The six most discussed topics were **Child Care (16), Community Voice, Leadership, & Engagement (15), Early Start CT (15), Basic Needs & Supports (14), Local Governance Partners (14)**, and **Parenting Supports (14)**. (Number in parentheses is count of activities where the topic was discussed.)

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT HOURS: 62.5

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES: 32

Seventeen in-person community engagement meetings or events were held or attended across the towns of Bloomfield, Danbury, Enfield, Manchester, Mashantucket, Norwalk, Stamford, Tolland, and West Hartford.



FULL PARENT CABINET AND SUBCOMMITTEE MEETINGS

These are co-led by OEC staff and Parent Cabinet leaders, and help ensure that the Parent Cabinet's voice remains central in shaping OEC's early childhood systems and priorities of the OEC.

Outcomes: Growth in Leadership Skills + Improvements in Early Childhood Systems from Parent Voice

Full Meetings

***Gave feedback/input on*:**

- Early Childhood Education Endowment Advisory Board
  - Public hearing
    - Parent Cabinet coordinator submitted written testimony in support of the work of the endowment on behalf of the OEC Parent Cabinet
- Early Start CT expansion
- Local needs assessment
- Parent Cabinet meeting structure and outreach hours
- Local Governance Partners (LGPs) – Connection with Parent Ambassadors
- Care 4 Kids, redetermination process, Parent Portal issues, and paperless rollout

***Learned more about*:**

- 2026 legislative proposals and updates
- Pyramid Model Community Pilot
- 2025 Parent Cabinet Role + Coordinator Support Evaluation results
- OEC Parent and Caregiver Survey Committee outreach efforts data
- OEC website and Early Start CT map
- New OEC Division, Family, & Community Leadership and Outreach
  - Centralizes family-voice work: Head Start, Local Governance Partners, OEC Parent Cabinet Coordinator, Parents Connecting Parents, and 2Gen Statewide Coordinator

Subcommittees or Focus Groups

***Gave feedback/input on*:**

- CT Early Learning Development Standards (ELDS) Family Materials Focus Group
- CT Association for Infant Mental Health (AIM), Infant Mental Health campaign messaging
- Care 4 Kids fact sheets, redetermination process, portal errors, and paperless roll out
- W.E.L.L. Subcommittee regional community conversation planning
- PC Logic Model visual and community engagement form updates
- Birth to Three transition materials
- Combining of Data Subcommittee and Governance Subcommittee to form the Data and Governance Subcommittee

***Learned more about*:**

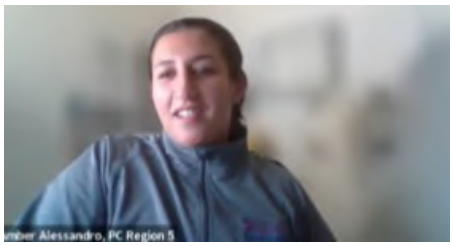
- CT PATH

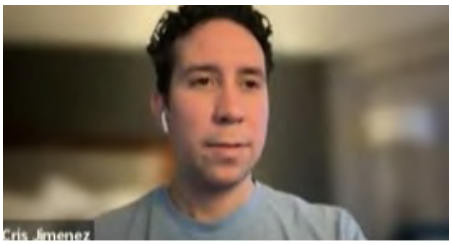
LEADERSHIP SHOUTOUTS!

Outcomes: Growth in Leadership Skills + Improvements in Early Childhood Systems from Parent Voice

Parent Cabinet monthly meetings co-facilitators: **Amber, Mallory, Cris, Stephanie, Kelly, Christina**—thank you for your leadership!













Parent Cabinet members **served on advisory committees and other panels** to uplift parent voices and connect to the full Parent Cabinet.

Amber Alessandro (Region 5)
- Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) Evaluation Study Advisory Committee
  - Study examines the impact of CT's CCDF payment policies on providers/families
  - Study will draw from Parent/Caregiver Survey; aims to improve subsidy access
- CT ELDS Updates Advisory Committee

Stephanie (Region 6)
- Child Care Development Fund (CCDF) Evaluation Study Advisory Committee
  - Study examines the impact of CT's CCDF payment policies on providers/families
  - Study will draw from Parent/Caregiver Survey; aims to improve subsidy access

Cris Jimenez Porrata (Region 4)
- Early Childhood Education Endowment Advisory Board
- Parent Panel at the 2026 Home Visiting Conference on April 20, 2026, highlighting the voices and lived experiences of families

Mallory Paige (Region 5)
- OEC External Steering Committee
- Panel on OEC's Behavioral Health webinar on January 29, 2026, that highlighted Head Start principles and family wellness, as a Head Start Policy Council member

Christina Pace (Region 3)
- OEC One Point of Entry Portal Advisory Committee

Tiffanie Allain (Region 3)
- Birth to Three Interagency Coordinating Council (ICC)

Tricia Hamlin (Region 4), **Amber Alessandro** (Region 5), **Cris Jimenez Porrata** (Region 4), and **Parent Cabinet alum Marinda Monfilston**
- OEC Parent & Caregiver Survey Parent Committee
  - Gave feedback on dissemination strategies

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT + LEADERSHIP GROWTH

Outcomes: Growth in Professional Development Skills and Knowledge + Awareness of OEC Parent Cabinet

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Public Policy Forum February 2026

Parent Cabinet leaders Cris Jimenez Porrata and Mallory Paige attended the NAEYC Public Policy Forum in February 2026 to learn more about early childhood public policy on the national level and meet with congressional delegates on the federal level.







Top Left: Cris pictured with Merril Gay and Congressman Joe Courtney.

Top Right: Mallory with Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro.

Bottom: Mallory pictured with Early Childhood leaders Carol Carrozelli, Karen Rainville, Debbie Collins, and Mary Oster.

New England Fathering Conference, March 2026

Cris attended the 3-day New England Fathering Conference in Mystic, CT, in March 2026, that included breakout sessions and panel discussions focused on strengthening father engagement and addressing the challenges many fathers face.



Cris pictured with OEC staff Jen Wilder and Haley DeClerk.







PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT + LEADERSHIP GROWTH *(continued)*

Child Care Aware Symposium, May 2026, Arlington, VA

Parent Cabinet leaders Tiffanie Allain and Cris Jimenez Porrata attended the Child Care Aware Symposium in May 2026. They were joined by the Parent Cabinet coordinator and met with congressional delegates on the federal level. Cris presented alongside Commissioner Elena Trueworthy, Kristen Dudanowicz, Courtney from the CT Project, and former Commissioner Beth Bye.

Top left: Cris, Tiffanie, and PC Coordinator Chenae in front of the Capitol.

Top right: Cris and Tiffanie pictured with PC Coordinator Chenae.

Bottom: Cris and Tiffanie pictured with Commissioner Elena Trueworthy, Kristen Dudanowicz, Eloisa Melendez from OEC, Courtney from the CT Project, and former Commissioner Beth Bye.

ANNOUNCEMENTS AND CELEBRATIONS



Welcome Yesenia! The newest Parent Cabinet leader, Yesenia Fuentes joined for Region 6 at the end of January 2026. We are so happy to have you!



PC members, alum, and the design team congratulated Commissioner Elena Trueworthy's confirmation in March by sending her well wishes in a Kudoboard book! PC submitted a group testimony in support of her confirmation!

ANNOUNCEMENTS & CELEBRATIONS *(continued)*

New OEC Division: Family & Community Leadership and Outreach!

The Office of Early Childhood has launched a new division focused on elevating family and community leadership across Connecticut. The Family & Community Leadership and Outreach Division brings together key initiatives—Head Start, Local Governance Partners, the OEC Parent Cabinet, Parents Connecting Parents, and the 2Gen Statewide Coordinator—to strengthen coordination and ensure that family voice plays a central role in shaping OEC programs and services statewide. The division is led by Karen Pascale, director of the Connecticut Head Start Collaboration Office.





Tiffanie graduated from her Parents Empowering Parents (PEP) class in May! Tiffanie is pictured with her PEP class at their Kindness Korner project.

Regan (Region 1) finished her time as the Parent Leadership Training Institute (PLTI) Coordinator for Stamford after 10 years! She is pictured here at the Statewide PLTI graduation at the Hartford Capitol on June 10, 2026.

Right: Regan with Yukiyo Lida, associate director of Parent Leadership and Family Engagement, and Executive Director from the Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity, and Opportunity Melvette Hill.

Left: Regan with the graduating class.





PARENT CABINET ALUM LEADERSHIP

Strengthening Parent Leadership Practices Training Series for Local Governance Partners (LGPs) and Parent Trust Fund Grantees

Thanks to funding from the **Kresge Foundation**, the **OEC** and the **State Department of Education (SDE)** partnered with the **National Center for Family & Parent Leadership** (powered by the **Michigan Early Childhood Investment Corporation)**, to strengthen and sustain family leadership practices across communities. This is done through OEC's Local Governance Partners (LGPs) and SDE's Parent Trust Fund grantee communities. Trainings took place from December 2025 through June 2026, focusing on building the skills and structures needed for true shared leadership.

Parent Cabinet alumni continued to grow in their leadership and partnership with OEC. Parent Cabinet alumni Caitlin McNamara, Josh Vaughn, Maria Del Pilar Vargas, and Symone Maguire (now also a Parent Ambassador) have been active in the development of the training and learning series. They've been working alongside LGP Parent Ambassadors Karina Mendez, Jo Modeste, and Ola Szczesny; and the National Center consultants Monica Lewis, Julia Gutierrez-Albrecht, and Rachelle McKissick-Harris. They helped plan and co-facilitate multiple sessions with Parent Ambassadors from across Connecticut.

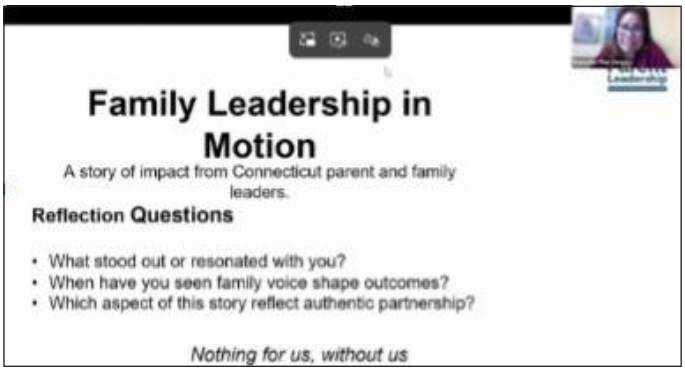
Two in-person gatherings were held in May co-led by the National Center, Parent Cabinet alumni, and Parent Ambassadors, and coordinated by OEC staff, OEC Parent Cabinet Coordinator Chenae Russell, Malissa Griffith, Parents Connecting Parents program manager, and Judy Carson, program manager for School-Family-Community Partnerships at SDE. OEC is grateful to all who have contributed to this work to strengthen parent leadership practices statewide.











Top: Josh Vaughn, Chenae Russell, OEC Commissioner Elena Trueworthy, Julia Gutierrez-Albrecht, Malissa Griffith, Caitlin McNamara, Rachelle McKissick-Harris, OEC Deputy Commissioner David Morgan, Judy Carson, and Monica Lewis.

Second Row: Julia Gutierrez-Albrecht, Karina Mendez, Symone Maguire, and Rachelle McKissick-Harris speaking.

Third Row Left: Caitlin McNamara speaking.

Third Row Right: Joshua Vaughn speaking.

Bottom: Maria Del Pilar Vargas speaking on one of the virtual trainings.

PARENT CABINET ALUM LEADERSHIP *(continued)*

As selection for Parent Cabinet is approaching, many Parent Cabinet alum have been a part of helping to improve the selection process for Fall 2026 alongside Governor's Fellow Shawn O'Brien and Data Scientist Coral Wonderly. Thank you to Parent Cabinet alum Symone Maguire, Marinda Monfilston, Cailtin McNamara, Josh Vaughn, and Maria Del Pilar Vargas!



Fatherhood Conversations
PC alum Josh Vaughn has been hearing from fathers through fatherhood conversations at a Naugatuck YMCA Saturday Series with support from OEC to help as they think about improving recruitment for father leaders.

CURRENT OEC PARENT CABINET MEMBERS

Regan Allan, Stamford (Region 1)
Jenny Canepa, Stamford (Region 1)
Raquel Sanchez-Ramirez, New Haven (Region 2)
Shannon Knox, New Haven (Region 2)
Tiffanie Allain, Brooklyn (Region 3)
Jessica Stark, Middletown (Region 3)
Christina Pace, Colchester (Region 3)
Tricia Hamlin, West Hartford (Region 3)
Kelly Sorrow, Vernon (Region 4)
Cris Jimenez Porrata, Tolland (Region 4)
Amber Alessandro, Danbury (Region 5)
Mallory Paige, Danbury (Region 5)
Yesenia Fuentes, Bristol (Region 6)
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 OEC Parent Cabinet at:

ctoec.org/parent-cabinet