

# Meeting Notes

Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations  
<https://portal.ct.gov/acir>

## Special Education, Education Governance & Workforce Development Subcommittee

**Tuesday, May 13, 2025**

Agenda: <https://egov.ct.gov/PMC/Agenda/Download/28657>

Video: This meeting inadvertently was not recorded

**ACIR Members present:** John Filchak, Jan Perruccio (Co-chair), Eric Protulis, Lon Seidman (Co-chair)

**Other participants:** Jennifer Benevento

**OPM staff:** Christine Goupil, Bruce Wittchen

### **1. Welcome and call to order**

Lon Seidman called the meeting to order at 9:06.

### **2. If desired: review of draft [notes of the 3/11/2025 meeting and 2024-25 Work Program](#)**

There was no review.

### **3. Regional/Interdistrict Special Ed and Other Services**

This topic was included in the legislative discussion.

### **4. Legislation Roundtable**

There was a discussion of the status of and uncertain prospects for four key education bills:

[SB 1](#), *An Act Increasing Resources For Students, Schools And Special Education*  
[HB 5001](#), *An Act Concerning The Quality And Delivery Of Special Education Services In CT*  
[HB 7277](#), *An Act Concerning The Provision Of Special Education In Connecticut*  
[SB 1561](#), *An Act Concerning Resources For Special Education*

The focus was on special education, the sustainability of current and proposed approaches to funding, and the concerns raised by various legislative proposals. Jennifer Benevento described the threat of people being priced out and of public schools being priced out because they cannot compete with private programs that are able to raise their prices to pay more for the needed staff. She said she understands the fears of parents and others but is hopeful. Lon Seidman said nothing was done about this for a long time, so it is difficult now.

John Filchak said this also had been discussed by the (Municipal Opportunities and Regional Efficiencies (MORE) Commission beginning in 2010 (see [2015 Legislative Recommendations](#) of its Special Education Select Working Group). He added that the issue is like the property tax: people talk about it, but nothing is done because of the money involved. Jennifer said this group has previously talked about regional cost

sharing and, to cite a similar situation, questioned why her town would consider a \$6 million animal control facility instead of sharing a facility with neighboring towns.

Lon Seidman explained how the state could encourage a shared approach to education through additional reimbursement for construction and mentioned that the state's definition of [Local Education Agencies](#) (LEAs) has an impact on what can be done. Lon also said he has suggested that the state employ matchmakers go around the state matching districts who can share programs. He also mentioned that the [CT Assoc. of Boards of Education](#) (CABE) divided the state into [large regions](#) and that making those smaller should encourage more conversations among school districts within a region. John Filchak said there are few legislative impediments to regionalization and that the [Northeast CT Council of Governments](#) (NECCOG) has done regional initiatives that other COGs will not do. He added that statutes identifies a region as being any two or more towns, which he said is not a good definition, and added that CCM and COST have not always embraced regionalism.

Jennifer Benevento questioned why towns prefer raising taxes over saving through regionalism. She added that unions are blamed for preventing regional approaches and said they are helping their members put food on the table, but they are good partners. John Filchak said he never had union problems with his COG's regional initiatives and said there is a racial issue, with towns in his area not wanting to regionalize a service with Windham.

Jan Perruccio said opposition comes from different perspectives. She said regionalism can be a program grower and money saver, but school superintendents can lose their jobs over it. She said the recent experiences of establishing the new Regional School District 20 will set us back. She added that district-by-district approaches to special education are unsustainable, but 2019's punitive legislative attempts to force regional education created considerable opposition to the concept (see [SB 457](#), [SB 738](#), and initial [SB 874](#)). She described legislative hearings and the impact on her advocacy as superintendent for her district to consider regional approaches at the same time.

John Filchak said regionalism is held back by the typical focus on cost because regional approaches might not save money. He described his region's shared animal control service, which is an improvement over what towns could provide individually, and was sold to the towns on the basis of that improved service, which did not have a lower cost. Jan Perruccio added that the savings of regional approach sometimes are experienced in the long-term. Lon Seidman noted the challenge resulting when collaborating towns have significantly different mill rates, in which towns with a larger mill rate can experience a greater impact from increased costs supported by voters in a town with a lower mill rate.

There was a discussion of equalization and of the regressive nature of the property tax and it was suggested that the state's approaches for regional solutions are part of the problem. Eric Protulis highlighted the need to feature quality improvements because regional solutions do not save money, not at first. He pointed out the degree of differences among districts and that some students do not have access to the same programming as others. He encouraged a focus on quality.

John Filchak said the state tries for one-size-fits-all solutions and noted pushback from wealthy towns. He said he and another former COG director had advocated for the state to pilot innovative practices by focusing funding where towns were willing to try, but the state just spreads the money around. Eric Protulis said some legislators are open to regional approaches and asked if this group should meet with them about the recommendations. Do we have such a role? Lon Seidman said that is a role for the group, but added that legislators might resist due to the massive turnout of opponents to the previously mentioned regional school bills.

John Filchak said the plan is for each of the subcommittees to present its work at one of the ACIR's meetings this fall, with the ACIR finalizing its report in December and presenting it with a legislative briefing in January. Jennifer Benevento suggested reaching out to groups that have been opponents,

specifically mentioning parents of special education students, to engage with them as early as possible, and highlighted the fears of many parents.

There was a discussion of current examples of small scale sharing of services among towns and Lon Seidman agreed that it would be worth discussing recommendations with parents. He highlighted the benefit of sending a student to a shared service in a town 15 minutes away versus sending the student to a private outplacement 45 minutes away.

There was a brief discussion of the possibility of holding a symposium to bring people together for a broader discussion of the different perspectives on these topics and the meeting adjourned at 9:51.

*Notes prepared by Bruce Wittchen, OPM*