

The Regional School District 13 Board of Education Student Achievement Committee met in regular session on Wednesday, February 25, 2026 at 4:30 p.m. in the library at Coginchaug Regional High School.

Committee Members Present: Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mrs. Allen, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Roraback, and Mrs. Cowan (arrived at 5:30)

Committee Members Absent: Ms. Hamilton, Mrs. Caramanello, and Mr. Simmons

Board of Education Members Present: Mr. Konstantino (attended remotely)

Administration Present: Dr. Leggett, Superintendent of Schools and Dr. Siegel, Associate Director of Learning, Innovation, and Accountability

Mrs. Petrella called the meeting to order at 4:30 P.M.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Public Comment

A parent spoke to express concern about newly adopted graduation requirements under Policy 5127, particularly the reduction of the English requirement from four credits to three. As long-time educators, Mr. Viens and his wife argue that most Connecticut districts require four credits, and lowering the standard places the district in a small minority and may weaken students' academic profiles, especially for highly selective college admissions where high school reputation matters. He believes reducing the requirement to help struggling students is misguided, as those students would benefit most from four years of English, and strong literacy skills are essential for all career paths. He also noted that even the Connecticut Technical Education and Career System requires four English credits. Additionally, Mrs. Viens raised concerns that students' plans can change, and lowering requirements could limit future opportunities. Finally, he criticized the timing of the policy's implementation, particularly its application to the Class of 2027, and changes to fine arts requirements, which he said disrupted carefully planned senior schedules. Mr. and Mrs. Viens urged the board to reconsider both the reduction in English credits and the accelerated implementation timeline, emphasizing that graduation requirements should maintain high standards and expand opportunities.

Approval of Agenda

Dr. Darcy made a motion, seconded by Mr. Roraback, to approve the agenda as presented.

All in favor of approving the agenda as presented: Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mrs. Allen, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Roraback, and Mr. Konstantino. Motion passed.

Approval of Minutes – November 5, 2025

Dr. Darcy made a motion, seconded by Mr. Roraback, to approve the November 5, 2025 meeting minutes as presented.

All in favor of approving the November 5, 2025 meeting minutes as presented: Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Roraback, and Mr. Konstantino. Mrs. Allen abstained from voting. Motion passed by majority vote.

Review and Discussion of Graduation Requirements Policy

Board members and administrators discussed concerns about the reduction of the English graduation requirement from four credits to three and clarified several points. Mrs. Petrella questioned what would happen if students fulfill the 3 credit English requirement but the college they apply to requires 4 credits. Dr. Leggett explained that having only three English credits could affect college admissions differently depending on the institution, though some colleges may allow flexibility such as summer or online coursework. Mrs. Petrella also inquired if the reduction in English credits result in the reduction of an English teacher, as proposed in this year's budget. Dr. Leggett emphasized that the reduction of the English credit requirements is not tied to cutting an English teaching position, noting that senior English courses are electives and class sizes would remain within limits even with a staffing reduction due to budget constraints.

Mrs. Petrella asked whether the revised graduation requirements could apply only to incoming freshmen rather than current students. Dr. Leggett responded that the change affects only a small number of students, approximately two or three, and presented two options: implement the new requirements starting with the Class of 2028 or allow the administration to "grandfather" in individual students if conflicts arise. Dr. Leggett emphasized that the impact would be minimal either way.

Dr. Leggett stated the reduction in credits is intended to increase flexibility and expand elective pathways, particularly for students pursuing non-college career certifications, not to lower standards. Dr. Darcy noted that college-bound students will still take four years of English, especially those in AP courses. Dr. Leggett also noted that restoring the fourth required credit would require reducing another requirement, either in humanities or electives, to stay within the state's 25-credit minimum. Dr. Darcy also commented that while only one other district has the three credit English requirement, this is a new state policy the board is implementing after its full policy review. Other districts, she noted, may follow and implement a 3 credit English requirement once they complete their policy review. Mr. Roraback also identified that the technical high school system has an active summer school English and math curriculum to support student graduation.

Dr. Leggett also addressed college admissions. College admissions officers typically review the rigor of a student's course selection rather than a school's minimum requirements; colleges want to see the program of studies and what level of difficulty the student chose. Dr. Leggett does not believe the change would harm the district's academic reputation or accreditation, though Dr. Leggett agreed to verify what impact it may have on accreditation according to NEASC.

Dr. Leggett also clarified a previous error in the revised physical education policy. Students must earn a minimum of one credit and may earn up to a maximum of two credits in PE toward graduation. At minimum, students must take 0.25 credits of PE and health per year. Students may also earn some credit through participation in sports and can take additional PE electives, but no more than two total PE credits may count toward graduation requirements. This is an editing correction the board already voted on.

The committee decided to send the Graduation Requirements Policy 5127 back to the Policy Committee for further review, with possible options of delaying implementation to the Class of 2028 or allowing grandfathering for affected students.

10-Year State Assessment Data Overview

Dr. Siegel introduced a 10-year overview (2014–2015 through 2024–2025) of state assessment data, including SBAC and SAT for ELA and math, and NGSS for science. Dr. Siegel explained that the data is drawn from EdSight and reflects standardized accountability measures administered in secure testing environments. For ELA, district performance was relatively stable from 2014–2017 around a score of 72, followed by growth in 2018 and 2019. Scores declined during the COVID years, consistent with national trends, and showed some instability in 2023–2024. In 2024–2025, there was a modest rebound to 71.2. While current performance is below the pre-pandemic peak, it is not the lowest point in the decade and overall remains relatively flat across the 10-year span.

Board members asked about the timing of the new reading program (implemented around 2023–2024). Dr. Leggett noted that temporary dips are common during new program rollouts. Mr. Moore recalled that in 2017–2018, the board and superintendent made a strong districtwide push to improve curriculum and outcomes, which may have contributed to the gains seen before the pandemic.

Dr. Siegel reviewed 10-year district math performance data (SBAC grades 3–8 and SAT grade 11 combined into a 0–100 performance index). Math showed stronger growth than ELA from 2014–2019, followed by a significant pandemic-related decline, consistent with national findings, including reported learning loss of over a year. Recovery in math has been less stable than in ELA, likely because math skills are cumulative and interruptions compound gaps. Current scores remain below pre-pandemic peaks but fall within the district's historical range.

Board members asked clarifying questions about how the performance index is calculated and when updated scores will be available (typically certified between July and September). Dr. Siegel discussed the implementation of math playlists beginning in grade 4 and expanding to grade 5 as a response to achievement dips, noting that results may take time to reflect in aggregate data because multiple grade levels contribute to the overall score.

Mr. Roraback acknowledged that, as a small district, a relatively small number of struggling students can significantly affect overall averages. Dr. Leggett stated that the district's scores are not where they should be and also confirmed that there is a notable achievement gap between high-need students and their peers, and that the district's gap is wider than the Connecticut average, making it a priority area for improvement.

Mr. Moore asked whether removing high-need students (approximately 22% of the population) from the data would change the overall trend line, specifically, whether the shape of the performance curve would remain the same without that subgroup. The question aimed to determine whether the district-wide trend is largely driven by the achievement gap or if broader performance issues exist across all students. Dr. Leggett responded that the team would need to analyze the data further and report back, as that breakdown had not yet been calculated.

Dr. Darcy shifted to strategies for improvement, including stronger family engagement in math learning. Dr. Darcy noted that while reading support at home is common, many families feel less confident supporting math. Dr. Leggett suggested that sometimes this is due to cultural attitudes (“I’m not a math person”) or unfamiliarity with current instructional methods. Suggestions included creating take-home math kits with manipulatives, offering guidance to parents on supporting math at home, and increasing hands-on learning in classrooms, especially after pandemic restrictions limited shared materials.

Dr. Siegel explained that science data is not fully comparable across the full 10-year span because the district used CMT/CAPT assessments until 2017, piloted NGSS in 2017–2018, and fully implemented NGSS beginning in 2018. A dividing line on the chart marks this change in assessments. Science is tested only in grades 5, 8, and 11, so year-to-year comparisons reflect different student cohorts, unlike ELA and math.

During the pandemic years (2019–2022), science scores remained relatively strong (around 74), which Dr. Leggett noted was unusual given that science, particularly hands-on and inquiry-based learning, was often more disrupted from COVID than other subjects. However, scores declined in 2023–2024, including one middle school grade level that performed significantly lower despite not showing similar weakness on internal assessments. The cause is unclear. Dr. Darcy speculated whether post-pandemic instructional focus on literacy and math may have temporarily sidelined science, or whether curriculum changes, such as the phased implementation of OpenSciEd, played a role. It was also noted that the district previously had a strong outdoor education program, which may have supported science performance during pandemic years, but instructional leadership positions were reduced around 2022–2023. The most recent data (2024–2025) shows an upward trend again, suggesting some recovery.

Dr. Siegel concluded the presentation with key takeaways and next steps:

System-driven growth (2017–2019): The district’s improvement during this period was largely the result of a coordinated, system-wide effort. This included curriculum alignment, structured data cycles, shared instructional leadership, content-based coaching, and STEM/literacy leadership support. Coaching was formalized during this period, separating it from intervention work.

Pandemic disruption: The COVID-19 pandemic interrupted these systems. Manipulatives weren’t available, collaboration structures were disrupted, and instructional priorities shifted to student well-being. This caused a dip in achievement despite prior growth.

Recovery and focus areas: Current scores are rebounding but haven’t yet reached the 2018–2019 peak. The district is focusing on restoring instructional coherence through aligned curriculum, consistent instructional practices, embedded data cycles, strong Tier 1 instruction, differentiation, and small-group

support.

Vertical alignment and cumulative learning: There is a particular emphasis on ensuring cumulative skill development in math so that gaps from pandemic interruptions can be addressed.

Professional learning and coaching: Teachers share strategies in PLCs, and coaches target areas of need. Best practices are shared across grades, and support is responsive in real time.

Discussion of Mid-Year Data Review Planning

Dr. Siegel reviewed the assessments used throughout the district, which includes K–1: Universal Number Sense, Grades 2–5: i-Ready (math), Grades 6–8: IXL (math), aligned with ongoing calibration studies, Literacy assessments are separate and under review. Current assessment tools show trends that generally align with prior district performance data, though fluctuations exist.

Dr. Leggett presented that the mid-year diagnostic reports (iReady, IXL, DIBELS, number sense screeners) are teacher-focused tools designed to guide instruction, not to compare achievement across years. They help teachers identify next steps for individual students. Dr. Siegel elaborated on what the mid-year data reports measure. Tests differ across the year (e.g., K–1 number sense begins with a 10-question interview, mid-year adds a written component). Scoring scales differ (e.g., beginning of year out of 30 vs. mid-year out of 40). Growth is not always reflected in grade-level bands. For example, a student can make significant progress but remain below grade-level proficiency. Additionally, mid-year scores cannot be directly compared to previous years' standardized achievement scores (SBAC, SAT, NGSS) because they measure different things and are not on a consistent scale.

Dr. Darcy discussed the need for data in understanding not just overall achievement, but also how many students are making measurable growth from one point to another. Dr. Darcy noted that growth can look different for each student, so it's important to consider the percentage of students improving academically rather than expecting uniform 'year's growth.' Dr. Darcy also wanted to highlight how data teams use short-cycle assessments and check-ins to inform instruction, striking a balance between being data-driven and data-informed to support teachers without causing burnout.

Mrs. Petrella agreed that the committee wanted to view data to see growth, and Dr. Leggett reinforced that the current data was not an appropriate measure of showing growth. Dr. Siegel highlighted the importance of providing a comprehensive view of how the district's data teams operate, including their protocols for analyzing student performance. Mrs. Allen also expressed interest in understanding how universal screeners, particularly for literacy, are being used to identify early risk and guide interventions, helping students stay on track. Additionally, Mrs. Allen emphasized the need for consistent communication with parents regarding assessment results, ensuring that board members and families share a common understanding of student achievement and progress. Dr. Siegel will put together the information on these assessments requested by the committee and bring it to the next meeting.

Discussion of Online Courses from CSDE

The committee discussed whether to approve Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) approved online elective courses, such as the History of Music by Little Steven. The question was whether these courses should go through the committee's standard approval process or be automatically accepted due to their state approval. Dr. Darcy raised considerations about alignment with district values, potential impact on teachers, and maintaining consistency. Mr. Moore also stated the current policy may need to be amended in order to accept the CSDE online courses. Mrs. Petrella suggested that the committee could review the courses for ethical and curricular alignment before presenting them to the board. Mr. Konstantino questioned if the district offers online courses. Currently, the district offers some online courses through Edgenuity for specific student needs, but has not yet implemented CSDE approved courses. Dr. Leggett and Dr. Siegel will research this more and bring this back to the committee again in the future.

Strategic Planning and Vision of a Graduate Update

Dr. Leggett reported that all focus groups for the strategic planning process have been completed, providing substantial input. The next step is sharing feedback at each school to refine the "Vision of a Graduate" and finalize strategic planning categories. First drafts of these are expected by late March or early April. Additionally, the process highlighted the emerging need for a "Vision of Instruction," articulating core instructional beliefs and expectations, which will guide teaching practices and provide clarity for staff.

Student Committee Member

Dr. Leggett announced that Will Overton has applied to join the Student Achievement Committee. He comes highly recommended, and there were no objections to his appointment. Will Overton will be submitted for a board appointment tonight.

Public Comment

Mrs. Viens, a local high school counselor, noted that most colleges, including UConn, where many local students enroll, require four years of English for admission. Additionally, NCAA Division I athletes also need four years of English, and Division II athletes must meet certain academic unit requirements. Therefore, if students were to take electives in place of a fourth year of English, it could affect both college admissions and NCAA eligibility. Dr. Leggett agreed that the course chart should clearly indicate college requirements for English, aligning it with how other subjects are presented. The district has maintained that 4 credits in English is the recommendation for most students, and all college bound students.

Adjournment

Dr. Darcy made a motion, seconded by Mr. Roraback, to adjourn the meeting.

All in favor of adjourning the meeting: Mr. Moore, Mrs. Petrella, Mrs. Allen, Dr. Darcy, Mr. Roraback, Mr. Konstantino, and Mrs. Cowan. Motion passed and the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted by Meghan Shortell-Fratantonio