

## **Special Education Ad Hoc Subcommittee Meeting**

Thursday, June 4, 2026 6:00 PM

New Fairfield Community Room, 33 Route 37, New Fairfield, CT. In the event of inclement weather, this meeting will change to remote, and a virtual link will be provided on our website and distributed. , 3 Brush Hill Road, New Fairfield, CT 06812

### **I. CALL TO ORDER**

### **II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

#### **II.A. April 6, 2026**

### **III. INFORMATION/ACTION ITEMS**

#### **III.A. Update on Special Education Department Goals for the 2025–2026 School Year Two**

#### **III.B. BRIDGE Program Update and Proposal for the 2026–2027 School Year**

### **IV. OTHER**

### **V. ADJOURNMENT**

**BOARD OF EDUCATION, NEW FAIRFIELD, CT**  
**Special Education Ad Hoc Subcommittee Meeting**

Name of Subcommittee: Special Education Ad Hoc Meeting type: Regular  
Date of Meeting: 4/6/26 Minutes submitted by: Sue Huwer  
Members present: Sue Huwer, Kimberly LaTourette, Samantha Mannion & Ed Sbordone  
Members absent:  
Other attendees: Ken Craw, Monika Krepsztul, Michelle Demeyer, Theresa Fox, Alex Lambert  
Place of meeting: New Fairfield Community Room, 33 Route 37, New Fairfield, CT

The meeting was called to order at 6:02 p.m.

**II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

**A. February 5, 2026**

**Motion:** To approve the minutes of February 5, 2026, as presented

Made by: Samantha Mannion

Seconded by: Kim LaTourette

**Recording of vote:** All in favor

**III. INFORMATION ITEMS**

**A. Bridge Program Update** - Monika Krepsztul reported that two months into it, the new Bridge Program is succeeding. The program adds a new therapeutic component for those high school students dealing with school avoidance issues and at risk of needing placement outside the district or dropping out altogether. It uses a skills-based approach and group meetings in the school environment to help these students with social/emotional issues, coping skills and behavioral problems that hinder their attending high school regularly. The objective is to improve their attendance so that they can complete their education in the district, without the need for outplacement. (The Bridge Program augments other existing efforts: Students with school avoidance issues often require home visits by consultants and social workers and private transportation to and from school for them to be able to attend class.)

There are presently 18 students in the program. The program offers group meetings: one for girls regarding social and emotional relationships, one that is co-ed dealing with communication and coping skills, and a third group for boys focusing on behavior and making good choices. The program has recently added a middle school component: It has begun meeting with the 8th grade, via a weekly program, to help these students socially and emotionally be able to acclimate to high school as smoothly as possible. The Bridge Program has already prevented two outplacements. Staff is hopeful that a current student in outside placement will return to the district in September. Samantha Mannion encouraged staff to seek a grant from the Worth Foundation, which supports efforts like this in the Bridgeport area.

**B. Strides Program Update** – Monika and staff reported that the STRIDES program is now fully staffed with our own employees and not agency's staffing. There are five job sites within walking distance of the STRIDES location in downtown Danbury (Food Bank, hockey rink, Library, City Center, and Naugatuck Community College) and there is an effort to build more on local connections to the downtown location. Also, in April, STRIDES students will have the opportunity to go to Green Chimneys farms for work there.

The partnership with Newtown is going well but we are nearing the end of our three-year working arrangement as well as our shared office lease. Communication is strong and, going forward, there will be areas to address including: a lease renewal with new terms vs our seeking alternate space in the building with our own lease. We expect our number of students to increase significantly within two years, which the current space may not be large enough to accommodate. Also, the current lease is shared 50-50. Newtown has more students in the program, but it was to offset this by providing all students with free job transportation via its vans. However, it was reported that this transportation has been limited as our students go to local job sites within walking distance of STRIDES and the number of shared job opportunities in Newtown which require van transport has been reduced. Also, STRIDES students are now receiving transportation training. Some are working towards a driver's license.

**IV. ACTION ITEMS** – none

**V. OTHER** - none

**Motion to adjourn:** Made by: Kim LaTourette

**Recording of vote:** All in favor

**Seconded by:** Ed Sbordone

**Meeting adjourned at:** 6:44 p.m.

## **New Fairfield Public Schools Bridge Program**

**Goal:** To establish a comprehensive in-district pathway for students in grades 9–12 who experience significant social-emotional needs, school avoidance, and other barriers to school participation, including students who may be vulnerable to high-risk behaviors such as substance use. Across grades 9–12, the pathway will deliver integrated therapeutic interventions alongside academic instruction to promote consistent attendance, academic progress, emotional well-being, and sustained engagement with the school community. The program will also provide targeted school avoidance services for students in grades 6–8, with an emphasis on transition planning to support successful entry into high school. Through individualized supports and coordinated services, the program will foster resilience, strengthen coping and self-regulation skills, and, when appropriate, reduce the need for more restrictive educational placements.

**Introduction:** Bridge will operate within the district's Middle School BEST Program and High School Alternative Learning Center (ALC) as a supportive, therapeutic extension of existing services, incorporating social work supports and interventions. This structure ensures that students receive individualized care while remaining in their home district, allowing them to maintain relationships with teachers, peers, and the broader school community. By focusing on both academic continuity and emotional well-being, Bridge provides a pathway toward long-term success and greater inclusion within the school environment.

**Rationale:** Students with intensive social-emotional needs often experience interruptions in their education and a diminished connection to their peers and community. Out-of-district placements can exacerbate this isolation, separating students from the people and environments most familiar to them. Bridge addresses this challenge by providing in-district therapeutic services that promote stability, foster resilience, and maintain students' connections to their school community. By building on existing programs, the district can deliver individualized support to students awaiting placement or requiring more intensive services, while also offering families of outplaced students the option to consider returning to their home district. At its core, Bridge is designed to strengthen student belonging, build confidence, and help every learner find a pathway forward.

**Student Population:** The Bridge Program will support students in grades 9–12 with significant social-emotional needs, school avoidance, and other challenges that impact consistent school attendance, engagement, and academic success, including concerns related to substance use. In addition, students in grades 6–8 will receive school avoidance supports and transition services to facilitate a successful move to high school, with continued support as they enter ninth grade.

**Location and Services:** Students in grades 9–12 will access their academic instruction through the Alternative Learning Center (ALC). Bridge's therapeutic supports will be embedded within the school day and integrated alongside academic programming to promote engagement, consistency, and successful participation in school.

**Staffing Request:** This proposal recommends the addition of a full-time social worker to enhance the district's continuum of mental health and behavioral supports. The position will primarily focus on strengthening therapeutic services within the High School Alternative

Learning Center (ALC), supporting students experiencing school avoidance, addressing concerns related to substance use and other high-risk behaviors, providing embedded, targeted instruction in coping, self-regulation, and social-emotional skill development, and facilitating successful transitions from middle school to high school.

This position is essential to ensuring that students with significant social-emotional and behavioral needs receive timely, consistent, and high-quality support while remaining educated within their home district. The addition of a dedicated social worker will further strengthen the district’s capacity to provide early intervention, promote student engagement and attendance, reduce barriers to learning, and support positive academic, behavioral, and postsecondary outcomes.

**ALC & Bridge Financial Plan and Staffing Structure:**

| <b>Staffing / Description</b>                           | <b>Current FTE</b> | <b>Proposed FTE</b> | <b>Change</b>    | <b>Notes</b>  |
|---|--------------------|---------------------|------------------|---|
| ALC Teachers (English, Math, Social Studies, Science)   | .8                 | .8                  | \$0              | Small class sizes ensure individualized academic support.   |
| Elective courses  | Existing           | No change           | \$0              | Provide access to courses often unavailable to outplaced students.  |
| Special Education Teacher                               | 1.0                | 1.0                 | \$0              | Maintain continuity of academic support.  |
| ALC Paraeducator  | 1.0                | 0                   | -\$25,197        |   |
| Social Worker   | 0                  | 1.0                 | +\$60,900        | New position dedicated to Bridge; individualized and group therapy, crisis intervention, school avoidance, substance use, and support for the MS BEST Program |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>2.8</b>         | <b>3.8</b>          | <b>+\$35,703</b> | Additional Funds Required   |
| Out-of-district anticipated tuition transfer to Payroll |                    |                     | -\$35,703        | 26-27 Minimum anticipated cost savings (106,703) associated with serving outplaced students in-district   |
| <b>Total Change</b>                                     |                    | <b>+1.0 FTE</b>     | <b>\$0</b>       |   |

## **Financial Benefits:**

While the primary goal of Bridge is to meet the social-emotional and academic needs of students, the program is intentionally designed as a cost-avoidance and capacity-building strategy for the district.

By offering a high-quality therapeutic option in district, Bridge reduces the likelihood that students will require future out-of-district placements and allows the district to intervene earlier and more effectively. This includes addressing school avoidance through embedded, in-district supports, significantly reducing the need for external school avoidance services and consultants, which are both costly and short-term.

In addition, Bridge creates a clear pathway for students currently placed outside the district to return when appropriate, further decreasing tuition, transportation, and contracted service expenditures. Over time, this proactive approach allows the district to reinvest avoided costs into sustainable, student-centered supports that strengthen in-district capacity.

## **Summary:**

Hiring a full-time social worker within the existing ALC structure is a financially sound and educationally impactful solution that delivers the following benefits:

- Improved student outcomes: Increased attendance, engagement, and social-emotional functioning.
- Cost savings: One position costs less than a single out-of-district placement.
- Immediate compliance: Ensures timely fulfillment of IEP requirements for students in crisis.
- Reduced out-of-district placements: Keeps students in district, resulting in significant tuition savings.
- Reduced reliance on contracted services: Decreases dependence on external school avoidance supports.
- Sustainable growth: Builds long-term district capacity for high-quality, in-district programming.