
OLR Bill Analysis

sHB 6499

AN ACT CONCERNING MINOR REVISIONS TO THE EDUCATION STATUTES.

SUMMARY:

This bill makes various changes in the education statutes. It:

1. reclassifies American Sign Language and eliminates signed English from required public school instruction offerings;
2. adds genocide education and awareness to the subjects for which the State Board of Education (SBE) must provide curriculum materials and encourage school districts to offer courses for students and in-service training for certified personnel;
3. allows the education commissioner to permit an otherwise qualified teacher with an elementary education endorsement to teach a specialized subject in a K-8 school;
4. changes the schedules for filing various education-related reports generally, requiring them to be filed less frequently;
5. eliminates (a) a statutory deadline for filing expenditure reports from school districts participating in the school breakfast program and (b) the education commissioner's discretion over whether school districts that use their grants for unauthorized purposes must repay the grant;
6. gives school districts an extra month to notify nontenured teachers that their contracts for the following school year will not be renewed;
7. allows school superintendents or their designees to access the state's public school information system to obtain mastery test

information about individual students enrolled in or transferring to their districts;

8. requires school districts to take additional measures to address truancy and report annually on their truancy reduction activities; and
9. requires SBE to adopt uniform definitions of excused and unexcused absences for districts to use in implementing required truancy policies and filing truancy data reports.

The bill also corrects several statutory references (§§ 13, 19 and 20). These changes are technical.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2011, except for the technical corrections, which are effective on passage.

§ 1 & 2 — INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAMS AND TEACHER IN-SERVICE TRAINING

§ 1 — *American Sign Language*

The law specifies the subjects public schools must offer. They include language arts and, at least on the secondary level, one or more foreign languages. The bill changes the designation of “foreign language” to “world language.” It classifies American Sign Language as a world language instead of as an optional subject within language arts. It also eliminates a school district’s option to offer signed English under the category of language arts.

American Sign Language is a complete, complex language that employs signs made with the hands and other movements, including facial expressions and body postures. Signed English is a form of sign language based on English and uses English syntax rather than the syntax of American Sign Language.

§§ 1 & 2 — *Genocide Education and Awareness*

The bill requires the SBE to (1) make curriculum and other materials on genocide education and awareness available and (2) within available appropriations, encourage local school districts to include the

subject in their (a) instructional programs for students and (b) in-service training programs for certified teachers, administrators, and other pupil personnel.

§ 3 — WAIVER OF CERTIFICATION ENDORSEMENT LIMITATION

The bill authorizes the education commissioner, at a school board's request, to allow a certified teacher who holds an elementary education endorsement to teach a specialized course, such as computer and information technology, in a kindergarten-through-grade-eight school in the district. The teacher must be otherwise qualified to teach the specialized course and must be employed by the school board making the request.

An elementary education endorsement covers kindergarten through grade six. Endorsements for grades six-12 authorize a teacher to teach a particular subject. There is no K-8 endorsement.

§§ 4-11 — REPORTING SCHEDULES AND DEADLINES

The bill changes the schedules and dates for filing various statutorily required education reports. In general, the changes reduce the frequency for filing the reports.

§ 4 — *After-School Program Reports*

The bill changes the submission deadline, from October 1 to December 1, for a biennial report from the State Department of Education (SDE) to the Education Committee on performance outcomes for entities receiving after-school program grants. The report must include measurements of the programs' impact on student achievement, attendance, and behavior.

§§ 5 & 6 — *Youth Service Bureau Reports*

The bill changes, from annual to biennial, the schedule for SDE to submit to the General Assembly a report on diverting children from the court system to youth service bureaus, including the number of times any child is diverted, the number of children diverted, the types of services provided, the ages of the children diverted, and other statistical information as requested.

§ 7 — Charter School Reports

The bill changes, from annual to biennial, the schedule for SDE to submit to the Education Committee a report on the operations of charter schools, including recommendations for statutory changes to facilitate expanding their number, a compilation of the schools' strategic school profiles, and an assessment of the adequacy of state funding for such schools and the adequacy and availability of suitable facilities for them.

§§ 8 & 9 — School Readiness Reports

The bill changes the schedule, from twice a year to once every two years, for local school readiness councils' report to SDE on (1) the number and location of school readiness spaces and estimates of future needs; (2) the need for school readiness programs and the number of children not being served; and (3) for priority school districts, the number of children not being served and the estimated cost of serving those children. It changes SDE's schedule for reporting a summary of the local reports to the Education Committee from annual to biennial.

§ 10 — School Facilities Report

The bill changes, from biennial to triennial, the schedule for school districts to report to SDE and SDE to the Education Committee on the condition of school facilities and actions taken to implement each district's long-term school building, indoor air quality, and green cleaning programs.

§ 11 — School Paraprofessional Advisory Council Reports

The bill reduces, from quarterly to annually, the schedule for the School Paraprofessional Advisory Council to advise the education commissioner of, and report to the Education Committee on, training needs and the effectiveness of the content and delivery of current training for school paraprofessionals. The bill also requires the council to meet at quarterly.

§ 12 — SCHOOL BREAKFAST PROGRAM GRANTS

The bill requires school districts to repay any school breakfast program grant funds not spent for allowable purposes. Current law

gives the education commissioner discretion over whether to require repayment. It also requires school districts participating in the program to file financial statements of their expenditures annually and in manner the commissioner requires instead of by September 1 of the fiscal year following the year the district participated.

§ 14 — NOTICE TO NONTENURED TEACHERS OF CONTRACT NONRENEWAL

The bill delays, from April 1 to May 1, the annual deadline for a school district to notify teachers who do not have tenure that their contracts will not be renewed for the following year. By law, unless it terminates a nontenured teacher for cause, a school district must continue the teacher's contract for the following year unless it notifies him or her in writing of nonrenewal by the statutory deadline.

§ 15 — PUBLIC SCHOOL INFORMATION SYSTEM ACCESS

The bill requires the education commissioner to give school superintendents or their designees access to mastery test information in the state's public school information system. The access must be limited to determining examination dates, scores, and levels of achievement only for those students enrolled in or transferring into a superintendent's school district. The bill applies to statewide mastery tests administered in grades three through eight and the 10th grade Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT).

§§ 16-18 — TRUANCY POLICIES

§ 16 — *Additional Requirements for School Districts*

By law, each school board must adopt policies and procedures for dealing with truants that include certain specific actions. Among these are that (1) school personnel or volunteers under their direction make a reasonable effort to notify parents by phone when their child fails to appear for school and there is no indication that the parent knows of the child's absence; (2) school officials must meet with a child's parents within 10 school days after the child's fourth unexcused absence in a month or his 10th in a school year; and (3) when a parent does not attend the required meeting or otherwise fails to cooperate in addressing the truancy, the superintendent of schools file a written

complaint with the Superior Court alleging that the child's family is a Family With Service Needs (FWSN) (see BACKGROUND).

The bill requires:

1. school personnel or volunteers to notify the parent of an child's absence by mail as well as by phone,
2. the mailed notice to warn that two unexcused absences in a month or five in a year could lead the school superintendent to file a FWSN complaint, and
3. the superintendent to file a FWSN complaint within 15 days after a parent fails to attend the meeting with school officials or otherwise fails to cooperate in addressing his or her child's school absences. Current law imposes no deadline for filing the FWSN complaint.

§ 17 — Information on Truancy Reduction Activity

By law, superintendents must include truancy data in the school and school district profiles they must submit to SDE each year. The bill also requires superintendents to include, in the narrative part of the profiles, a description of their school board's actions to reduce truancy in the district.

§ 18 — Excused and Unexcused Absences

By July 1, 2012, the bill requires the SBE to define an "excused" and "unexcused" absence and requires school boards to use the definitions to (1) report required truancy data on school profiles and (2) implement required truancy policies and procedures. There is currently no uniform statewide definition of these terms.

BACKGROUND

Family With Service Needs

A FWSN complaint may be filed when a child under age 17 runs away without good cause, is truant or beyond control of his or her parents or school authorities, or engages in certain forms of sexual or immoral conduct. The complaint must be referred to a juvenile

probation officer who investigates and recommends that the child receive a program of services through the court. If the probation officer is notified that the child has either dropped out of the program or can no longer benefit from the services, he or she must decide whether other services would be appropriate or whether the case should be referred to the Superior Court.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Education Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 32 Nay 0 (03/17/2011)