
OLR Bill Analysis

sSB 929

AN ACT CONCERNING CLOSING THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT GAP.

SUMMARY:

This bill:

1. requires children, starting with the 2015-16 school year, to reach age five by October 1, rather than January 1, to enroll in kindergarten;
2. creates an achievement gap task force and specifies its membership, duties (including creation of a master plan to close the achievement gap), and reporting requirements;
3. creates an interagency council for ending the achievement gap and states its membership and responsibilities;
4. permits school boards with low-achieving schools to increase the number of school sessions each year and the number of school hours each day;
5. authorizes the education commissioner to conduct a best practices literacy pilot study; and
6. changes laws regarding kindergarten reading assessments, school district student objectives, and elementary teacher certification.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2011, except the provision creating the achievement gap task force is effective upon passage.

§ 1 — ACHIEVEMENT GAP TASK FORCE

The bill establishes an 11-member task force to address academic achievement gaps between Connecticut students and consider effective

approaches to closing the achievement gaps in elementary, middle, and high schools.

By January 1, 2020, the task force must develop a master plan to eliminate the academic achievement gaps in consultation with the State Department of Education (SDE), the Connecticut State University System, the Interagency Council for Ending the Achievement Gap that the bill establishes, and the Education Committee. The task force terminates on January 1, 2020.

In addition to the education commissioner, or the commissioner's designee, the task force consists of members appointed by the following:

1. the House speaker and the Senate president pro tempore, two each;
2. the House and Senate majority leaders, one each;
3. the House and Senate minority leaders, one each;
4. the General Assembly Black and Puerto Rican Caucus chairperson, one; and
5. the governor, one.

Any member of the task force, except the education commissioner and the member the governor appoints, may be a state legislator.

All task force appointments must be made no later than 30 days after the bill is enacted. Vacancies must be filled by the appointing authority.

The House speaker and the Senate president pro tempore must select the chairpersons from among the 11 task force members. The chairpersons must schedule the first meeting of the task force, which must be held within 60 days after bill is enacted. The Education Committee's administrative staff must serve as the task force's administrative staff.

§1 — MASTER PLAN

The bill requires the master plan to:

1. identify the achievement gaps that exist among and between (a) racial groups, (b) ethnic groups, (c) socioeconomic groups, (d) genders, and (e) English language learners and students whose primary language is English;
2. focus efforts on closing identified achievement gaps;
3. establish annual benchmarks for implementation of the master plan and closing the achievement gaps;
4. make recommendations regarding the creation of a secretary of education; and
5. develop a plan for (a) implementing the bill's new kindergarten entrance age requirement and (b) providing spaces in school readiness programs to those children who reach the age five after October 1 and are not eligible to enroll in kindergarten for that year.

The task force may amend the master plan at any time.

Deadline and Progress Reports

The task force must submit the master plan to the Education Committee, the Interagency Council for Ending the Achievement Gap, and the House and Senate clerks by January 1, 2012.

Beginning no later than January 1, 2013 and annually until January 1, 2020, the task force must submit progress reports on the master plan's implementation and related recommendations to the Education Committee and the House and Senate clerks.

§ 2 — INTERAGENCY COUNCIL FOR ENDING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

The bill establishes a nine-member Interagency Council for Ending the Achievement Gap that must:

1. assist the bill's achievement gap task force in the development of the achievement gap master plan described above;
2. implement the provisions of the plan and, if necessary, make recommendations to the Education Committee for legislation related to the plan; and
3. submit annual progress reports to the Education Committee and the achievement gap task force on the implementation of the plan.

The council consists of the following officials or their designees: (1) lieutenant governor, (2) education commissioner, (3) children and families commissioner, (4) social services commissioner, (5) the public health commissioner, (6) higher education commissioner, (7) economic and community development commissioner, (8) administrative services commissioner, and (9) Office of Policy and Management secretary. The lieutenant governor, or her designee, must serve as the council chairperson.

The council is within the SDE for administrative purposes only and must meet at least quarterly.

§ 3 — EXTENDED SCHOOL DAYS AND INCREASED SCHOOL SESSIONS

Current law requires school districts to provide at least 180 days of sessions in a school year. The bill specifically permits local or regional boards of education for schools designated as low-achieving under state law to increase the number of school sessions each year and the number of school hours each day in order to improve student performance and remove the school from the list of low-achieving schools.

§ 4 — KINDERGARTEN ENROLLMENT AGE

Starting with the 2015-16 school year, the bill requires children to reach age five by October 1, rather than January 1, of the school year to be eligible for kindergarten.

§ 5 — KINDERGARTEN STUDENTS AND THE SUMMER READING PROGRAM

The bill makes several changes to the law requiring all priority school districts to provide a summer reading program for kindergarten students, reading assessments of young students, and individual reading plans to improve literacy.

Current law requires priority school districts to evaluate the reading level of students in grades one through three in the middle and at the end of the school year. Starting with the 2011-12 school year, the bill requires the reading level of all kindergarten students to be assessed at the end of the year. It changes the criterion for kindergarten students to go into the summer reading program from the teacher's determination that they need additional help, to the school's determination that they are substantially deficient in reading based on measures established by the State Board of Education.

It also allows a priority school district to require kindergarten students who are substantially deficient in reading to attend summer school. Under current law, a district may require students in grades one to three who are reading deficient to go to summer school.

When a student is determined to be reading deficient, the school must develop a personal reading plan for that student. The bill changes this to an individual priority school district reading plan and requires the plan to include assessment results and applicable federal requirements. Under current law, the plan must include additional instruction, within available funds, such as tutoring or an after-school, school vacation, weekend, or summer school intensive intervention reading program as described in law.

The bill adds the requirement that school literacy teams monitor each student's individual reading plan. It requires the literacy team to include, at a minimum, teachers, school reading specialists, internal or external reading consultants, the school principal, and the provider of the additional instruction. Under current law, the school must discuss the plan with the provider of the additional instruction.

By law, decisions to promote students to the next grade who have individual reading plans because they were found to be deficient in reading must be based on documented progress. The current law applies this standard to students in grades one through three. The bill extends it to kindergarten and expands the applicability to all educational and instructional decisions, not just the decision to promote to the next grade. It makes the conforming change that the school principal must justify in writing to the superintendent any decision to promote a kindergarten student who is deficient in reading.

By law, each superintendent must report to the education commissioner on the number of students who are reading deficient and are promoted to the next grade for grades one through three. The bill requires the superintendent to also report on kindergarten students in this group.

It also makes conforming and technical changes.

§ 6 — LITERACY BEST PRACTICES PILOT STUDY

The bill authorizes the education commissioner to (1) conduct a pilot study to promote best practices in early literacy and closing academic achievement gaps and (2) identify schools to participate in the study.

The pilot study may use various assessment tools, including those used in the summer reading program. The bill also permits the education commissioner to waive the summer reading program assessments for certain grade levels in participating schools. SDE can research and evaluate participating schools and this may be done with the help of external groups or organizations.

For purposes of this pilot study, “achievement gaps” means the existence of a significant disparity in the academic performance of students among and between (1) racial groups, (2) ethnic groups, (3) socioeconomic groups, (4) genders, and (5) English language learners and students whose primary language is English.

SDE must report the pilot study’s findings to the Education

Committee by October 1, 2013.

§ 7 — SCHOOL DISTRICT STUDENT OBJECTIVES

By law, all school districts must craft educational goals that are consistent with the state's educational goals and student objectives that relate to the goals. The bill requires local and regional boards of education to annually establish the student objectives.

§ 8 — MATH ASSESSMENT FOR ELEMENTARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATION

The bill requires that, effective July 1, 2011, anyone seeking a teacher certification in elementary education must achieve a satisfactory evaluation on the appropriate SDE-approved math assessment.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Education Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 30 Nay 0 (03/23/2011)

Appropriations Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 42 Nay 3 (04/25/2011)