



OLR RESEARCH REPORT

July 24, 2012

2012-R-0338

MAJOR EDUCATION ACTS FROM 2011 AND 2012

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You asked for brief summaries of the major education acts enacted in the 2011 and 2012 regular and special legislative sessions.

The summaries in this report are taken from the Office of Legislative Research's *Major Public Acts* reports for 2011 and 2012 (OLR Reports [2011-R-0235](#) and [2012-R-0181](#)). For information concerning all education-related public acts enacted in 2011 and 2012, please refer to OLR's *Acts Affecting Education* reports for those years ([2011-R-0303](#) and [2012-R-0198](#)).

2012 SESSION — [PA 12-116](#) & [PA 12-1](#), JUNE 12 SPECIAL SESSION

In 2012, the legislature passed an education reform act that made major changes in education laws to, among other things:

1. address the state's academic achievement gap;
2. identify and intervene in school districts and schools with low academic performance;
3. increase state education funding to towns;
4. provide more financial support for school choice programs;

5. improve teacher training, qualifications, practice, and evaluation systems; and
6. establish a separate governing board for the state's technical high school system.

New School Readiness Program Spaces

The legislature approved funding for 1,000 new spaces in school readiness programs. Half of the new spaces must be located in the 10 school districts with the lowest academic performance, while the other half are split equally between the (1) priority and former priority districts that not among the 10 lowest and (2) so-called competitive districts, which are districts not included in either of the other two categories but that are either among the 50 poorest in the state or have one or more low-income schools. (OLR Report [2012-R-0269](#) lists the eligible districts and the allocation each received.)

Intensive Early Reading Program

The act creates a new intensive kindergarten-to-grade-three reading program to improve literacy and narrow the achievement gap. In each of the next two school years, five low-achieving schools will be selected to participate. The program must include (1) routine student reading assessments, (2) scientifically based instruction, (3) an intensive reading intervention strategy, and (4) an intensive summer school reading program.

The intervention strategy must include one reading coach and four reading interventionists for each school, all funded by the state. It also includes (1) teacher and administrator training in reading research and (2) administrator training in assessing classrooms to ensure students are proficient readers. Students at priority schools who are reading below proficiency must also be enrolled in an intensive summer school reading program that includes components named in the act.

Intervening in Low-Performing Schools

The act creates the "commissioner's network of schools" as a means for the state to intervene in low-performing schools and raise student academic achievement. By July 1, 2014, the commissioner must select up to 25 schools for the network, and selected schools must begin implementing school turnaround plans by that date.

When a school is chosen for the network, the act requires its school district to create a turnaround committee, which includes parents and teachers, to develop a turnaround plan for the school based on a menu of school improvement models. If the plan is deficient or no plan is submitted, the education commissioner can use the act's models to develop his own plan for the school. The act provides for a streamlined collective bargaining process when union contracts need modification in order to carry out the turnaround plan.

The act allows a turnaround committee or the commissioner to choose various nonprofit or government entities to govern or manage network schools, but limits to six the number that can be governed by private nonprofit entities, including charter school management organizations that meet the act's criteria.

The commissioner must provide funding, technical assistance, and operational support to schools participating in the commissioner's network. The State Board of Education (SBE) must pay any costs of implementing a plan that exceed the school's ordinary operating expenses.

School Choice Programs

The education reform act increases annual per-student grants to state charter schools, interdistrict magnet schools outside the Hartford region, and school districts operating regional agriculture science and technology centers. It also (1) provides an additional incentive for school districts with more than 4,000 students to increase their enrollment of out-of-district students under the Open Choice interdistrict school attendance program and (2) requires that two of the next four state charter schools approved before July 1, 2017, be schools offering a dual language or other specialized program for English language learners.

Education Cost Sharing (ECS) Grants and Alliance Districts

The act increases ECS grants to towns for FY 13 by \$50 million in the aggregate. It also imposes conditions on ECS grant increases to the 30 towns with the lowest-performing school districts. Release of the additional funds to these "alliance districts" is contingent on the education commissioner's approval of each district's plan to improve student and school performance through such methods as extended learning time, improved reading programs, and additional training for teachers and other staff. (See OLR Report [2012-R-0269](#) for a list of the alliance districts.)

The state must also fund a minimum of 10 new family resource centers and 20 new or expanded school-based health clinics to be located in alliance districts.

Teachers

Qualifications. The act bolsters teacher preparation programs and teacher qualifications in several ways. It (1) establishes a state distinguished educator designation for experienced, successful teachers who have advanced education beyond the master's degree and who meet SBE-established performance requirements; (2) starting July 1, 2013, requires all certified school employees working with students in kindergarten through grade three to take a practice version of an SBE-approved reading instruction exam; (3) starting July 1, 2015, requires teacher preparation programs to offer classroom experience in each of four semesters; and (4) starting July 1, 2016, requires an applicant for a professional educator certificate to hold a master's degree in a subject relevant to their teaching.

Professional Development. Beginning July 1, 2013, the act revamps required professional development programs for teachers and administrators to emphasize improved practice and job-embedded individual and small-group coaching sessions. It requires all certified employees to participate. In addition, the act requires the education commissioner to establish a teacher professional development program for elementary school teachers to provide intensified training in reading instruction.

Annual Evaluations. The education reform act requires school districts to evaluate teachers and administrators every year using new evaluation and support programs that align with new state model guidelines. Before implementing their new programs, districts must train the evaluators and provide orientation to teachers being evaluated. Once the program is in place, they must include ongoing training on their evaluation programs in their regular in-service training programs for teachers. Districts must implement their new evaluation programs by September 1, 2013.

Tenure and Termination. Starting July 1, 2014, the act requires school superintendents to use evaluations to inform their decisions on granting tenure to teachers and administrators. It allows districts to terminate teachers or administrators if evaluations find them to be ineffective and they fail to successfully complete a remediation plan, including improving their overall rating to at least "proficient." Finally,

the act streamlines teacher termination hearings by (1) reducing the maximum time for the process to unfold and (2) limiting each side's testimony and evidence to six hours, unless the hearing official extends the time for good cause.

Technical High School System

The act changes the name of the regional vocational-technical schools to the technical high school system (CTHSS) and creates a new 11-member board to govern it. The new board consists of four business executives appointed by the governor, five members appointed by SBE, and the economic and community development and labor commissioners. The governor appoints the chairperson, who serves as a nonvoting ex-officio member of the SBE.

The act requires the CTHSS superintendent to submit a proposed operating budget for the system to the CTHSS board for its amendment and approval. Once approved, the board must submit the budget to the SBE and the Office of Policy and Management. ([PA 12-116](#), as amended by [PA 12-2](#), **June 12 Special Session**. Most provisions take effect July 1, 2012.)

2011 SESSION

School Bullying and Cyberbullying — [PA 11-232](#)

[PA 11-232](#) expands the types of conduct that constitute school bullying and requires school officials to investigate and address it whether it occurs in or, in certain circumstances, outside of school. It expressly bars bullying based on the student's actual or perceived "differentiating" characteristics, such as race, gender, sexual orientation, or physical appearance. It also bars "cyberbullying," which is bullying using electronic communications or devices.

The law (1) requires all public school employees and certain school contractors to be annually trained in how to identify, intervene, and prevent bullying and youth suicide among students; (2) makes school principals responsible for investigating and addressing bullying incidents; (3) prohibits retaliation against those who report bullying; and (4) grants immunity to school boards, school employees, students, parents, and others against damage claims arising from good faith reports of, and responses to, school bullying. Finally, it requires each school board to adopt a safe school climate plan, each school to assess its school climate every other year, and the State Department of

Education to establish a statewide network to provide resources, materials, and training on school bullying to school districts. ([PA 11-232](#), effective July 1, 2011.)

Charter School Educator Permits — [PA 11-60](#) & [PA 11-234](#)

These acts allow the education commissioner, starting in the 2011-12 school year, to issue a charter school educator permit to a charter school employee. The permit allows a charter school to employ its holder as a teacher or administrator without the required state certification for the position. To qualify, the employee must (1) pass the same state qualifying examinations as an applicant for a state teaching or administrator certificate and (2) demonstrate effectiveness as a teacher or school administrator, as appropriate. The acts limit the number of teachers and administrators who may hold the permit in any year to no more than 30% of a charter school's teachers and administrators combined. ([PA 11-60](#), as amended by [PA 11-234](#), effective July 1, 2011.)

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