
OLR Bill Analysis

sHB 7215 (as amended by House "A")*

AN ACT CONCERNING SCHOOL CLIMATES.

SUMMARY

This bill makes numerous changes to the laws related to school bullying and safe school climate. Principally, it:

1. establishes a 33-member social and emotional learning and school climate advisory collaborative and tasks it with, among other things, developing a biennial state-wide school climate survey, model positive school climate policy, and student suicide risk assessment (§§ 1-3);
2. requires the State Department of Education (SDE), by August 1, 2021, to publish on its website the model policy and school climate survey the collaborative develops (§ 2);
3. modifies the definition of bullying by, among other things, eliminating the requirement that the action occur between students (§ 3);
4. (a) specifies that schools, when they contact parents and guardians whose children have been involved in bullying, must let the parents know the results of the investigation into the incident and (b) requires the schools to also notify the parents or guardians that they may refer to information on the board of education's website about rights and remedies under school law (§ 3);
5. requires boards of education to publish such information in plain language on their websites by June 30, 2021 (§ 4); and
6. requires boards of education, in consultation with the collaborative and SDE, to provide on the department website

certain training materials for school administrators regarding bullying prevention and intervention (§ 5).

*House Amendment "A" makes various changes to the underlying bill, such as (1) changing the council in the bill to a collaborative, expanding its membership, and modifying its responsibilities; (2) modifying the definition of bullying; and (3) eliminating provisions that (a) extend bullying reporting requirements to school volunteers, (b) imposed various SDE requirements related to bullying, (c) renamed safe school climate plans as safe school climate policies and made numerous modifications to the information that must be included in them.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2019, except the provisions related to the collaborative are effective upon passage.

§§ 1-3 — SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND SCHOOL CLIMATE ADVISORY COLLABORATIVE

The bill establishes a 33-member Social and Emotional Learning and School Climate Advisory Collaborative and tasks it with the following:

1. collecting information on school climate improvement efforts of local and regional boards of education;
2. documenting any needs the boards articulate for technical assistance and training to foster positive school climates;
3. identifying best practices to promote positive school climates;
4. directing resources to support state-wide and local initiatives to foster and improve positive school climates and improve access to social and emotional learning in schools;
5. developing an assessment to screen students in grades 3 -12 for suicide risk;
6. developing a biennial state-wide school climate survey and model positive school climate policy;

7. (a) developing a plain language explanation to distribute to parents and guardians that describes their right to file a written complaint with the State Board of Education alleging the local or regional board of education's failure to implement the state's educational interests and the associated remedies and (b) providing the explanation of these rights and remedies to each board of education by January 1, 2021; and
8. performing other functions concerning social and emotional learning and fostering positive school climates.

Definitions

Under the bill, a “school climate” means the quality and character of school life based on patterns of students’, parents’, and school employees’ experiences of school life, including norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures. Currently, school climate means the quality and character of school life, with a particular focus on the quality of the relationships within the school community between and among students and adults.

The bill defines a “positive school climate” as a school climate in which:

1. norms, values, expectations, and beliefs are promoted that support feeling socially, emotionally, and physically safe;
2. students, their parents and guardians, and school employees feel engaged and respected and work together to develop and contribute to a shared school vision;
3. educators model and nurture attitudes that emphasize the benefits and satisfaction gained from learning; and
4. each person feels comfortable contributing to the school’s operation and care of its physical environment.

“Social and emotional learning” means the process through which

people achieve emotional intelligence through self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

“Emotional intelligence” means a person’s ability to:

1. perceive, recognize, understand, and manage his or her emotions and those of others;
2. use emotions to facilitate cognitive activities, including reasoning, problem solving, and interpersonal communication; and
3. understand and identify emotions.

Membership

The collaborative members include 22 legislative appointees as described in Table 1.

Table 1: Legislative Appointees

Appointing Authority	Number of Appointees	Qualifications
House speaker	Five	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CT Association of Boards of Education representative • Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee member • School administrator with experience in district-level, equity-focused, and cross-disciplinary social and emotional learning • Representative of an organization that provides free or

<i>Appointing Authority</i>	<i>Number of Appointees</i>	<i>Qualifications</i>
		<p>reduced-cost legal services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CT Parent Power representative
Senate president pro tempore	Five	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CT Association of Schools representative • CT Association of School Administrators representative • Social Emotional Learning Alliance for CT representative • CT School Counselor Association representative • CT Association of Public School Superintendents representative
House majority leader	Three	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special Education Equity for Kids of Connecticut representative • CT Parent Advocacy Center representative • African Caribbean American Parents of Children with Disabilities, Inc.

<i>Appointing Authority</i>	<i>Number of Appointees</i>	<i>Qualifications</i>
		representative
Senate majority leader	Three	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Center for Children’s Advocacy representative • Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence representative • Representative of UConn’s Neag School of Education
House minority leader	Three	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • American Federation of Teachers – CT representative • Center for Social and Emotional Learning at Central Connecticut State University representative • CT Parent Teacher Association representative
Senate minority leader	Three	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CT Education Association representative • National Alliance on Mental Illness – CT representative • Youth Suicide Advisory Board

<i>Appointing Authority</i>	<i>Number of Appointees</i>	<i>Qualifications</i>
		representative

The collaborative members also include the:

1. chairpersons and ranking members of the Children’s and Education committees and
2. education commissioner, child advocate, and Commission on Women, Children and Seniors (CWCS) executive director, or their designees.

Appointments to the collaborative must be made within 30 days of the bill’s passage, and the collaborative must hold its first meeting within 60 days of passage.

Under the bill, the collaborative must be chaired by the CWCS executive director or his designee and a cochairperson elected from among the members. CWCS staff must serve as the collaborative’s administrative staff. The appointing authorities must fill any vacancies.

The collaborative may designate subcommittees and advisory groups to carry out its functions, as long as they are composed of collaborative members.

Reporting Requirement

The collaborative must annually report to the Children’s and Education committee, beginning by January 1, 2021, any recommendations and its efforts to:

1. monitor the school climate improvement efforts of the boards of education,
2. document needs the boards articulate for technical assistance and training to foster positive school climates,

3. identify best practices for promoting positive school climates, and
4. direct resources to support state-wide and local initiatives on fostering and improving positive school climates and improving access to social and emotional learning.

Model Positive School Climate Policy

The bill requires the collaborative, by January 1, 2020, to develop a model positive school climate policy. In doing so, it may review safe school climate plans that local and regional boards of education have developed and implemented (see “Safe School Climate Plans” below).

Suicide Assessment

The bill requires the collaborative, by July 1, 2020, to submit to the Children’s and Education committees the assessment it develops to screen students for suicide risk and any recommendations for implementing the assessment in public schools.

School Climate Survey

The bill requires the collaborative, by July 1, 2021, to develop a biennial state-wide school climate survey and provide it to SDE. The survey must be designed to obtain confidential information from school employees and students’ parents and guardians concerning their impressions of the school’s climate. The survey must ask about their impressions of:

1. the student learning environment at the school, including academic supports and resources available to students and school safety;
2. school employee communication to parents and guardians about students;
3. the teaching environment at the school, including employee resources, supports, and professional development; school leadership; and collaborative planning time availability;

4. whether there is a positive climate at the school;
5. whether individuals of all races, ethnicities, and cultural backgrounds feel welcome at the school; and
6. (a) the availability of supports and strategies to develop and retain teachers and administrators, including minority teachers and administrators, school psychologists, and counselors, and (b) suggestions for increasing the availability of such supports and strategies.

§ 3 — BULLYING DEFINITION

The bill modifies the definition of “bullying” to mean an act that is direct or indirect and severe, persistent, or pervasive and (1) causes a student emotional or physical harm, (2) places a student in reasonable fear of such harm, or (3) infringes on a student’s rights or opportunities at school. Under this definition, the actions do not necessarily have to occur between two students.

Currently, bullying is one or more students’ repeated use of a written, oral, or electronic communication directed at or referring to a student in the same school district, or a physical act or gesture repeatedly directed at another student in the district, that (1) causes a student physical or emotional harm or property damage, (2) places the student in fear of such harm or property damage, (3) creates a hostile school environment for the student, (4) infringes on his or her rights at school, or (5) substantially disrupts the school’s education process or orderly operation.

As under existing law, bullying includes written, oral, or electronic communication or a physical act or gesture on the basis of having, or associating with individuals who have, certain actual or perceived characteristics (e.g., race, gender, or disability).

§ 3 — SAFE SCHOOL CLIMATE PLANS

Existing law requires boards of education to develop and implement a safe school climate plan to address bullying in schools, among other things. The plan must require schools, within 48 hours of

completing an investigation into alleged bullying, to notify the parents or guardian of the (1) student who committed the bullying and (2) student against whom the bullying was directed.

The bill specifies that this notice must include the results of the investigation. It additionally requires the notice, which must be verbal or by email if the parents' or guardians' email addresses are known, that they may refer to the plain language explanation of their legal rights and remedies that is published on the board of education's website as required by the bill.

§ 5 — SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR TRAINING

The bill requires boards of education to develop training materials for school administrators. The materials must provide information on preventing and intervening in discrimination against, and targeted harassment of, students based on their (1) actual or perceived differentiating characteristics (e.g., race, color, or physical disability) or (2) association with individuals or groups who have one or more such characteristics. The materials may be developed in consultation with or provided by one or more organizations offering training on identifying, preventing, and intervening in discrimination.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Committee on Children

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 14 Nay 0 (03/07/2019)

Education Committee

Joint Favorable

Yea 24 Nay 2 (05/16/2019)