Bill No.: SB-1018
Title: AN ACT CONCERNING THE OPPORTUNITY GAP.
Vote Date: 3/25/2019
Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute Change of Reference to Appropriations
PH Date: 3/13/2019
File No.: 

Disclaimer: The following HOUSE FAVORABLE Report is prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and does not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose.

SPONSORS OF BILL:
Education Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:
This bill aims to identify and address underperforming districts by establishing a new method of awarding Priority School District (PSD) grants. By tying grant amounts to performance and including stipulations on what underperforming districts spend their grant amounts on they hope to correct low achieving programs.

Substitute Language:

Section 1: Substitute language replaces using the Accountability Index score in favor of a district’s English language arts performance and attendance rates. This is per the recommendation of the Department of Education.

Section 4: New section makes conforming changes within existing PSD law.

Section 5: Requires any alliance district who has not seen improvement in its accountability index must spend 50% of the PSD grant on intensive reading instruction. Substitute languages requires the remaining 50% of the grant be spent on evidence-based strategies recommended by SDE. Substitute language also specifies alliance district submit an academic performance evaluation to SDE as opposed to a broad annual evaluation.

Section 6: Determines a district may exit the Commissioner’s Network if the Commissioner believes continued participation is not likely to produce improvements, at the Commissioner’s discretion.
Section 7 & 8: Substitute Language eliminates sections which expand the amount of data to be collected by the SDE. It also eliminates making performance growth data publicly available.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Dianna R. Wentzell, Commissioner, Department of Education: The Department is generally supportive of this bill but suggests a few changes. They recommend using the Performance Index for English Language Arts instead of the Accountability Index for measuring performance of Priority School Districts as it is a more direct measure of literacy and academic performance. These recommendations were addressed in substitute language in section 1. The Department has concerns regarding their staff and resource levels and the extensive task of expanding data collection. This recommendation is also reflected in the substitute language.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Subira Gordon, ConnCAN, Executive Director: ConnCAN supports legislation that makes student data available to the public. They feel that students and families must know how their school and district perform in order to make informed decisions about their next steps after high school. However, language which makes student data publicly available was eliminated in substitute language.

Shannon Marimon, Executive Director, Connecticut Council for Education Reform (CCER): CCER supports this bill, with reservations. CCER agrees that there is a need for the collection of data relating to college and career readiness of students, however they would prefer to expand Connecticut’s Next Generation Accountability System to also assess districts’ performance on student’s career readiness. CCER also believes that imposing budget restrictions on under performing schools is “at best, unwise and at worst, inequitable.” They also agree with the testimony of the SDE that this bill would require the Department complete far more work than they have resources or staff for.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Fran Rabinowitz, Executive Director, Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS): CAPSS has a number of concerns over this bill. They that collecting data over one year to determine if there has been improvement isn’t enough time, they recommend at least a two year span to accurately assess performance. They believe a “one size fits all” approach to an intensive reading intervention program neglects to consider the different needs each district may have. They also feel the Accountability Index is too broad a tool as it takes 12 different factors into account, it may not accurately represent reading skill. They also feel the bill does not go far enough as it doesn’t include intervention strategies for districts which are not performing.

Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE): CABE feels that limiting an underperforming district’s access to the mentioned grants could inhibit their ability to make improvements.