
OLR Bill Analysis
sSB 881

AN ACT CONCERNING WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT.

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SUMMARY

This bill creates new programs and policies affecting workforce training, secondary and postsecondary education, college admissions, and public transportation as part of a statewide workforce strategy.

Among other things, the bill creates a new Office of Workforce Strategy to develop a statewide workforce strategy and coordinate the (1) funding of workforce training programs and (2) measurement and evaluation of education and workforce development program outcomes. It also tasks the Office of Higher Education (OHE) with

creating a database of credentials offered in Connecticut to promote degrees, certificates, certifications, government licenses, apprenticeships, and job training programs. The bill also adjusts various reporting requirements by higher education institutions, public school districts, and employers to inform the statewide workforce strategy.

Additionally, the bill adjusts current secondary education policies to increase students' access to more challenging course placement, encourage them to complete their high school education, and explore available federal funding options for higher education.

The bill also creates the following new programs: (1) an automatic admissions program to admit high-achieving high school students to the four Connecticut State Universities; (2) a pilot program to allow high school students to take early college courses without prerequisites; and (3) a bulk pass, reduced-rate public transportation program for riders affiliated with certain education and employment training programs.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2021, unless otherwise noted below.

§§ 1 & 57-66 — OFFICE OF WORKFORCE STRATEGY

Eliminates OWC and replaces it with a new OWS, headed by a chief workforce officer; generally transfers to the chief workforce officer the workforce development-related functions and duties currently assigned to the labor commissioner and OWC; and establishes additional duties and reporting requirements

The bill eliminates the Office of Workforce Competitiveness (OWC) within the Department of Labor (DOL) and replaces it with a new Office of Workforce Strategy (OWS). The bill places OWS within the Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) for administrative purposes only.

Under the bill, OWS is headed by a chief workforce officer appointed by the governor with confirmation by both the House and Senate. The governor must appoint someone (1) knowledgeable about public sector workforce training programs and (2) with the training and experience to perform the duties described below. The chief

workforce officer reports directly to the governor. The bill transfers to the chief workforce officer the workforce development-related functions and duties that are currently assigned to the labor commissioner and OWC, including those described below.

It also makes conforming changes (§§ 57-66).

Chief Workforce Officer's Functions and Duties

Lead Official and Principal Advisor on Workforce Policy. Under current law, DOL serves as the lead state agency for developing employment and training strategies and initiatives needed to support Connecticut's position in the knowledge economy. The DOL commissioner, with OWC's assistance, serves as the governor's principal workforce development policy advisor and the liaison with local, state, and federal workforce development agencies. He coordinates (1) the state's implementation of the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA) (see BACKGROUND) and (2) state agencies' workforce development activities.

The bill generally transfers these functions and duties to the chief workforce officer, designating him or her as the (1) lead state official for developing employment and training strategies and initiatives and (2) governor's principal advisor for workforce development policy, strategy, and coordination. The bill requires the chief workforce officer to coordinate the state plan, budget, and implementation of WIOA and issue guidance to this effect. He or she must do so on behalf of the governor and Governor's Workforce Council (i.e., currently, also known as the Connecticut Employment and Training Commission (CETC); see § 33-56 below), and in consultation with the DOL commissioner, who must offer any resources he can make available for this purpose.

Under the bill, the chief workforce officer must additionally serve as the liaison with the Governor's Workforce Council and regional workforce development entities.

Workforce Cabinet. The bill requires the chief workforce officer to chair a Workforce Cabinet comprising the state agencies involved in employment and training. (Existing law requires the governor to designate these agencies and requires their department heads to annually report specified information on the programs offered.) The bill requires the Workforce Cabinet to meet at the direction of the governor or chief workforce officer.

Governor's Workforce Council. OWS must (1) provide staff support, and any other resources the chief workforce officer can make available, to the Governor's Workforce Council and (2) coordinate all necessary support that the council may need and that other state agencies make available.

State Workforce Strategy. The bill requires the chief workforce officer to develop a state workforce strategy and update it as necessary. The strategy must be developed in consultation with the Governor's Workforce Council and the Workforce Cabinet and approved by the governor.

State and WIOA-Funded Programs. Under the bill, the chief workforce officer must coordinate and align (1) each workforce development activity funded by the state through WIOA funds and (2) any state grant programs administered by, or in collaboration with, a state agency to further the goals and outcomes of the state workforce strategy and the Governor's Workforce Council's workforce development plan.

Public, Legislative, and Local Official Involvement. The bill transfers to the chief workforce officer the requirement to establish systems to ensure the maximum involvement of the public, legislature, and local officials in workforce development policy, strategy, and coordination. In doing so, it eliminates the current requirement that this involvement extend to the state's implementation of WIOA.

Contractual Agreements. The bill transfers to the chief workforce officer the authorization to enter into contractual agreements to carry out OWS's purposes, but it requires him or her to do so in conjunction

with one or more state agencies and with the Office of Policy and Management (OPM) secretary's approval.

Agency Guidance. The bill requires the chief workforce officer to (1) issue guidance to state agencies, the Governor's Workforce Council, and regional workforce development boards to further the state workforce strategy and (2) consult with these entities on its implementation. This guidance must (1) comply with state and federal laws, (2) be approved by the OPM secretary, and (3) take effect at least 14 days after OPM approves it.

Other Duties. The chief workforce officer must also:

1. collaborate with the regional workforce development boards to adapt the best practices for workforce development for statewide implementation, if possible;
2. together with state agencies, including DOL, the State Department of Education (SDE), and OPM, coordinate the measurement and evaluation of education and workforce development program outcomes;
3. review the WIOA state plan (which outlines Connecticut's four-year workforce development strategy) for each of the workforce development system's core programs, before the plan is submitted to the governor;
4. market and communicate the state workforce strategy to ensure maximum engagement with students, trainees, job seekers, and businesses, and elevate the state's national workforce profile;
5. identify subject areas, courses, curriculum, content, and programs that may be offered to students in primary and secondary school to improve student outcomes and meet the state's workforce needs (for identifying academic programs for which private sector specialists may donate their teaching services under existing law);
6. identify high-demand industries to be included as career

choices in the student success plans that boards of education must, by law, create for each public school student in grades 6 – 12; and

7. in consultation with DOL, coordinate with regional workforce development boards and community action agencies to ensure compliance with state and federal laws in order to expand the service capabilities of programs offered under WIOA and the U.S. DOL’s American Job Center system.

Workforce Data

Current law authorizes DOL, with OWC’s assistance, to ask any state office, department, board, commission, or agency to provide reports, information, and assistance that is necessary or appropriate for DOL to carry out its duties and requirements. The bill (1) transfers this authorization to the chief workforce officer; (2) expands it by allowing him or her to request data, in addition to reports, information, and assistance, from these agencies and entities; and (3) explicitly allows the officer to make the requests to public colleges and universities. However, the bill requires that any data requests from an agency participating in CP20 WIN be submitted through CP20 WIN according to its established policies and procedures (see BACKGROUND).

Annual Report to the Legislature

Each year, beginning by October 1, 2022, the bill requires the chief workforce officer to submit a report on the states’ workforce development to the governor and Higher Education and Employment Advancement, Education, Commerce, and Labor and Public Employees committees. At a minimum, the report must include information on OWS’s programs and the number, demographics, and outcomes of people they serve.

The bill also eliminates the current requirement that DOL annually report to the legislature on its two- and five-year forecast of workforce shortages by occupation.

§ 2 — CAREERCONNECT ACCOUNT

Establishes a new CareerConneCT account in the General Fund to fund workforce training programs; requires the chief workforce officer to report to the legislature and governor on these programs and the individuals they served

The bill establishes the “CareerConneCT account” as a separate, nonlapsing General Fund account and requires DECD to use it to fund workforce training programs that OWS recommends. The bill requires the account to contain any moneys the law requires to be deposited in it. (SB 887 of the current session authorizes \$20 million in general obligation bonds in each year of the next biennium for CareerConneCT workforce training programs.)

Under the bill, the chief workforce officer, in coordination with the DOL commissioner and regional workforce development boards, must ensure that participants in any workforce training program funded through the CareerConneCT account also enroll in any federally funded workforce development program.

Annually, beginning by October 1, 2022, and ending October 1, 2024, the chief workforce officer must report to the governor and Higher Education and Employment Advancement, Education, Commerce, Labor and Public Employees committees on the workforce training programs funded through this account. The report must, at a minimum, provide information on the number, demographics, and outcomes of the individuals served by these programs.

§§ 3 & 4 — CREDENTIALS DATABASE

Requires OHE to create a database of the credentials offered in Connecticut; beginning by July 1, 2024, requires specified institutions and training providers to submit information about the credentials they offer to be included in the database; requires OWS to establish standards to designate certain credentials as “credentials of value”

Credentials Database

By January 1, 2023, OHE’s executive director, in consultation with the advisory council described below, must create a database of the credentials offered in Connecticut. Under the bill, a “credential” is a documented award issued by an authorized body. It includes the following:

1. degrees or certificates awarded by colleges and universities, private occupational schools, or State Board of Education (SBE)-

- approved alternate route to certification (ARC) program providers;
2. certifications awarded through an examination process designed to demonstrate that an individual has the knowledge, skill, and ability to perform a specific job;
 3. government licenses that allow someone to practice a specific occupation based on predetermined qualifications; and
 4. documented completion of an apprenticeship or job training program.

The database must explain the skills and competencies earned through a credential in uniform terms and plain language. In creating the database, the executive director must use the (1) minimum data policy established by the New England Board of Higher Education's (NEBHE) High Value Credentials for New England initiative and (2) uniform terms, descriptions, and standards for comparing and linking credentials in Credential Engine's Credential Transparency Description Language-Achievement Standards Network (see BACKGROUND).

The database must, at a minimum, include the following data for each credential:

1. name and type of credential being offered and its credential status type (i.e., active, deprecated, probationary, or superseded);
2. entity that owns or offers the credential;
3. a short description of the credential and the language in which it is offered;
4. a website that provides related information;
5. estimated cost and duration for completion;
6. the industry related to the credential, which may include its

- code under the North American Industry Classification System;
7. the occupation related to the credential (e.g., its North American Industry Classification code or U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics standard occupational classification system code); and
 8. a listing of online or physical locations where it is offered.

Advisory Council

The bill establishes a council to advise the OHE executive director on the database's implementation. The advisory council must include the state's chief data officer and representatives from OWS, OHE, OPM, DOL, SDE, the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities, UConn, and independent higher education institutions. The chief workforce officer, chief data officer, and OHE executive director, or their designees, must cochair the council, appoint its members, and schedule meetings.

Requirement to Submit Credential Information

Annually, beginning by July 1, 2024, the bill requires specified institutions and training providers to submit information about the credentials they offer to be included in the database. Specifically, this requirement applies to each higher education institution, private occupational school, SBE-approved ARC program provider, and training program provider listed on DOL's Eligible Training Provider List, excluding any state agencies or departments.

Each of these entities must submit the information in the form and manner the OHE executive director prescribes, including the data described above. Higher education institutions, however, may omit the industry code data for any credentials for which it is not applicable.

The bill also authorizes DOL, in consultation with the advisory council, to require any pre-apprenticeship or apprenticeship program sponsor to submit information about its program to OHE for inclusion in the database.

Credentials of Value

The bill requires OWS to establish standards to designate certain credentials as “credentials of value.” These standards may include (1) meeting the workforce needs of Connecticut’s employers, (2) enrollment and completion rates, (3) net cost, (4) whether the credential transfers to or stacks onto another credential of value, (5) duration until completion, and (6) types of employment opportunities and earnings available upon completion.

OWS must compile and annually update its list of credentials of value and include it in the database.

§§ 5 & 6 — HIGHER EDUCATION PROGRAM APPROVALS

Allows eligible higher education institutions to apply to OWS for additional program approval exemptions beyond those allowed under current law; terminates reporting requirements for BOR and BOT on new programs and program changes they approve for their respective institutions

Current law exempts qualifying independent colleges and universities from OHE’s approval process for up to 12 new higher education programs per academic year and any modifications to their existing programs. Institutions qualify for this exemption if they:

1. are eligible to participate in the Federal Family Education Loan program;
2. have a financial responsibility score of at least 1.5, as determined by the U.S. Department of Education (this score reflects the overall relative financial health of institutions); and
3. have been located in Connecticut and accredited as a degree-granting institution in good standing for at least 10 years by a federally recognized regional accrediting association.

The bill allows these eligible institutions to apply to OWS for additional exemptions beyond the 12 per academic year allowed under current law. OWS may waive the program approval requirement for any new program if it determines that the program aligns with and furthers the goals of the state workforce strategy approved by the governor.

The bill terminates, on June 30, 2024, the requirement that these exempt institutions annually file with OHE a list and description of any new programs introduced, and any existing programs discontinued, in the preceding academic year. As under existing law, the institutions must continue to annually file their (1) program approval process and all actions their respective governing boards took concerning new program approvals, and (2) financial responsibility composite score.

The bill also terminates, as of June 30, 2024, the Board of Regents for Higher Education (BOR) and UConn Board of Trustees (BOT) reports to OHE on the new programs and program changes they approved. (In doing so, however, it retains an existing requirement that BOR notify OHE of new and modified programs.) By law, BOR reviews and approves recommendations to establish new academic programs for the universities within the Connecticut State University System, the community colleges, and Charter Oak State College, and BOT does so for UConn.

§ 7 — PRIVATE OCCUPATIONAL SCHOOL AND ARC PROGRAM STUDENT DATA

Requires each private occupational school and ARC program provider to submit specified data to OHE on each of their enrolled students; prohibits OHE from releasing to the public any of this identifiable student information

By January 1, 2023, the bill requires each private occupational school and SBE-approved ARC program provider to submit to OHE specified data on each of their enrolled students. The data must include course enrollment; course and credential completion; fees and tuition charged; federal student loans received; federal student loan balances; and state-assigned student identifiers, if applicable. (By law, SDE assigns a unique student identifier to each student to track his or her performance in the public school information system.) The schools and providers must submit this data in the form and manner OHE prescribes.

The bill prohibits OHE from releasing to the public any identifiable student information provided by these schools and providers. OHE must establish policies to protect this information as if it were

protected student data subject to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974.

§ 8 — QUARTERLY REPORTING REQUIREMENTS FOR EMPLOYERS

Requires employers subject to the state's unemployment law to report certain data about each employee in their quarterly wage reports to DOL; requires personally identifiable employee data to be kept confidential, but allows nonidentifiable data to be shared for specified purposes

Expanded Reporting Requirement

The bill requires employers subject to the state's unemployment law to report specified data about each employee in their quarterly wage reports to DOL. Specifically, employers must report the following data for each employee:

1. gender identity, age, race, ethnicity, veteran status, disability status, and highest education completed;
2. home address and address of primary work site;
3. occupational code under the BLS standard occupational classification system;
4. hours and days worked and salary or hourly wage;
5. employment start date in the current job title and, if applicable, employment end date.

The DOL commission may issue guidance defining each of these data fields. The bill phases in these reporting requirements, based on the employer's number of employees, as follows:

1. beginning with the third quarter of 2024 for employers with 100 or more employees;
2. beginning with the third quarter of 2025 for employers with 99 or fewer employees, except as provided below; and
3. beginning in the third quarter of 2027 for employers with 49 or fewer employees that do not have an electronic payroll system.

The bill states that these provisions may not be construed to require employees to provide information on their gender identity, age, race, ethnicity, or veteran or disability status, if these disclosures are not otherwise required by law.

Electronic Report Submissions and Waivers

The bill allows employers to request a waiver from the electronic reporting requirement for the employee data described above, just as existing law allows them to do for electronic wage reports and reimbursements. As under existing law, employers, or their agents, may submit a written request for a waiver on a DOL-prescribed form at least 30 days before the report is due. The DOL commissioner must grant the request if, based on the information the employer or agent submits, he finds that the requirement would cause an undue hardship. The commissioner must promptly notify the employer or agent of his decision, which cannot be further reviewed or appealed. A waiver is good for one year.

The bill also makes a minor change to the electronic reporting requirement for the quarterly wage reports.

Confidentiality of Employee Data

The bill prohibits the DOL commissioner from releasing to the public any identifiable employee information provided by employers under the bill's reporting requirement. But it allows him or the department to share nonidentifiable information (1) with another state agency, state or territory, or the federal government, or (2) to support a CP20 WIN data request, submitted according to CP20 WIN's policies and procedures, for program administration, audit, evaluation, or research purposes.

§ 9 — DISCLOSURE OF TAX RETURN INFORMATION FOR CP20 WIN DATA REQUESTS

Authorizes DRS to release tax return information for evaluation or research purposes under specified conditions

The bill authorizes the Department of Revenue Services (DRS) commissioner, to the extent allowed by federal law, to disclose tax

return information for evaluation or research purposes to (1) another state agency or (2) support a data request submitted through CP20 WIN, in accordance with CP20 WIN's policies and procedures.

By law, "return information" includes:

1. a taxpayer's identity;
2. the nature, source, or amount of the taxpayer's income, payments, receipts, deductions, exemptions, credits, assets, liabilities, net worth, tax liability, tax collected or withheld, tax under- or over-reportings, or tax payments; and
3. any other data received, recorded, prepared, or collected by or furnished to the DRS commissioner regarding (a) a return or (b) a determination of liability for a tax, penalty, interest, fine, forfeiture, or other imposition or offense (CGS § 12-15(h)(2)).

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2021

§ 10 — SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAM

Creates a reporting requirement for boards of education with schools or districts that decline to implement the Community Eligibility Provision of the National School Lunch Program

The bill creates a new reporting requirement for certain boards of education that participate in the National School Lunch Program administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. An aspect of this program, known as the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP), generally allows a school or an entire district to serve free breakfast and lunch to all students without collecting household applications if at least 40% of their enrolled students participate in another means-tested program such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Eligible Connecticut schools and districts that wish to participate must submit required documentation to the SDE.

Under the bill, any board of education that has at least one school in its district that qualifies for the maximum federal reimbursement for all school meals served under the CEP and chooses not to implement

the CEP must report to SDE by December 1, 2021, and annually thereafter if applicable, about the reasons why. The report must include, at a minimum, (1) specific impediments to implementing the CEP; (2) actions required to remove these impediments; and (3) a plan for successful CEP implementation for the following year, if possible, or within the next two school years.

§ 11 — STUDENT SUCCESS PLANS

Creates new content and sharing requirements for grades 6-12 student success plans

The bill requires each local and regional board of education, beginning in the 2021-22 school year, to collaborate with each student and his or her parent or guardian when creating the student's success plan beginning in grade six. By law, a student success plan must (1) include a student's career and academic choices in grades six to 12 and (2) provide evidence of career exploration in each grade. The bill removes the requirement that the plans contain evidence of manufacturing career exploration, replacing it with exploration of industries that the OWS chief workforce officer identifies as high-demand.

Beginning July 1, 2022, the bill requires student success plans to include an academic plan that complies with the board of education's challenging curriculum policy (see § 15), as long as the plan does not conflict with the student's career choices that he or she determined in conjunction with a parent or guardian.

Beginning July 1, 2024, the bill requires each board of education to maintain each student success plan in an electronic database and submit them to SDE. Under the bill, the education commissioner may grant a one-year compliance extension for this requirement to any board upon request.

Additionally, the bill requires SDE to share a student success plan with a student's academic or career counselor from a higher education institution where the student is enrolled. The bill specifies that written consent is needed prior to sharing the plan, either from the student or a parent or guardian if the student is a minor.

§ 12 — COMPUTER SCIENCE HIGH SCHOOL STEM CREDITS

Allows computer science to count in part toward the STEM portion of the high school graduation requirements

The bill allows the high school graduation requirements, which apply to current grade 10 students and subsequent graduating classes, to include computer science as part of the nine-credit STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) course requirement.

§ 13 — STUDENT PLACEMENT IN ACCELERATED COURSES

Places limitations on student placement in academic courses or programs based predominantly upon academic performance

Subject to the provisions below, the bill prohibits any board of education from restricting or denying a student access to any honors, advanced, or accelerated courses or programs based either solely or predominantly on previous academic performance. This prohibition extends to placement in career and technical education, work-based learning, service learning, dual enrollment, dual credit, early college, advanced placement (AP), or International Baccalaureate (IB) courses or programs.

Under the bill, a board may take the following actions relating to student placement:

1. establish prerequisites for these courses or programs, as long as they align with any prerequisites established by any independent organization that develops, regulates, oversees, or sponsors them;
2. seek to minimize prerequisites and ensure that they are evidence-based indicators of student performance; and
3. use academic performance or other measures to determine students' enrollment eligibility if a course or program is oversubscribed.

Additionally, the bill requires boards to seek to improve access to and diversity in these courses and programs, promote a challenging curriculum for all students, and encourage all students to pursue high-

quality degree and non-degree postsecondary education. It also specifies that these student placement requirements do not require boards to offer new programs or courses or new sections of courses in addition to their current offerings.

§ 14 — EARLY COLLEGE PILOT PROGRAM

Requires UConn to pilot prerequisite-free Early College Experience Courses in high schools

The bill requires UConn to conduct a three-year pilot program over the 2022-23 through the 2024-25 school years that allows students at five different public high schools to take four different UConn Early College Experience Courses without prerequisites. Under the bill, UConn chooses the participating high schools with the approval of the governing board of education. The schools must be geographically dispersed across the state, and at least one of the five schools must be part of an alliance district (see BACKGROUND).

The bill requires UConn to report to the Higher Education and Employment Advancement and the Education committees by October 1, 2025, about how student performance in the prerequisite-free courses compared with student performance in the courses that required them. The comparison must include information on course enrollment, exam performance, final grades, and matriculation rate at UConn by these students.

§ 15 — CHALLENGING CURRICULUM POLICY

By July 1, 2022, requires boards of education to adopt a challenging curriculum policy for high-achieving students in grades 8, 9, and 11

By July 1, 2022, the bill requires each local and regional board of education to adopt a challenging curriculum policy that requires boards to create an academic plan for certain high-achieving students or enroll these students in the next most rigorous course level offered by a high school in the district. It allows a minor student's parents or guardians, a student 18-years-old or older, or a legally emancipated minor to decline to implement the student's academic plan or enroll the student in a rigorous course or program. Additionally, the bill specifies that it does not require boards of education to offer new

programs or courses in addition to what they currently offer.

A board of education's challenging curriculum policy must use one of the following criteria to identify eligible students: (1) student performance on a mastery exam, excluding any alternate assessments for certain special education students (see BACKGROUND), or (2) student fulfillment of other board criteria. The academic plan or advanced course or program enrollment must align with the following:

1. the courses or programs offered at the student's high school;
2. the student's success plan (see § 11);
3. high school graduation requirements established by state law;
and
4. the program's or school's objectives and requirements, including technical education and career schools and regional agricultural science and technology education centers.

The bill also allows SDE to require boards of education to report information about student performance and enrollment under the challenging curriculum policy adopted by the board.

Academic Plan

The bill requires each local and regional board of education to create an academic plan for students who meet or exceed the level three standard for English language arts, math, or science components of the mastery exam, or meet or exceed other board-established criteria. For these students, the district's academic plan must either result in:

1. grade 8 or 9 students completing one or more dual credit, dual enrollment, early college, AP, or IB courses by the end of grade 11 or
2. grade 11 students completing as many courses as possible that earn college credit, including dual credit, dual enrollment, early college, AP, or IB courses by the end of grade 12.

Rigorous Course Enrollment

Under the bill, each board of education must enroll an 8th or 11th grade student in the next most rigorous course or program level offered by the student's high school for any subject area in which the student meets or exceeds (1) the state level three standard for the English language arts, math, or science components of the mastery exam or (2) any other board-established criteria. After a student successfully completes an advanced course under this enrollment requirement, the bill requires the student to be enrolled in a course at the same level or the next most rigorous level in the same subject area, with the objective that the student will eventually be enrolled in a dual credit, early college, AP, or IB course or program.

§§ 16-18 — FAFSA COMPLETION REQUIREMENT FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Beginning with the graduating class of 2024, institutes a FAFSA completion high school graduation requirement, requires SDE to create the forms to implement it, and allows students to use school time to get assistance with the application

Beginning with the graduating class of 2024 (i.e., current grade 9 students), the bill prohibits local or regional boards of education from allowing any student to graduate high school or granting a diploma to any student who has not (1) completed a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or (2) completed and signed a waiver declining to file the application. SDE must create the waiver form, which may be signed by a minor student's parent or guardian, a student 18-years-old or older, or a legally emancipated minor. The bill prohibits the form from requiring its signatory to state any reasons for declining to complete the FAFSA.

Under the bill, boards of education must exempt students from the FAFSA requirement by April 15 every school year if they (1) are unable to complete FAFSA or signed a waiver; (2) in the board's determination, have or will complete an occupational credential; (3) have enlisted in the U.S. armed forces; or (4) have placed into a registered apprenticeship program.

The bill requires SDE to create and distribute to boards of education, by July 1, 2022, any forms, including waiver forms, needed to

implement the FAFSA graduation requirement. The department must also annually post on its website the rate of FAFSA completion for each year’s graduating class, beginning by July 1, 2024.

Additionally, the bill requires boards of education to allow each grade 12 student to take up to three hours of school time to attend an event or receive assistance for FAFSA completion or for completion of an institutional aid application for undocumented students. The bill prohibits (1) this time from being considered an absence, either excused or unexcused, and (2) boards from requiring a student to attend this type of event or receive assistance.

§ 19 — RECORDS PROTECTION FOR UNDOCUMENTED STUDENTS

Prohibits the sharing of student financial aid applications with federal immigration authorities

The bill prohibits several individuals and entities from sharing, disclosing, or otherwise making accessible to any federal immigration authority (1) records or information obtained from an institutional aid application for undocumented students or (2) signed FAFSA completion waivers by high school students. These individuals and entities are officers, employees, or agents of a department, board, commission, public higher education institution, or any other state agency; or any officer, employee, or agent of a local or regional board of education.

§ 20 — ADULT EDUCATION GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

Increases adult education program credit requirements for graduation and adds a FAFSA completion requirement for program participant who enroll on and after August 1, 2023

The bill increases the number of credits needed to graduate from an adult education program from 20 to 25. Table 1 describes the new requirements.

Table 1: Heightened Graduation Requirements for Adult Education

Current Requirements (CGS § 10-69)	New Requirements under the Bill
English: at least four credits	Humanities: nine credits, including civics

Math: at least three credits	STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math): at least nine credits, which may include computer science
Social studies: at least three credits, including one in American history and at least a half credit in civics and American government	(see Humanities above)
Science: at least two credits	(see STEM above)
Arts or vocational education: at least one credit	

Additionally, the bill prohibits any school district providing an adult education program from granting a diploma to a program participant who enrolls on and after August 1, 2023, and has not completed a FAFSA or a FAFSA completion waiver created by SDE (see § 17). Under the bill, a district must exempt any program participant who is unable to complete a FAFSA or submitted a signed waiver as determined by the district.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2023

§§ 21 & 22 — HIGH SCHOOL WITHDRAWAL AND HIGH SCHOOL EQUIVALENCY TEST AGE

Raises the high school dropout age and the age at which a student may take a high school equivalency test

The bill raises the permissible high school dropout age from 17 to 18, beginning with the 2023-24 school year, eliminating the need for parent or guardian permission. It also specifies that an emancipated minor may withdraw from school. (A student may become legally emancipated from his or her parents at age 16.) Additionally, the bill requires the school district to provide the withdrawing student, rather than a parent or guardian, with information on the educational options available in the school system and in the community.

The bill correspondingly raises the minimum age, from age 16 to 17, at which a student can get permission from the education commissioner to take the GED or another SDE-approved high school

equivalency test in order to earn a state high school diploma. However, a legally emancipated minor may also take the test with the commissioner's permission beginning at age 16.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2023

§ 23 — AGENCY STRATEGY RECOMMENDATIONS

Requires the education commissioner to make recommendations to other state agencies and legislative committees about policies to make higher education more affordable

The bill requires the education commissioner, in consultation with OWS and with SBE approval, to make recommendations by January 1, 2022, to SBE, OPM, and the Education and Higher Education and Employment Advancement committees about the following topics:

1. necessary strategies and supports for increasing the number of alliance district and adult education students who complete the FAFSA;
2. educating students and families about the net cost of college, the use of Pell grants to increase college affordability, and the varying income potential of different college and certificate programs;
3. strategies for removing barriers and simplifying access to high-quality postsecondary education and training options, including nondegree programs;
4. feasibility of establishing an early high school graduation program that grants scholarships for students who graduate high school in three years or less to attend an undergraduate, in-person program at a non-profit Connecticut higher education institution; and
5. feasibility of developing a standardized exit survey for all grade 12 students.

Under the bill, the education commissioner must consult with parents, teachers, and school administration before making any of the above recommendations. The commissioner may establish a task force

to help create the recommendations.

§ 24 — WEIGHTED GRADING POLICY

Requires boards of education to update their weighted grading policy to address additional courses and programs and the effect of weighted grades on GPA and class rank

The bill requires boards of education to update the written weighted grading policy for honors and advanced placement classes that they must have under current law. Under the bill, the board must update the policy to address whether the following courses or programs are also given added weight for GPA and class rank calculation: IB, Cambridge International, service learning, dual enrollment, dual credit, early college, or career and technical class. Additionally, the board must add GPA calculation to its written policy, including whether a GPA is weighted or unweighted.

Additionally, the bill requires each local and regional board of education, before establishing this updated policy, to consider the impact of a weighted grading policy on the GPA and class rank of students who complete career and technical education coursework.

§ 25 — AUTOMATIC ADMISSIONS PROGRAM

Establishes an automatic admissions program for the Connecticut State Universities bachelor's degree programs and potentially other in-state institutions

Program Establishment and Eligibility Criteria

The bill requires the BOR to establish the Connecticut Automatic Admissions Program by April 1, 2022. When establishing the program and adopting the rules, procedures, and forms to implement it, BOR must consult with the four Connecticut State Universities and any other in-state higher education institution that enters into a memorandum of understanding with BOR to participate in the program.

Under the bill, the program must require participating institutions to admit an applicant as a full-time, first-year student to a Connecticut in-person bachelor's degree program if he or she meets the following requirements:

1. meets or exceeds the academic threshold (see "Academic

Threshold," below);

2. would qualify as an in-state student (see BACKGROUND);
3. is enrolled in his or her last school year before graduation in a Connecticut public or private high school; and
4. earns a high school diploma, if required by a participating institution.

The bill specifies that (1) admission to an institution under the program does not guarantee admission to any specific bachelor's degree program and (2) no participating institution may consider admission through the program when determining the student's need- or merit-based financial aid.

Under the bill, a participating institution may conduct a comprehensive review of an applicant who applies through the program. This review may entail requesting additional application materials or result in denying admission. The bill requires participating institutions to minimize the number of students subjected to this review if the student meets the above four requirements.

Program Application Process

The bill requires BOR to create a simple, online form for students to apply to the program's participating institutions. This application must require students to verify that they meet the qualifications, but it may not require an application fee, an essay, or recommendation letters.

Participating Institutions Outside of the Connecticut State University System (CSUS)

The bill allows a nonprofit higher education institution outside of CSUS to participate in the program if it enters a memorandum of agreement with BOR and meets the following qualifications:

1. has graduated at least 100 students with a bachelor's degree in each of the prior four years;
2. maintains eligibility to participate in federal student financial

aid programs;

3. has a financial responsibility score of at least 1.5 for the most recent fiscal year with available data, as determined by the U.S. Department of Education; and
4. is accredited as a degree-granting institution in good standing for at least 10 years by a regional accrediting organization and maintains the accreditation.

Under the bill, each participating institution must accept the online application form (see “Program Application Process,” above) and comply with the academic threshold requirements (see “Academic Threshold,” below). Additionally, the bill allows BOR to charge a reasonable fee to any participating institution that is not a public institution of higher education in Connecticut; however, it must not exceed BOR’s cost for including the institution in the program, or \$25,000, whichever is less.

Academic Threshold

The bill requires BOR to establish (1) a minimum class rank percentile for program applicants to qualify for automatic admission to participating institutions and (2) a standardized GPA calculation method that must be used to determine class rank percentile.

The bill also allows a participating institution to establish an academic threshold for admission to the institution through the program in addition to BOR’s minimum class rank percentile. This additional academic threshold must be based on a minimum GPA calculated using BOR’s standardized method.

If a CSUS university establishes an academic threshold, then the bill requires the university to admit applicants through the program if the applicant meets or exceeds either the BOR-established minimum class rank percentile or the minimum GPA established by the university. If any other participating institution establishes an academic threshold, it must admit applicants through the program if the applicant meets or exceeds the BOR-established minimum class rank percentile, the

minimum GPA established by the institution, or both.

Under the bill, participating institutions' governing boards may not establish policies or procedures that require additional academic qualifications beyond what is in the bill.

Nonpublic High School Participation

The bill allows a Connecticut nonpublic high school's supervisory agent to apply to BOR to participate in the program. BOR must approve it if the school (1) is accredited by a generally recognized organization or is operated by the U.S. Department of Defense or (2) complies with the bill's class rank percentile calculation requirements (see § 26, below).

§ 26 — CALCULATING AUTOMATIC ADMISSIONS PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY

Requires board of education to calculate students' GPA and class rank percentile using a standardized method to determine automatic admissions program eligibility

The bill requires each local and regional board of education, starting by August 1, 2022, to make certain calculations annually to determine which students qualify for the automatic admissions program. Specifically, each board must do the following:

1. calculate a GPA using the BOR-established standardized method for each grade 11 student;
2. determine whether these students' class rank percentile is above or below the BOR-established minimum; and
3. share a student's GPA, and whether the student is above or below the minimum class rank percentile, with the student; his or her parents or guardians if a minor; SDE; and upon the student's request, a participating institution for purposes of the program.

The bill specifies that it does not require a board of education to (1) publish or provide any student's class ranking, (2) publish the BOR-established GPA calculation on a student's transcript, or (3) publish whether a student is above or below the BOR-established minimum

class rank percentile for the automatic admissions program.

The bill requires each board of education, starting by August 1, 2022, to annually notify each student in his or her final year of high school, and their parent or guardian, about whether the student may be admitted to at least one participating institution under the automatic admissions program, based on the academic threshold described above.

§ 27 — CTPASS PROGRAM

Establishes the Ctpass program by January 1, 2022, to allow certain individuals in an approved class to use certain public transit services for free or at low cost

The bill requires the Department of Transportation (DOT) to establish the Ctpass program by January 1, 2022, to allow certain individuals in an approved class to use certain public transit services without cost or at low cost. These individuals are employees, clients, students, or customers of a training program, alternate route to certification program provider, higher education institution, private occupational school, employer, state or municipal agency, and public nonprofit social service provider. DOT must post information regarding the program on its website in a manner that, in the commissioner's view, will maximize awareness and participation by the greatest number of eligible organizations.

Under the bill, these eligible organizations may submit to the DOT commissioner an application to participate in Ctpass. The commissioner may then negotiate terms and conditions and enter into a contract with the organization. The terms and conditions must include (1) the amount of compensation or reimbursement required from the eligible organization, (2) the definition of approved class specific to the eligible organization, and (3) any limitations on times of use or types of public transit services available to the approved class. The compensation or reimbursement negotiated in the contract must be in an amount that the commissioner finds necessary or advisable, as long as it ensures that DOT's transit service expenditures do not increase due to administrative costs incurred operating the program.

The bill requires that a contract under the CTpass program be valid upon OPM's approval for a maximum two-year term; however, the first contract with an eligible organization must not exceed 12 months. Before renewing a contract with an eligible operator, the DOT commissioner must consider the following to re-evaluate the required compensation or reimbursement amount: (1) prior pass usage information and (2) any transit services expenditure increases incurred by DOT. The bill allows the commissioner to treat several eligible operators as a single eligible organization for contract purposes under the program.

By January 1, 2023, and annually thereafter, the bill requires the DOT commissioner to report to the OPM secretary on the financial data and pass usage information for each contract under the CT pass program.

§§ 28 & 29 — CHESLA LOAN AND AWARD ELIGIBILITY FOR CERTIFICATE PROGRAM ENROLLMENT

Allows certain students or their parents to take out student loans and receive certain financial aid with CHESLA to enroll in certificate programs and requires CHESLA to establish an account to fund and operate certain loans

The bill allows (1) students enrolled in a Connecticut "high-value certificate program" or their parents to take out student loans with the Connecticut Higher Education Supplemental Loan Authority (CHESLA) and (2) these students to receive grants, scholarships, fellowships, or other non-repayable assistance from CHESLA. Under the bill, a "high value certificate program" is a non-credit, subbaccalaureate certificate program offered by a higher education institution or a private occupational school that OWS designates as a "credential of value" (see § 4). A "Connecticut high-value certificate program" is a high-value certificate program offered by a higher education institution or private occupational school in the state.

Additionally, the bill requires CHESLA to establish the Certificate Loan Loss Reserve and Funding account. This separate, non-lapsing account must contain any funds required by law to be deposited in it, including state appropriations or bonds sale proceeds. CHESLA must spend these funds to (1) fund loans that it issues to a borrower to

finance Connecticut high-value certificate program enrollment, (2) cover any losses CHESLA incurs from issuing these loans and reasonable and necessary expenses for administering these loans, and (3) cover any initial implementation expenses before the loans' origination.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2021, for the CHESLA account provision and October 1, 2022, for the loan provision.

§ 30 — CREDENTIALS AND SKILLS REPORT

Requires the chief workforce officer to submit a biennial report on certain credentials and skills, starting by September 1, 2022

By September 1, 2022, and biennially thereafter until September 1, 2028, the bill requires the chief workforce officer to submit to the governor and BOR a report on in-demand credentials and skills that lead to quality jobs.

§ 31 — WORKFORCE TRAINING AND CREDENTIAL ATTAINMENT FOR INCARCERATED INDIVIDUALS

Requires the chief workforce officer, correction and labor commissioners, and OPM undersecretary for criminal justice, to report their recommendations for improving workforce training and credential attainment for incarcerated individuals

By February 1, 2023, the bill requires the chief workforce officer, together with the correction and labor commissioners and OPM undersecretary for criminal justice, to report on recommendations to improve workforce training and credential attainment for individuals incarcerated by the Department of Correction. They must (1) recommend whether credential attainment should be a factor for early release and (2) identify in-demand credentials and skills that lead to quality jobs and any barriers to equitably accessing those jobs.

They must submit the report to the governor, OPM secretary, and the Judiciary, Higher Education and Employment Advancement, Labor, and Commerce committees.

§ 32 — FREEDOM OF INFORMATION ACT EXEMPTIONS

Exempts specified student and employee records from disclosure under FOIA

The bill exempts the following from disclosure under the Freedom

of Information Act (FOIA):

1. any information reported to an executive branch agency by a higher education institution, private occupational school, or other training or certificate program providers about applicants or enrolled students, including enrollment, program completion, student loan, or other financial aid information;
2. any employee information provided to DOL by an employer under the bill's expanded quarterly reporting requirement (see § 8);
3. FAFSA records or information, including any waivers completed pursuant to the bill's FAFSA completion requirement for high school students (see § 16);
4. any records pertaining to institutional financial aid for students without legal immigration status;
5. admission applications to higher education institutions held by any department, board, commission, public college or university, state agency, or board of education, including applications made under the bill's Connecticut Automatic Admissions Program (see § 25) and any materials that are not otherwise protected from disclosure under the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974.

§§ 33-56 & 67-72 — GOVERNOR'S WORKFORCE COUNCIL

Renames the Connecticut Employment and Training Commission the Governor's Workforce Council

The bill renames the Connecticut Employment and Training Commission (CETC) the Governor's Workforce Council, thus aligning the statutes to Governor Lamont's Executive Order No. 4. It makes related conforming changes throughout the statutes.

Executive Order No. 4, signed by the governor on October 29, 2019, requires CETC to also be known at the Governor's Workforce Council and, among other things, designates the council as the governor's

principal advisor on workforce development issues. It required the council to convene a group of stakeholders and review and report on the state's workforce development system.

§§ 73 & 74 — REPEALERS

Repeals certain laws on certificate programs

The bill repeals the following laws about certificate programs:

1. definitions related to the programs (CGS § 10a-57a);
2. requirements for higher education institutions and private occupational schools to submit, collect, and compile data about certificate programs (CGS § 10a-57b);
3. the requirement that OHE develop and post online a one-page fact sheet for each subbaccalaureate certificate program offered by each higher education institution and private occupational school in the state (CGS § 10a-57c);
4. the requirement that OHE annually review a sample of student data for all for-credit and noncredit subbaccalaureate certificate programs offered by higher education institutions and private occupational schools (CGS § 10a-57e); and
5. the requirement that BOR formulate written definitions for all subbaccalaureate certificates earned on a for-credit or noncredit basis and awarded by Connecticut higher education institutions and private occupational schools (PA 16-44, § 3).

BACKGROUND

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)

WIOA provides federal funds to states for a range of career services, job training, education, and related services and supports. It authorizes six core programs, including the Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth programs. The law requires each state to submit a state plan that outlines a four-year strategy for the state's workforce development system.

CP20 WIN

CP20 WIN (i.e., the Connecticut Preschool through Twenty and Workforce Information Network) provides a framework and mechanism for securely sharing longitudinal data across participating agencies. It is designed to provide information to education, workforce, and agency staff and leaders to help improve education and workforce outcomes.

Requests for data from CP20 WIN must be for conducting an audit or evaluation of a federally or state-funded education program and benefit a local or state education authority or agency. Requests must also comply with existing state and federal limitations on sharing education and unemployment wage data.

NEBHE's High Value Credentials for New England

NEBHE's High Value Credentials for New England initiative was designed to provide individuals, institutions, policymakers, and employers with the tools to compare and evaluate credential programs and understand the skills and competencies obtained by earning a credential. The initiative includes a cloud-based Credential Registry that houses, organizes, and links credential information. The minimum data policy establishes the fields that make up the credential profiles in the registry.

Credential Engine

Credential Engine is a nonprofit organization that provides web-based services for creating a centralized credential registry. Its Credential Transparency Description Language provides a common set of terms for defining credentials, credentialing organizations, quality assurance bodies, and competencies.

Alliance Districts

Alliance districts are the 30 school districts that have the lowest achievement, as rated by the state's accountability index, plus the three districts that were previously among the lowest 30 when the program started in FY 13 (CGS § 10-262u). For FYs 18-22, they are as follows: Ansonia, Bloomfield, Bridgeport, Bristol, Danbury, Derby, East

Hartford, East Haven, East Windsor, Groton, Hamden, Hartford, Killingly, Manchester, Meriden, Middletown, Naugatuck, New Britain, New Haven, New London, Norwalk, Norwich, Putnam, Stamford, Thompson, Torrington, Vernon, Waterbury, West Haven, Winchester, Windham, Windsor, and Windsor Locks.

Mastery Exams and Alternatives

Mastery exams for eighth grade students annually measure essential and grade-appropriate skills in reading, writing, mathematics, and science. Ninth grade students do not take any mastery exams. Grade 11 students take a mastery exam to measure essential and grade-appropriate skills in science, as well as a nationally recognized college readiness assessment that measures essential and grade-appropriate skills in reading, writing, and mathematics (i.e., the SAT, as approved by SBE (CGS § 10-14n)).

Federal regulations allow students with significant cognitive disabilities to take an alternate assessment with alternate academic achievement standards designed by the state (34 C.F.R. 200.1(d) & 34 C.F.R. 300.160(c)).

In-State Student Classification

By law, with limited exceptions, eligibility for in-state student classification is based on an applicant's domicile, which is his or her "true, fixed and permanent home" and the place where he or she intends to remain and return to when he or she leaves (CGS §§ 10a-28 & 10a-29). One exception allows a person, except for certain nonimmigrant aliens (i.e., people with a visa permitting temporary entrance to the country for a specific purpose), to qualify for in-state tuition if he or she meets the following criteria:

1. resides in Connecticut (i.e., maintains a continuous and permanent physical presence, except for short, temporary absences);
2. attended an in-state educational institution and completed at least two years of high school in Connecticut;

3. graduated from a high school or the equivalent in Connecticut;
and
4. is registered as an entering student, or is a student, at UConn, a Connecticut State University, a community-technical college, or Charter Oak State College.

Students without legal immigration status who meet the above criteria must file an affidavit with the institution stating that they have applied to legalize their immigration status or will do so as soon as they are eligible (CGS § 10a-29(9)).

COMMITTEE ACTION

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 19 Nay 3 (03/22/2021)