

OFFICE OF LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH
PUBLIC ACT SUMMARY



PA 21-95—sHB 6621

Education Committee

**AN ACT CONCERNING ASSORTED REVISIONS AND ADDITIONS TO
THE EDUCATION STATUTES**

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BACKGROUND

SUMMARY: This act requires several state and local actions related to social-emotional learning, including assessing students for social-emotional learning, developing a statewide social-emotional learning strategy, and developing social-emotional learning standards. (PA 21-2, June Special Session (JSS), removes the social-emotional learning assessment requirement and instead permits school districts to conduct the assessment (see BACKGROUND).)

The act includes provisions on social-emotional learning and teacher professional development and school resource officer training. It also requires a review of the state law on school bullying for possible changes and modifies the membership of safe school climate committees.

The act also makes various unrelated changes in the education statutes on (1) the topics for which a board of education can be petitioned to hold a public hearing, (2) in-school vision screening equipment, (3) a special education services and funding task force, (4) a plan for a statewide virtual school, and (5) acting superintendents' probationary periods.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2021, except where noted otherwise.

§ 1 — PETITIONED BOARD OF EDUCATION HEARINGS

Narrows the topics for which a board of education can be petitioned to hold a public hearing

Prior law allowed 1% or 50 of a town's electors, whichever is greater, to petition the board of education to hold a public hearing on any question. The act limits the hearing topic to only questions related to the education provided by the board.

§ 2 — VISION SCREENING EQUIPMENT

Specifies permissible equipment for conducting in-school vision screenings

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The act makes a minor change to the annual in-school vision screening for public school students. Prior law required the vision screening for grades K-1 and 3-5 to be performed using (1) a Snellen chart or (2) an equivalent screening device such as an automated vision screening device. The act instead specifies that the screening may be performed using (1) a Snellen chart or an equivalent screening device or (2) an automated vision screening device. This allows for use of an automated vision screening device that is not equivalent to a Snellen chart.

§ 3 — SPECIAL EDUCATION TASK FORCE

Establishes a 15-member task force to study special education services and funding

The act establishes a 15-member task force to study the provision of special education services and funding during the 2016-17 through 2019-20 school years.

Study Scope

The task force's study must examine at least the following topics:

1. provision of special education and related services, including whether local and regional boards of education provide these services (a) directly, (b) by partnering with regional education service centers (RESCs), (c) by contracting with a private special education services provider, or (d) as part of a cooperative arrangement between two or more boards;
2. the cost of providing special education and related services, the total aggregate amount per school district per year, and its annual percentage increase or decrease per school district;
3. the effect of special education costs on boards' minimum budget requirement;
4. the state reimbursement level to boards for special education, including the (a) total reimbursement amount submitted by each school district per year and the amount received per year and (b) percentage increase or decrease in these amounts per year; and
5. the criteria and way school districts are identifying students requiring special education and related services, including whether districts are overidentifying or under identifying these students and the causes and reasons.

Membership

Under the act, task force members include the education commissioner, or her designee, and 14 appointed members. Table 1 below lists the task force membership and the members' appointing authorities. All appointments must be made within 30 days after the act's passage, and the appointing authority must fill any vacancy.

Table 1: Special Education Task Force Membership

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<i>Appointing Authority</i>	<i>Member(s)</i>
House speaker	Special Education Equity for Kids of Connecticut representative Connecticut Association of Boards of Education representative Parent or guardian of a student receiving special education services
Senate president pro tempore	Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents representative Connecticut Education Association representative Parent or guardian of a student receiving special education services
House majority leader	American Federation of Teachers – Connecticut representative Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center representative
Senate majority leader	Connecticut Council of Administrators of Special Education representative RESC Alliance representative
House minority leader	Connecticut Association of School Administrators representative School and State Finance Project representative
Senate minority leader	Connecticut Association of Schools representative Connecticut Association of School Business Officials representative

Leadership, Meetings, and Staff

The act requires the House speaker and Senate president pro tempore to select the co-chairpersons from among the task force members. The co-chairs must schedule the first meeting. The Education Committee’s administrative staff must serve as the task force’s staff.

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Under the act, the task force must submit a report on its findings and recommendations to the Education Committee by January 1, 2022. The task force terminates on the day it submits the report or January 1, 2022, whichever is later.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

§ 4 — SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING ASSESSMENT FOR STUDENTS

Requires each board of education to administer a social-emotional learning assessment to students for the upcoming school year and allows them to administer these assessments in the following years; requires parents and guardians to be given prior notice of the assessment and grant permission before the assessment can be administered

The act requires each local and regional board of education to administer, for the 2021-2022 school year, a social-emotional learning assessment to students. Boards can choose between (1) an SDE-provided social-emotional learning assessment or (2) another social-emotional learning assessment or mental health and resiliency screening. (PA 21-2, JSS, § 386 amended this to allow, rather than require, administration of the assessment (see BACKGROUND).) Beginning with the 2022-2023 school year, the act allows boards to administer either of these assessments.

It also requires SDE, beginning with the 2021-2022 school year and upon request, to provide boards with a student social-emotional learning assessment and to assist them in administering it as provided under the act.

Under the act, parents or guardians must (1) receive prior written notice of the upcoming assessment and (2) grant permission before a student can complete the screening.

§ 5 — SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL SUPPORT STRATEGY

Requires the development of a statewide social-emotional support strategy to provide support and assistance to boards of education; specifies items to be included in the strategy

The act requires the Social Emotional Learning and School Climate Advisory Collaborative (“SEL collaborative”) (see BACKGROUND), in consultation with several state agencies, to design a statewide social-emotional support strategy to provide support and assistance to local and regional boards of education for mental health, social-emotional support, behavioral support, trauma support, and special education programs and services.

The strategy must include recommendations on:

1. training, recruiting, and deploying mental health and social-emotional support staff;
2. providing resources for school districts for hiring mental health and social-emotional support staff;
3. assisting boards in developing and implementing comprehensive school counseling programs according to statutory guidelines;
4. building on school and community efforts that support student mental health and well-being, such as community school models, family resource centers, health clinics, child care available from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m., and year-

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- round use of school buildings;
5. developing or enhancing support networks for mental health and trauma support services through interagency agreements, local action plans, and model programs;
 6. improving the knowledge and skill of educators and other school personnel to develop social-emotional learning and restorative practices competencies and capacities;
 7. creating opportunities for educators to collaborate, share support, and problem solve through team planning time and professional learning communities;
 8. providing resources to engage parents and families to support the development of student social and emotional growth at home and in the community; and
 9. providing opportunities for families to discuss topics relating to social-emotional learning, restorative practices, resiliency, and ways to ensure racial equity in schools.

For the strategy, the SEL collaborative must consult with the Office of Early Childhood and the departments of Education, Mental Health and Addiction Services, Children and Families, and Public Health. It may also consult with the national Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning to implement these provisions.

§ 6 — SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING STANDARDS

Requires SDE to develop, by October 1, 2022, student social-emotional learning standards for grades 4 through 12, inclusive; defines social-emotional learning

The act requires SDE to develop, by October 1, 2022, student social-emotional learning standards for grades 4 through 12, inclusive (SBE has already adopted standards for pre-K through grade 3). The standards must be designed for a multitiered system of support that is culturally relevant and responsive, emphasizes school connectedness, and includes restorative practices. The act requires SDE to make the standards available on its website.

For use in developing these standards, the act defines “social-emotional learning” as the process through which children and adults achieve emotional intelligence through the competencies of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

§ 7 — WORKING GROUP TO STUDY THE SCHOOL BULLYING STATUTE

Requires the SEL collaborative to convene a working group to (1) study the state’s school bullying statutes and make legislative recommendations and (2) provide technical support to local school districts regarding adoption of the Connecticut Association of Schools’ Connecticut Model School Climate Policy

The act requires the SEL collaborative, by January 1, 2022, to convene a working group to do the following:

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1. study the state laws defining school bullying and cyberbullying, requiring safe school climate plans, and specifying steps that must be taken in response to bullying;
2. make legislative recommendations about these laws, including restorative practices in safe school climate plans and statewide adoption of the National School Climate Standards; and
3. provide technical support to local school districts for adoption of the Connecticut Association of Schools' Connecticut Model School Climate Policy.

The act permits the SEL collaborative to consult with or include as members of the working group representatives from the national Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

§ 8 — SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS (SRO) AND SOCIAL- EMOTIONAL TRAINING

Requires all SRO memos of understanding (MOUs) between boards of education and local law enforcement agencies entered into on and after July 1, 2021 to require SROs to complete any social-emotional learning training provided to teachers and administrators as part of professional development

The act requires, on and after July 1, 2021, all SRO MOUs entered into, extended, updated, or amended between boards of education and local law enforcement agencies to require SROs to complete any separate training specifically related to social-emotional learning and restorative practices provided to teachers and administrators as part of professional development. The training must be completed while officers are performing their duties as SROs and while they are assigned to be at the school.

By law, any school district that assigns an SRO to a school under its jurisdiction must enter into an MOU with the local law enforcement agency about the role and responsibility of the officer.

§§ 9-11 — PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL- EMOTIONAL TRAINING

Integrates social-emotional learning into various aspects of professional development for certified employees; adds social-emotional learning to teacher in-service training

The act makes the following changes in state law about professional development for teachers and other certified school employees such as administrators and counselors:

1. requires social-emotional learning and restorative practices to be integrated throughout teacher professional development and in-service training,
2. requires local school districts to include student social-emotional learning and restorative practices in their professional development plans, and

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3. requires local districts to add the integration of social-emotional learning and restorative practices into professional development as part of the district's statement of educational goals.

By law, school districts are required to provide 18 hours of professional development training per year to each teacher at no cost to the teacher.

The act also adds the principles and practices of social-emotional learning and restorative practices to the list of topics that must be included in the required in-service training that all teachers receive by law.

§§ 12 & 13 — SCHOOL PARAEducATOR ADVISORY COUNCIL

Changes the School Paraprofessional Advisory Council's name to the School Paraeducator Advisory Council; requires the council to study issues related to this field and develop paraeducator career development pathway proposals and report the study and proposals to the Education Committee

The act renames the School Paraprofessional Advisory Council the "School Paraeducator Advisory Council." It also requires the council to conduct a study addressing issues related to this field and develop paraeducator career development pathway proposals. Paraeducators are school staff who assist teachers in the classroom and are not certified as professional teachers.

The council must submit the study and proposals, along with any recommendations for legislation, to the Education Committee.

Study

By January 1, 2022, the council must conduct a study on the following:

1. minimum employment standards, including pay rates, health care coverage, retirement benefits, and professional development for paraeducators that focus on maximizing their success in the classroom;
2. safety issues for paraeducators who work with students who have behavioral issues, including the availability of appropriate safety equipment at each school;
3. issues related to assigning substitute teaching duties to paraeducators, including emergency situations when a paraeducator is asked to serve as a substitute teacher; and
4. issues related to the duties of paraeducators who work with students who have individualized education programs (IEPs).

Career and Professional Development Proposals

By January 1, 2022, the act requires the council to develop proposals to create a pathway for continued paraeducator career and professional development, including:

1. paraeducator certificate and apprenticeship programs that offer course credits applicable to transferrable associate degree programs;
2. associate degree programs that (a) build upon and do not duplicate the

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courses and competencies of paraeducator certificate programs, (b) incorporate field experiences, (c) are aligned with the standards and competencies for teachers, and (d) are transferrable to a bachelor's degree in education and teacher certification programs; and

3. bachelor's degree programs that lead to teacher certification that build upon and do not duplicate the courses and competencies of transferrable associate degrees.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage for the study and career proposal provisions.

§ 14 — SAFE SCHOOL CLIMATE COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Adds additional members to each school's safe school climate committee; prohibits student members of the committee from participating in any activity that may compromise a student's confidentiality

The act adds additional members to each school's safe school climate committee. Under the state's anti-bullying law, each school must have this committee to address school bullying issues.

Beginning with the 2021-2022 school year, the act requires each committee to include (1) at least one teacher, appointed by the teachers' union; (2) medical and mental health staff assigned to the school; and (3) in the case of a committee at a high school, at least one student from the high school who is selected by the school's students in a manner the school principal determines.

The act specifies that student committee members cannot participate in any activity that may compromise the a student's confidentiality, including the committee's specific duties to (1) receive copies of completed reports following bullying investigations; (2) identify and address bullying patterns among students; and (3) implement the school security and safety plan for the collection, evaluation, and reporting of information relating to disturbing or threatening behavior that may not meet the definition of bullying. Existing law provides the same prohibition for parents or guardians serving on the committees.

Student members can participate in other committee duties such as reviewing and amending school bullying policies and making recommendations for the school district's safe school climate plan.

§ 15 — STATEWIDE VIRTUAL SCHOOL PLAN

Requires SDE to develop a plan for a grade K-12 statewide virtual school

The act requires SDE to develop a plan to create and implement a statewide virtual school with virtual learning instruction for grades kindergarten to 12 through one or more internet-based software platforms. The department must submit the plan, along with any related legislative recommendations, to the Education Committee by February 1, 2022.

Under the act, this virtual school must:

1. be maintained by and under the direction and control of the State Board of Education (SBE);

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2. provide at least 180 days of actual school sessions and 900 hours of actual school work for grades kindergarten to 12, so long as no more than seven hours of actual school work in any school day count toward the school year's required total;
3. offer rigorous coursework and a curriculum that is (a) aligned with SBE-approved curriculum guidelines and (b) in accordance with the SBE-adopted statewide subject matter content standards;
4. grant a diploma to any enrolled student who satisfactorily completed the high school graduation requirements under state law; and
5. be created with consideration for (a) best practices in virtual learning, (b) technological capabilities of students throughout Connecticut, and (c) equity.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

§ 16 — ACTING SUPERINTENDENTS

Allows a one-time probationary period extension for acting superintendents who were unable to complete certification or training programs during the past two school years

The act allows the education commissioner to grant a one-time extension to any appointed acting superintendent's probationary period if, during the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years, he or she was unable to (1) become properly certified or (2) successfully complete an SBE-approved school leadership program. Under the act, this extension applies to the probationary period for the 2021-22 school year.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

BACKGROUND

Social and Emotional Learning and School Climate Advisory Collaborative

The 33-member social and emotional learning and school climate advisory collaborative is tasked by law with developing a state-wide school climate survey, a model positive school climate policy, and a student suicide risk assessment. The collaborative membership includes, among others, legislative appointees, the chairpersons and ranking members of the Children's and Education committees, the education commissioner, and the Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity, and Opportunity executive director.

Related Act

PA 21-2, JSS, § 386, later removed the social-emotional learning assessment requirement in § 4 of the act and instead permits school districts to conduct the assessment.