

OFFICE OF LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH
PUBLIC ACT SUMMARY



PA 23-208—sHB 5003

Education Committee

AN ACT CONCERNING CERTAIN REVISIONS TO THE EDUCATION STATUTES

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§ 1 — KINDERGARTEN ENTRANCE AGE

Changes the waiver process to the rule that, beginning with the 2024-25 school year, a child must be age five by September of the school year to start kindergarten.

This act changes the waiver process to the rule that, beginning with the 2024-25 school year, children must be age five by September 1 of the school year in order to start public school kindergarten. (PA 23-159, § 3, raises the age children can start kindergarten from age five by January 1 of the school year to age five by September 1 of the school year, effective July 1, 2024.)

This act allows a child under five as of September 1 to be admitted to kindergarten if (1) the parent or guardian makes a written request to the school principal and (2) the principal and an appropriate staff person conduct an assessment that shows the child is developmentally ready. Under prior law, a child under age five could only be admitted by a vote of the board of education at a duly called meeting.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2024

§ 2 — ALLIANCE DISTRICT EFFECTIVENESS REPORT

Requires the education commissioner to (1) develop a report on the effectiveness of the alliance district program, including recommendations for changing the program, and (2) submit the report to the Appropriations and Education committees by January 1, 2026

The act requires the education commissioner to develop a report on the effectiveness of the alliance district program, including recommendations for changing the program. The commissioner must submit the report to the Appropriations and Education committees by January 1, 2026.

The report must include at least the following:

1. an analysis of the program's effectiveness for improving student academic achievement and school district performance;
2. the oversight and accountability metrics and standards used to (a) measure student academic achievement and district performance and (b) conduct the

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- analysis; and
3. a financial accounting of the funding provided to each alliance district, how the funds have been spent, and whether (a) the funds have been spent in accordance with the required alliance district improvement plans and (b) there is a causal link between how the funds are used and an improvement in student achievement and district performance.

The recommendations must include, at a minimum, an implementation plan, developed with stakeholders, for decreasing the number of alliance districts on or before July 1, 2027, and how resources and funding may best be used to assist districts in improving student achievement and district performance.

An alliance district is a school district that is among the towns with the 33 lowest accountability index (AI) scores as calculated by the State Department of Education (SDE) or was previously designated as an alliance district from FYs 13-22. (The AI score measures school district performance based on student standardized test scores plus additional measures such as student growth over time.) Existing law requires the education commissioner to designate 36 alliance districts (which counts the previously designated districts) for the five-year period from FYs 23-27. Alliance districts must receive SDE approval for their improvement plan before the agency will release the alliance portion of the district's ECS (Education Cost Sharing) funds (CGS § 10-262u).

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2023

§§ 3 & 4 — FAMILY RESOURCE CENTER COST STUDY

Eliminates the requirement that each alliance district use part of its alliance funding to establish family resource centers in each of its elementary schools; requires each alliance district to report to SDE on the cost of creating these centers in each elementary school

The act eliminates the requirement in PA 23-167, § 4, that each alliance district use part of its alliance funding to establish a family resource center in each of its elementary schools. It also requires each alliance district to develop a report on the cost of creating a family resource center in each of its elementary schools. The reports must be submitted to SDE by February 1, 2024.

By law, family resource centers provide comprehensive child care services, remedial educational and literacy services, families-in-training programs, and supportive services to parents who receive temporary family assistance and other parents in need of the services (CGS § 10-4o).

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2023

§ 5 — MINORITY TEACHER RESIDENCY PROGRAM FUNDING

Requires SDE to withhold a revised percentage of state aid to alliance districts beginning in FY 25, instead of FY 24, to fund minority teacher residency programs that partner with alliance districts

By law, each alliance district must partner with a minority teacher residency program operator to enroll candidates and place them in the district for a 10-month

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residency (CGS § 10-156gg). To fund this program, SDE withholds from each alliance district a percentage of its state aid. PA 23-167, § 41, required the education commissioner, in FY 24, to withhold 10% of any increase in funds the alliance district received in FY 21 over the amount of funds it received in FY 20, rather than 10% of any increase the district received in FY 25 that exceeds the amount received in FY 20. The act amends this to require that the funds be withheld for FY 25 rather than FY 24.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2023

§ 6 — PATHWAYS IN TECHNOLOGY EARLY COLLEGE PROGRAM

Changes the start year from FY 24 to FY 25 for a new pathways in technology early college high school program for alliance districts

PA 23-167, § 46, requires SDE to create a grant for new or expanded pathways in technology early college high school programs in alliance districts starting in FY 24. SDE must issue requests for proposals and award grants to two school boards for the costs associated with establishing a new public-private partnership or enhancing a pathway in technology early college high school program.

This act delays the start year for the program by one year, from FY 24 to FY 25.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2023

§ 7 — PRIORITY SCHOOL DISTRICT FUNDING

Requires that any district in its first year as a former PSD receive a full, rather than reduced, grant; repeals the creation of a fourth grant year for former PSDs

Existing law requires that districts that no longer qualify as priority school districts (PSD; i.e., “former PSDs”) receive a progressively reduced PSD “phase-out” grant over three years as described below.

For FY 24, the act requires that any school district that is in its first year as a former PSD receive the same grant amount that it did in FY 23 during its last year as a PSD, rather than a reduced PSD phase-out grant. Under prior law, the first-year grant for former PSDs was calculated as follows: the grant amount from the district’s final year of PSD status, minus 25% of the difference between that final grant amount and \$250,000.

The act also repeals the provision in PA 23-204, § 325, that would have made any former PSD that received its final, third-year PSD phase-out grant during FY 23 eligible to receive a fourth grant in FY 24 in the same amount as its third-year phase-out grant.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2023

§ 8 — BOARD MEMBER ELECTIONS FOR REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

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Revises the elections for, and terms of, the Regional School District 20 board of education members

The act revises the elections for, and terms of, the regional board of education members for Regional School District 20. Under the act, each member town elects one member in June of 2024, another in June of 2025, and a third in June of 2026. All members serve four-year terms. Region 20 includes the towns of Goshen, Litchfield, Morris, and Warren.

The act specifically supersedes the statutes related to the formation of a regional school district, including the requirement that the regional school study committee's plan determines the number of regional board of education members. (The school study committee is a required part of how school districts take steps to form a regional district.)

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

§§ 9-10 — SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS

Narrows the circumstances when an SRO must file a report to those in which an investigation or intervention of behavior or conflict (1) escalates to violence or (2) constitutes a crime; requires that MOUs between school boards and law enforcement agencies conform with any laws or policies concerning police officer duties

By law, each local and regional board of education that assigns a school resource officer (SRO; i.e., sworn police officer) to its schools must have a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the SRO's local law enforcement agency to address the SRO's role and responsibility in the school, including the officer's interactions with students and staff.

PA 23-167 adds the requirement that, as of July 1, 2023, these MOUs specify the SRO's duties and procedures for restraining students, using firearms, and making school-based arrests. The act also requires that the MOU provisions on SRO duties align with any laws or policies governing police officer duties.

PA 23-167 additionally requires each SRO to submit to his or her agency's police chief a report for each investigation or behavioral intervention the SRO conducts within five days of doing so.

The act narrows the situations under which an SRO must file a report to those in which an investigation or intervention is of challenging behavior or conflict that escalates to violence or constitutes a crime. Under PA 23-167 and unchanged by the act, "investigation or behavioral intervention" is when an SRO conducts (1) a fact-finding inquiry about student behavior or school safety, including emergency circumstances, or (2) an intervention to resolve violent or nonviolent student behavior or conflicts.

As required by PA 23-167, and unchanged by this act, the report must include at least the following:

1. the date, time, and location of the investigation or behavioral intervention;
2. the SRO's name and badge number;
3. the race, ethnicity, gender, age, and disability status for each student involved in the investigation or behavioral intervention;

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4. the reason for and nature and disposition of the investigation or behavioral intervention; and
5. whether any student involved in the investigation or behavioral intervention was (a) searched; (b) informed of their constitutional rights; (c) issued a citation or a summons; (d) arrested; or (e) detained, including the amount of time of the detainment.

Police chiefs must submit SROs' reports to their school districts' superintendents at least monthly. Superintendents must submit them to their school districts' local or regional board of education.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2023

§ 11 — ROBERTA B. WILLIS SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

Makes various changes to the Roberta B. Willis Scholarship program, including requiring FY 24 awards to use ARPA funds by December 31, 2024, and excluding regional-community technical colleges from the program

There are three types of awards under the Roberta B. Willis Scholarship Program: (1) need- and merit-based, (2) need-based, and (3) the Charter Oak grant. The act makes various changes to the scholarship program, including the following:

1. limiting the program by excluding the regional-community technical colleges, making their students ineligible to receive an award;
2. replacing “full-time or part-time undergraduate student” with “eligible student”;
3. changing how scholarship funds are used, including requiring the Office of Higher Education (OHE) to use the federal American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, P.L. 117-2 (ARPA) allocations by December 31, 2024; and
4. allowing the program to use a student aid index as an alternative to family contribution when determining student eligibility.

The act also makes many technical and conforming changes.
EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2024

Regional-Community Technical Colleges

The act excludes the regional-community technical colleges from the scholarship program, which makes students at these institutions ineligible to receive an award. It makes a conforming change by eliminating the requirement that at least 2.5% of the annual appropriation be allocated to the regional-community technical colleges to be used for financial aid purposes. It also makes additional conforming changes.

Eligible Students

The act substitutes “eligible student” for “full-time or part-time undergraduate student” throughout the law and specifies that the eligible student is a resident of the state. Otherwise, the definition is the same: a student enrolled at an institution of higher education in studies leading to the student’s first associate or bachelor’s

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degree who is carrying a courseload of 12 or more credits (full-time) or between 6 and 11 credits (part-time).

Allocation of Roberta B. Willis Scholarship Program Funds

By law, the General Assembly must allocate funds to OHE for the Roberta B. Willis Scholarship program. The act requires OHE, for FY 24, to make awards for the program from any funds allocated to the office from federal ARPA funding until they are exhausted before making any awards or allocating any funds from General Fund appropriations.

Under prior law, at least 20% but no more than 30% of available appropriations were allocated to the need- and merit-based grant. The act maintains the 20% minimum but caps the maximum allocation at 30% of available funds or \$10 million, whichever is greater. The act requires that the program's funding allocations across its three award types be made within available funds, rather than available appropriations as prior law required. Correspondingly, it requires that the administrative allowance be based on one-fourth of a percent of available funds, rather than available appropriations.

The act requires OHE to use the funds appropriated or allocated for the program for FY 24 to (1) make its awards for the need- and merit-based grant and (2) allocate funds for the 2023-24 and 2024-25 academic years for the need-based and Charter Oak grants. Additionally, it requires all ARPA funds allocated for the program to be used by December 31, 2024.

Award Distribution and Student Eligibility

Under existing law and unchanged by the act, the need- and merit-based grants are available to state residents who are enrolled full- or part-time as an undergraduate student at any Connecticut public or independent college or university.

Prior law required OHE to make the determination of financial need based on the family contribution for educational costs as computed from the student's Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Beginning July 1, 2024, the act replaces statutory references to "family contribution" in the Roberta B. Willis Scholarship program with "student aid index" to reflect changes in federal law. (The federal FAFSA Simplification Act, part of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021, P.L. 116-260, phases out the "Expected Family Contribution" and replaces it with "Student Aid Index"). Under the act, "student aid index" is the index used to determine financial aid eligibility as computed from a student's FAFSA.

By law, OHE makes awards on a sliding scale up to a maximum federal family contribution set annually by OHE and based on funding levels and the number of eligible applicants. Under the act, as an alternative to family contribution, OHE can also use student aid index when making need- and merit-based awards.

The act makes a similar change with the need-based grant. By law, the amount of annual funds allocated for each institution of higher education is determined by

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its full-time equivalent student enrollment by family contribution. The act allows either family contribution or student aid index to be used.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2023

§ 12 — ALLIANCE DISTRICT PROGRAM REVISION REPEAL

Repeals the revisions to the alliance district program made in PA 23-167

The act repeals the provisions in PA 23-167, §§ 38-40, that renamed alliance districts “educational reform districts” and reduced the number of these districts from 36 to 20. Relatedly, it repeals the provision that defined a “legacy alliance district” as a school district for a town that was designated as an alliance district for FYs 13-24.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2023

§ 13 — ROBERTA B. WILLIS SCHOLARSHIP AND FREE SCHOOL MEAL ELIGIBILITY REPEALS

Repeals (1) PA 23-204, § 135, which contains similar provisions to § 11 above regarding the Roberta B. Willis scholarship program and (2) the extension of free school meal eligibility to otherwise ineligible low-income families in the 2023-24 school year

The act repeals PA 23-204, § 135, which contains similar provisions to § 11 (above) regarding the Roberta B. Willis scholarship program.

It also repeals PA 23-204, §§ 311 & 312, which would have extended free school meal eligibility to students with a family income below 200% of the federal poverty level who are otherwise ineligible in the 2023-24 school year.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2023