
OLR Bill Analysis

sSB 14 (File 547, as amended by Senate "A")*

AN ACT ASSISTING SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN IMPROVING EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES.

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*Senate Amendment "A" adds provisions (1) making various changes to the education statutes related to the Connecticut Seal of Biliteracy, Goodwin University Magnet Schools, *Sheff* magnet schools, Connecticut Grown for Connecticut Kids Week, and transition services for students receiving special education services; (2) specifying the Office of Early Childhood's (OEC's) responsibilities in operating and administering Early Start CT, including implementing policies and procedures (a) establishing a sliding fee scale and (b) regarding

participating early childhood care and education program accreditation requirements; and (3) making changes to conform the law to the Connecticut Technical Education and Career System's (CTECS's) establishment as an independent state agency. The amendment also (1) adds provisions defining designated staff members and designated qualified staff members, (2) establishes their education requirements, and (3) removes the cap on annual operating expense grants under the Connecticut Smart Start program.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2024, unless otherwise noted below.

§§ 1 & 2 — SDE LITERACY RESEARCH AND READING SUCCESS RESOURCES

Requires SDE's Center for Literacy Research and Reading Success to make certain resources available to the faculty of teacher preparation programs; expands the requirement that SDE's Office of Dyslexia and Reading Disabilities verify compliance with certain standards for educator preparation programs and applicants

This bill requires the State Department of Education's (SDE's) Center for Literacy Research and Reading Success to make available to the faculty of teacher preparation programs (1) resources and research supporting scientifically based reading instruction (see *Background – Scientifically Based Reading Research and Instruction*) and (2) Connecticut's K-3 Literacy Strategy that the center develops. It replaces current requirements that the center make available (1) materials related to the science of teaching reading, (2) the intensive reading instruction program, and (3) samples of available reviewed and approved reading curriculum models or programs. It also eliminates the requirement for the center to report on teacher preparation programs' progress in including these models or programs.

By law, SDE's Office of Dyslexia and Reading Disabilities must verify that educator preparation programs and applicants for educator certification meet compliance standards for dyslexia instruction and training. The bill extends this requirement to cover intermediate administrator and supervisor preparation programs. It also expands the scope of the requirement to include the programs' and applicants' compliance with scientifically based reading, research, and instruction, and structured literacy instruction and training.

Background — Scientifically Based Reading Research and Instruction

Existing law defines “scientifically based reading research and instruction” as (1) a comprehensive program or a collection of practices based on reliable, valid evidence showing that when these programs or practices are used, students can be expected to achieve satisfactory reading progress and (2) the integration of strategies for continuously assessing, evaluating, and communicating the student’s reading progress and needs in order to implement ongoing interventions so all students can read and comprehend text and apply higher-level thinking skills. The program or collection of practices must include instruction in oral language, phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, rapid automatic name or letter name fluency, and reading comprehension.

§§ 3 & 4 — STATE-WIDE PROGRAM TO SUPPORT ADVANCED PLACEMENT STUDENTS

Requires SDE to conduct a study on the feasibility of establishing and administering a state-wide program to support public high school students’ participation in advanced placement courses

The bill requires SDE to conduct a study on the feasibility of establishing and administering a state-wide program to support public high school students’ participation in advanced placement courses or programs, giving priority to students from low-income families. Under the bill, these programs include an honors class, advanced placement class, International Baccalaureate program, Cambridge International program, dual enrollment program, dual credit course or program, early college program, or any other advanced or accelerated course or program offered, and for which credit is awarded, by a local or regional board of education in grades nine through 12, inclusive.

The bill requires SDE to consult with local and regional boards of education and public and independent higher education institutions in conducting the study. Under the bill, the study must review current in-state programs to provide advanced courses or programs, identify and analyze similar programs in other states, and make recommendations on the framework and criteria for implementing the program.

The bill requires SDE to submit a report and any recommendations

on the establishment and implementation of the program to the Education Committee by January 1, 2026.

§ 5 — STATE SEAL OF BILITERACY

Allows a broader range of schools to award the Connecticut State Seal of Biliteracy on their high school diplomas

The bill expands the types of schools that may affix the Connecticut State Seal of Biliteracy to the high school diplomas of students who achieve a high level of proficiency in English and one or more foreign languages.

It does this by allowing the governing body of any school that awards diplomas, instead of only local and regional boards of education, to use criteria the State Board of Education sets for awarding this designation. (Presumably, this includes private schools in addition to public schools authorized under current law.) The bill also expands the definition of “foreign language” to include any language spoken by a Native American tribe, instead of only tribes that are federally recognized as under current law.

§§ 6 & 8 — GOODWIN UNIVERSITY MAGNET SCHOOLS TUITION AUTHORITY

Authorizes GUMS to charge tuition to boards of education whose students attend grades kindergarten to 12 at a GUMS-operated school

The bill extends to Goodwin University Magnet Schools (“GUMS”) the same authority to charge tuition for its magnet schools, and the same conditions, as regional education service centers (RESCs). GUMS currently operates two magnet schools.

The bill does this by granting the authority more broadly to any interdistrict magnet school operator that is (1) the board of governors or equivalent for an independent higher education institution or (2) any other third-party not-for-profit corporation the education commissioner approves. GUMS is the only current magnet school operator in this category.

The bill authorizes GUMS to charge per-student tuition to sending districts whose students attend grades kindergarten to 12 at a GUMS-

operated school. The tuition equals the difference between the (1) sending school's average per-pupil expenditure for the previous fiscal year and (2) magnet school grant amount received plus any revenue from other sources, calculated on a per-pupil basis. Starting in FY 25, the law caps tuition charged for all magnet schools at 58% of the per-student tuition charged for FY 24, which the bill applies to GUMS.

Sheff Magnet Schools

By law, RESC magnet schools that help the state meet its obligations under the *Sheff v. O'Neill* Connecticut Supreme Court desegregation decision (see *Background – Sheff v. O'Neill State Supreme Court Decision*) may charge tuition of up to \$4,053 to parents or guardians of children attending preschool at these schools, but they are prohibited from charging tuition to any parent or guardian with a family income that is at or below 75% of the state median income. The state must cover the unpaid tuition for these parents, within available appropriations.

The bill adds GUMS to the group that may charge preschool tuitions and applies the same limitations.

Background — Sheff v. O'Neill State Supreme Court Decision

In this 1996 decision, the Connecticut Supreme Court ruled that the state had a constitutional obligation to remedy the educational inequities in the Hartford schools caused by racial and ethnic isolation (238 Conn. 1 (1996)). The court ordered the state legislature and the governor to craft a solution, and legislation was passed to create voluntary desegregation in Hartford by creating interdistrict magnet schools and using programs such as Open Choice.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

§ 7 — CONTINUOUS EMPLOYMENT AND TEACHER TENURE

Allows Goodwin magnet school teachers hired from other districts to be considered continuously employed for purposes of tenure and accumulated sick leave

The bill allows teachers employed by GUMS or Goodwin University Educational Services, Inc. (GUES) to be considered continuously employed when they previously worked for a local or regional board of education during the school year immediately before employment with

GUMS. It applies to teacher tenure and paid sick leave accumulation and accrual from year to year. By treating the employment as continuous, a teacher does not lose tenure rights or accumulated sick leave earned before gaining employment with Goodwin.

GUES and GUMS currently operate two magnet schools adjacent to Goodwin University in East Hartford. GUES is the parent organization, and GUMS has the day-to-day responsibility to run the magnet schools.

By law, a similar provision exists for teachers who are either being hired by a newly formed regional school district or are no longer employed by a regional district due to its dissolution.

§§ 9 & 10 — SHEFF MAGNET SCHOOL REQUIREMENTS

Renews until June 30, 2025, the (1) requirement that Sheff magnet schools meet the required enrollment standards and (2) education commissioner's authority to assess a financial penalty on noncompliant schools; makes technical changes

The bill reinstates until June 30, 2025, the requirement that the education commissioner consider whether a *Sheff* magnet school meets the reduced-isolation standards required under *Sheff* to award grants to the school. The requirement had expired at the end of FY 21. A magnet school that does not meet the standards may still receive grants if the commissioner (1) finds that it is appropriate to award a grant for an additional year or years and (2) approves a plan to bring the school into compliance with the standards.

The bill also renews until June 30, 2025, the commissioner's authority to impose a financial penalty on a magnet school that does not meet the reduced-isolation standards for two or more consecutive years. Specifically, the commissioner may impose the penalty on the school's operator or, after consulting with the operator, take other appropriate steps to help the operator comply.

The bill also makes related technical changes.

§ 11 — CONNECTICUT-GROWN FOR CONNECTICUT KIDS WEEK

Requires SDE to provide technical assistance and support for schools to arrange for interactions between students and farmers, including field trips and presentations, as part of Connecticut-Grown for Connecticut Kids Week

The bill modifies SDE's current responsibilities regarding the Connecticut-Grown for Connecticut Kids Week. Among other things, this annual, week-long event promotes Connecticut agriculture and foods to children through school meal and classroom programs and at farms, farmers' markets, and other community locations. Current law requires SDE to arrange for interaction between students and farmers, including field trips to farms and in-school presentations by farmers. The bill instead requires SDE to provide technical assistance and support for schools to do this.

§§ 12-16 — TRANSITION SERVICES AND PROGRAMS FOR STUDENTS RECEIVING SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES

Modifies the statutory definition of "transition service"; transfers responsibility for developing and maintaining an accessible online listing of transition resources and services from SERC to SDE's transition services coordinator; makes minor and conforming changes

Definitions (§§ 12-16)

The bill modifies the statutory definition of "transition service" for purposes of planning and providing these services to special education students who are leaving, or about to leave, the kindergarten-12 education system (§ 12).

Current law defines a transition service as a service for special education students that facilitates their transition from school to postsecondary activities such as education, training, employment, or independent living.

The bill replaces this definition with the federal definition of transition services, which is more detailed and names some specific activities (e.g., supported employment). The federal definition means activities for a child with a disability that are (1) results-oriented and focused on improving the child's academic and functional achievement to facilitate the child's movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation; and (2) based on the individual child's needs, taking into account their strengths, preferences, and interests (34 C.F.R. § 300.43).

Additionally, the bill makes technical and conforming changes to the definition of transition program (§§ 12-16).

Visits of Transition Programs (§ 12)

Under current law, SDE’s transition services coordinator must perform unannounced visits of transition programs. The bill removes the requirement that the visits be unannounced but allows the coordinator or SDE to make unannounced visits in addition to the required visits.

Online Transition Resources and Services Listing (§ 14)

The bill transfers, from the State Education Resource Center (SERC) to SDE’s transition services coordinator, responsibility for developing and maintaining an easily accessible online listing of transition resources, services, and programs.

Under current law, SERC must develop and maintain the listing in collaboration with SDE, the departments of Developmental Services, Social Services, and Aging and Disability Services, and the offices of Policy and Management and Workforce Strategy.

The bill transfers this responsibility to SDE’s transition services coordinator and instead requires the coordinator to collaborate with the following agencies: the departments of Developmental Services, Aging and Disability Services, Children and Families, Labor, Mental Health and Addiction Services, Public Health, Social Services, and Correction, and the Office of Early Childhood. Existing law already requires these agencies to each appoint an employee to act as a liaison with the transition services coordinator.

The bill also makes a corresponding change to require the collaborating agencies listed above to post a link to the online listing in an easily accessible location on their respective agency websites.

§§ 17-22 — CTECS CONFORMING CHANGES

Makes several changes to conform the law to current practice and CTECS’s establishment as an independent state agency

The bill makes several changes to conform the law to the CTECS’s

establishment as an independent state agency. Specifically, it removes obsolete references to (1) SDE in a statute requiring CTECS to indemnify certain donors of tangible property and (2) the effective date of the 2017 legislation that established CTECS (§§ 19 & 22).

It also allows CTECS to allocate funds to allow RESCs to provide professional development services, technical assistance, special education services, and evaluation activities to technical education and career schools. Under the bill, the commissioner may do this regardless of certain state procurement laws. Existing law grants similar authority to SDE (§ 20).

The bill also makes changes to conform the law to current practice for CTECS. It requires, rather than allows, CTECS to offer part-time and evening programs and requires it to offer extracurricular programs in vocational, technical, technological, and postsecondary education and training. The bill also requires that students admitted to a CTECS postsecondary education program without a high school diploma have completed the school year in which they turn 22 (rather than be age 21 or older) (§§ 21 & 22).

Lastly, the bill makes other technical and conforming changes (§§ 17 & 18).

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage, except that the SDE reference and other technical and conforming changes are effective July 1, 2024.

§ 23 — CTECS AND TRANSITION SERVICES

Explicitly requires CTECS to provide and fund transition services; requires CTECS to convene a planning and placement team meeting for home-schooled special education students before they enroll in a CTECS school

Existing law requires CTECS to, among other things, provide an appropriate educational program for each child requiring special education. The bill explicitly requires CTECS to provide and fund transition services (see §§ 12-16 above) as part of this requirement.

The bill also requires CTECS (rather than the local or regional board of education) to convene a planning and placement team meeting for

home-schooled special education students before they enroll in a CTECS school. As under existing law, the meeting must address the student's transition to a CTECS school and ensure that his or her individualized education program (IEP) reflects the current supports and services he or she requires.

§§ 24 & 25 — EARLY START CT

Makes OEC responsible for operating and administering a state-funded early care and education system to coordinate and facilitate efficient delivery of early childhood care ("Early Start CT")

The bill makes the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) responsible for operating and administering a state-funded early care and education system to coordinate and facilitate efficient delivery of early childhood care ("Early Start CT"). Under the system, the bill requires OEC to (1) provide open access for infants and toddlers and pre-school age children to high quality early care and education programs that promote the health and safety of children and prepare them for school, and (2) prevent or minimize the potential for developmental delay in children before age five.

The bill also requires OEC to operate Early Start CT to facilitate the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity of the children, families, and staff in early care and education programs.

Service Coordination

Under the bill, Early Start CT must encourage coordination and cooperation among early care and education programs, prevent the duplication of services, and identify the specific service needs and unique resources available to particular municipalities. The office must also improve the availability and quality of Early Start CT programs and their coordination with child care providers' services.

Impact on Families

The bill requires Early Start CT to provide opportunities for parents to choose among affordable, accredited early care and education programs (e.g., a program accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) or National Association for Family Child Care, or that has received Early Head Start or Head Start

federal approval), and strengthen families through encouragement of family engagement and partnership in a child's development and education.

Under the bill, Early Start CT must also enhance a family's capacity to meet the special needs of its children, including children with disabilities. It also must assure that children with disabilities are integrated into early care and education programs available to children who do not have disabilities.

Funding

The bill requires Early Start CT to maximize local and federal early care and education funding to expand capacity and access, and to reduce educational costs by decreasing the need for special education services for school-age children.

Background — Related Bill

HB 5051 (File 596), §§ 1 & 2, favorably reported by the Education and Appropriations committees has similar provisions.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2025

§ 26 — FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Allows eligible entities to enter into a contract with OEC to receive state financial assistance to operate early childhood care and education programs under Early Start CT; establishes eligibility requirements and allows the OEC commissioner to consider certain criteria when determining eligibility; requires any contract to be made contingent upon available funding and a successful application to an OEC-issued RFP; requires OEC to allocate a certain amount of funding for coordination, program evaluation, and administration; creates per-child and per-classroom rates for assistance by age

Eligibility Requirements

As part of Early Start CT, the bill allows the following eligible entities to enter into a contract with OEC to receive state financial assistance: municipalities, local and regional boards of education, RESCs, family resource centers, Head Start programs, preschool programs, nonprofit organizations, child care centers, group or family child care homes, and any other program that meets the OEC commissioner's standards. The assistance is for operating early care and education programs that focus on providing services based on economic, social, or environmental

conditions, including in regions with insufficient access to child care.

Under the bill, to receive this financial assistance, a (1) child care center or group or family child care home must be licensed by the OEC commissioner, and (2) local or regional board of education or RESC preschool program must be approved by SDE.

Under the bill, at least 60% of eligible children enrolled in an early care and education program receiving financial assistance under Early Start CT must be members of a family that is at or below 75% of the state median income.

The bill requires the commissioner to ensure that the majority of early care and education programs receiving financial assistance serve children that reside in, or attend early care and education programs in, priority school districts, former priority school districts, or towns with schools deemed severe need schools because 40% or more of the lunches served are served to students eligible for free or reduced priced lunches.

The bill allows the OEC commissioner, when determining whether to enter into a contract for financial assistance, to consider (1) a community's Care 4 Kids participation and (2) the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) social vulnerability index as the census tract determines.

Request for Proposals (RFP)

The bill requires any contract for financial assistance to be made contingent upon available funding and a successful application submitted to an OEC that has been informed by the appropriate local governance partner's needs assessment and community plan (see § 27).

The bill exempts from the RFP requirement any Early Start CT facility that has (1) been approved to operate an early care or education program financed through the Connecticut Health and Education Facilities Authority and (2) received a commitment for debt services from the Department of Social Services on or before June 30, 2014, or from OEC on or after July 1, 2014.

Funding for Program Administration and Operation

Under the bill, OEC must allocate an amount up to 10% of the total financial assistance under the contract with each local or regional governance partner the bill establishes, but no more than \$150,000 for coordination, program evaluation, and administration. The bill requires the allocated amount to be increased by an amount equal to local funding provided for early childhood education coordination, program evaluation, and administration, not to exceed \$50,000.

The bill prohibits any Early Start CT care and education program that receives financial assistance from discriminating based on ancestry; race; color; national origin; sex; gender identity or expression; sexual orientation; religion; learning, physical, intellectual, or mental disability; or any other protected class. It also prohibits funds received from being used to supplant federal, state, or local funding received for early childhood education on behalf of children in an early childhood education program.

The bill allows OEC to use up to 3% of funds allocated to the early care and education appropriation to evaluate program effectiveness and impact on participating children, families, and programs, including (1) child outcomes, (2) later school performance, (3) quality standards, (4) professional development and preparation, and (5) parent engagement impact.

Per-Child and Per-Classroom Rate

The bill allows OEC to pay, in an individual contract for FY 26, a per-child rate or an amount per-classroom that the commissioner determines.

Under the bill, OEC must pay, for each eligible child enrolled in an Early Start CT program, a per-child rate of at least:

1. \$10,500 for each child ages three or four, or age five and not eligible to enroll in school; or
2. \$13,500 for each child under age three who is in toddler or infant care and not in a preschool program.

The bill requires the commissioner to determine an equivalent amount per classroom, at equivalent rates per child multiplied by the classroom's total capacity on a case-by-case basis and established in the contract.

The bill requires OEC to (1) develop policies and procedures governing classroom sizes, payments, and required enrollment rates and (2) use data-driven, outcomes-based contract provisions to facilitate and incentivize full enrollment.

Background — Related Bill

HB 5051 (File 596), § 5, favorably reported by the Education and Appropriations committees, has similar provisions.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2025

§ 27 — LOCAL OR REGIONAL GOVERNANCE PARTNERS

Requires local or regional governance partners to represent each community receiving Early Start CT funds and the membership of each local governance partner to reflect the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic composition of the town or region it serves and to consist of early care and education stakeholders; requires each local governance partner to (1) conduct a data-driven needs assessment for the town or region the partner serves and (2) employ a staff liaison

The bill requires local or regional governance partners be established, within available appropriations, to assist in providing early care and education in a community under Early Start CT.

The bill allows (1) a town or school district, and appropriate representatives of groups or entities interested in early care and education in the town or school district to establish a local governance partner, and (2) two or more towns or school districts and appropriate representatives of groups or entities interested in early childhood education in a region to establish a regional governance partner. It requires OEC to monitor each local or regional governance partner for compliance with the bill's provisions.

Membership

The bill requires the membership of each local or regional governance partner to reflect the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic composition of

the town or region it serves. Membership must consist of early care and education stakeholders, including the following:

1. elected and appointed officials;
2. parents;
3. representatives with expertise in early care and education;
4. a Smart Start representative, where applicable;
5. local education and healthcare providers in the community;
6. a local homeless education liaison;
7. community representatives from workforce or job training entities; and
8. other community representatives who provide services to children.

Role and Responsibilities

Under the bill, a local or regional governance partner must do the following:

1. conduct and administer a data-driven needs assessment for its respective community or region (see below),
2. employ strategies to solicit parental engagement and membership,
3. provide periodic technical assistance on best practices in early childhood and family engagement for its town or region,
4. jointly sponsor professional development opportunities with OEC, and
5. ensure that community outreach is regularly conducted and maintained with community stakeholders.

Data-Driven Needs Assessment

The bill requires each local or regional governance partner, within available appropriations, to conduct a data-driven needs assessment for the town or region the partner serves. The needs assessment must include recommendations for the preferred distribution and allocation of child care spaces in the partner's respective town or region and, subject to OEC's approval, may include a data-driven methodology to reassign child care spaces before the contract date lapses.

Under the bill, OEC must create the needs assessment in collaboration with communities. The assessment must directly inform, among other things, child care space assignment across a mixed delivery system, including licensed family child care providers, group child care homes, child care centers, and license-exempt public schools.

Staff Liaison

The bill requires each local or regional governance partner to hire a staff liaison to aid and support the partner in implementing this section's provisions and ensure collaboration with OEC related to planning improvements to the state early care and education governance structure. The staff liaison must also ensure that:

1. partnerships are established and fostered among child care providers,
2. cooperation is maintained with OEC in monitoring and evaluating child care and education programs,
3. existing and potential resources and services available to children are identified,
4. recommendations are made to school officials about transition from child care programs to preschool programs and kindergarten,
5. effective community engagement strategies are used to ensure diverse participation, and
6. biannual child assessments OEC approves are performed at

programs and done in partnership with families.

The staff liaison must also ensure (1) an information exchange with other community organization serving children's and families' needs and (2) facilitation and coordination of efficient, data-driven delivery of services to children and families, including referral procedures and before and after school child care for children attending school day and school year programs.

Background — Related Bill

HB 5051 (File 596), § 8, favorably reported by the Education and Appropriations committees, has identical provisions.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2025

§ 28 — SLIDING FEE SCALE

Requires OEC to establish a sliding fee scale for families that are enrolled in Early Start CT

The bill requires OEC to establish a sliding fee scale for families that are enrolled in an early care and education program under Early Start CT. The fee scale must be based on family income and consistent with the existing Care 4 Kids sliding fee scale.

Background — Related Bill

HB 5051 (File 596), § 3, favorably reported by the Education and Appropriations committees, has similar provisions.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2025

§ 29 — UNEXPENDED FUNDS

Allows up to \$2 million in unexpended Early Start CT funds, beginning FY 25, to be used to (1) provide professional development for early care and education program providers or (2) support early care and education programs in satisfying designated qualified staff requirements

The bill allows, for FY 26 and each fiscal year after, up to \$2 million in unexpended Early Start CT funds to be available for:

1. providing professional development for early care and education program providers, and staff employed in these programs, as

long as these programs receive financial assistance under Early Start CT for infant, toddler, and preschool slots; and

2. supporting early care and education programs in satisfying the designated qualified staff requirements the bill describes, as long as these programs receive financial assistance under Early Start CT.

The bill requires the OEC commissioner to determine how the unexpended funds are distributed.

Under the bill, with the consent of the Office of Policy and Management secretary, any unexpended funds that OEC does not distribute may be used for the following:

1. assisting early care and education programs in meeting and maintaining accreditation requirements;
2. providing training in implementing preschool assessments and curricula;
3. developing and implementing best practices for parents in supporting preschool and kindergarten student learning;
4. developing and implementing strategies for children to successfully transition to preschool and from preschool to kindergarten, including through parental engagement and whole-family supports that may be used through the two-generational initiative or other available resources; and
5. providing professional development.

Background — Related Bill

HB 5051 (File 596), § 6, favorably reported by the Education and Appropriations committees, has similar provisions.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2025

§ 30 — ACCREDITATION REQUIREMENTS

Generally requires any early care and education program receiving financial assistance under Early Start CT to be accredited or approved within three years of entering into an OEC contract

The bill requires any program participating in Early Start CT to be accredited within three years of entering a contract with OEC. Under the bill, any program not accredited must have an approved program plan within 12 months of entering into a contract with OEC.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2025

Background — Related Bill

HB 5051 (File 596), § 7, favorably reported by the Education and Appropriations committees, has similar provisions.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2025

§ 31 — DESIGNATED STAFF MEMBERS AND DESIGNATED QUALIFIED STAFF MEMBERS

Sets a schedule for OEC-funded early care and education programs to require certain qualifications for designated staff members

OEC-Funded Early Childhood Education Program Staffing Requirements

Under the bill, the designated staff members at each OEC-funded early care and education program must be designated qualified staff members meeting one of the criteria at the bachelor’s degree level (see below) by the following timeframes:

1. 25% from July 1, 2024, to June 30, 2027, inclusive;
2. 50% from July 1, 2027, to June 30, 2030, inclusive; and
3. 60% on and after July 1, 2030.

If the OEC funded early care and education program is a family child care home, the designated qualified staff member for the home must have achieved, or be working toward, an early childhood associate or bachelor’s degree.

Under the bill, these requirements apply to programs that accept state funds directly from OEC or indirectly through office subcontractors, for

any combination of infant, toddler, preschool, and before and after school care program, but does not include Care 4 Kids subsidies.

Designated Staff Members and Designated Qualified Staff Members

Under the bill, a “designated staff member” is the person assigned the primary responsibility for a classroom of children in an OEC-funded early care and education program. A “designated qualified staff member” is a designated staff member who possesses at least one of the following:

1. a bachelor’s degree or higher with a concentration in early childhood education from a regionally accredited higher education institution;
2. a teaching certificate issued by the State Board of Education with an endorsement in early childhood education or early childhood special education;
3. at least 12 early childhood credits from a regionally accredited higher education institution the Office of Higher Education (OHE) deems to meet bachelor’s degree requirements without a concentration in early childhood education;
4. a bachelor’s degree from a regionally accredited higher education institution without a concentration in early childhood education, but with at least 12 applicable early childhood credits OHE determines; or
5. permission from OHE if the designated staff member is enrolled in a higher education institution and engaged and making progress in an early childhood planned program of study leading to an early childhood bachelor’s degree.

The bill allows a bachelor’s degree-designated qualified staff member to supervise an associate degree-designated qualified staff member at an off-site location. Under the bill, the associate degree-designated qualified staff member must have at least one of the following:

1. an associate degree or higher with a concentration in early childhood education from a regionally accredited higher education institution;
2. at least 12 early childhood credits from a regionally accredited higher education institution OHE deems to meet associate degree requirements without a concentration in early childhood education;
3. an associate degree from a regionally accredited higher education institution without a concentration in early childhood education, but with at least 12 applicable early childhood credits OHE determines; or
4. permission from OHE if the associate degree-designated staff member is enrolled in a higher education institution and engaged in an early childhood planned program of study leading to an early childhood associate degree.

Under the bill, when a bachelor's degree-designated qualified staff member is not assigned, an associate degree-designated qualified staff member with the qualifications described above may be deemed a designated qualified staff member if the person is under the supervision of an on-site bachelor's degree-designated qualified staff member. The bill excludes from this provision family child care home providers that accept state funds. These providers must meet the designated qualified staff member qualifications.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2025

§ 32 — COMPETITIVE GRANT PROGRAM

Requires the OEC commissioner to establish a state-funded competitive program for federal Head Start grantees to improve and increase access to Early Head Start and Head Start programs

The bill requires the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) commissioner, as part of Early Start CT, to establish a state-funded competitive grant program for nonprofit agencies and local and regional boards of education that are federal Head Start recipients, to help enhance

program quality and increase the:

1. number of children served in programs that are both Head Start and Early Head Start recipients or delegates,
2. number of Early Head Start children served in addition to those who are federally funded, and
3. hours for children currently receiving Early Head Start services.

Additionally, it requires the grant program to assist with establishing extended-day and full-day, year-round, Head Start programs or expanding existing Head Start programs to extended-day or full-day, year-round programs.

Under the bill, nonprofit agencies or boards of education seeking grants must apply to the commissioner on forms and at times the commissioner prescribes.

The bill requires the commissioner to include contract provisions requiring at least 25% of funding to be used to enhance program quality. Contracts must be funded within available appropriations, or from federal funds and private donations, and all Head Start programs funded under the bill must comply with federal Head Start program performance standards.

Background — Related Bill

HB 5051 (File 596), § 9, favorably reported by the Education and Appropriations committees, has similar provisions.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2025

§ 33 — OEC REGULATIONS, POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Requires OEC to implement policies and procedures needed to implement Early Start CT and other requirements under the bill while adopting regulations

The bill requires the OEC commissioner to implement policies and procedures needed to (1) administer the Early Start CT provisions of the bill, (2) implement infant and toddler and school-age ratios and group size requirements, and (3) implement head teacher staffing

requirements for programs that serve only school-age children. The commissioner may implement these policies and procedures while in the process of adopting them as regulations.

Under the bill, any existing regulations on (1) infant and toddler and school-age ratios, (2) group size requirements, and (3) head teacher staffing requirements for programs serving only school-age children, generally applicable to child care centers and group child care homes, remain in effect until they are replaced by OEC's policies and procedures.

The bill requires the OEC commissioner to post notice of her intent to adopt regulations on OEC's website and on the eRegulations system within 20 days after she implements any policies or procedures, which are valid until final regulations are adopted.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

§ 34 — ALLOCATION OF FUNDS TO RESCS

Allows the OEC commissioner to allocate funds to (1) RESCs to provide professional development services, technical assistance and evaluation, and program planning and implementation activities, and (2) other entities, including boards of education

The bill authorizes the OEC commissioner, within available appropriations, to allocate funds to Regional Education Service Centers (RESCs) to provide professional development services, technical assistance and evaluation, and program planning and implementation activities; local and regional boards of education; child care centers; group and family child care homes; and other early childhood care and education entities, as she determines.

Under the bill, any funds the commissioner allocates must be spent according to procedures and conditions she sets.

Background — Related Bill

HB 5051 (File 596), § 10, favorably reported by the Education and Appropriations committees, has similar provisions.

§§ 35 & 36 — CHILD CARE HOMES AND CENTERS FOR DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN

Maintains current per-child grant amounts in FY 24 for certain children and requires OEC to pay in an individual grant a per-child rate, or an equivalent per-classroom rate, that the commissioner determines for FY 25

By law, the state, through the OEC commissioner, may enter into contracts that provide state financial assistance (i.e., grants) to municipalities, human resource development agencies, nonprofit corporations, or group or family child care homes for developing and operating child care homes or centers for disadvantaged children. Existing law requires that these contracts with the state provide for a grant, within available appropriations, for an amount at least equal to the per-child cost set in state law for each child ages three to five not yet eligible to enroll in school.

The bill maintains the above-described grant through the end of FY 24, and requires OEC, for FY 25, to pay in an individual contract or a grant a per-child rate, or an equivalent per-classroom rate, in an amount the commissioner determines.

Under the bill, the per-child cost must be at least:

1. \$10,500 for each child ages three or four, or age five and not eligible to enroll in school; or
2. \$13,500 for each child under age three who is in toddler or infant care and not in a preschool program.

The bill requires the commissioner to determine an equivalent amount per classroom, at equivalent rates per child multiplied by the classroom's total capacity on a case-by-case basis and established in the contract.

The bill requires OEC to (1) develop policies and procedures on classroom sizes, payments, and required enrollment size and (2) use data-driven, outcomes-based contract provisions to facilitate and incentivize full enrollment.

Background — Related Bill

HB 5051 (File 596), §§ 11 & 12, favorably reported by the Education and Appropriations committees, has similar provisions.

§§ 37 & 38 — SCHOOL READINESS PROGRAM PER-CHILD COST LIMITATIONS

Extends the FY 25 cap on the per-child cost of OEC's school readiness program through FY 26; requires OEC's annual Head Start and Early Head Start grant allocations for FYs 25 and 26 to be in an amount determined under the per-child cost OEC is required to pay under § 35 of the bill

The bill extends the FY 25 cap on the per-child cost (i.e., \$10,500) of OEC's school readiness program through FY 26, and requires the cap to be in keeping with the per-child cost OEC is required to pay under § 35 of the bill.

Current law requires OEC to annually allocate \$150,000 plus \$8.50 for each child to each town that has at least 900 children receiving temporary family assistance for Head Start and Early Head Start programs. The bill replaces this allocation for FYs 25 and 26 with an allocation in an amount to be determined in keeping with the per-child cost OEC is required to pay under § 35 of the bill.

Background — Related Bill

HB 5051 (File 596), §§ 13 & 14, favorably reported by the Education and Appropriations committees, has similar provisions.

§ 39 — FAMILY CHILD CARE HOME LICENSE EXPANSION

Allows the OEC commissioner to issue up to 20 licenses to maintain a family child care home anywhere in the state; removes the expiration date for all of the licenses the OEC commissioner issued under the family child care home license expansion

Under current law, the OEC commissioner may issue family child care home licenses from FY 22 to FY 26 in seven specified municipalities to a person or group of people, in a partnership with an association, organization, corporation, institution, or public or private agency, to provide child care services in a commissioner-approved space outside of a family home.

The bill instead allows the commissioner to issue up to 20 licenses anywhere in the state. The bill eliminates the license expiration date of June 30, 2026, and requires the licenses to be issued for four-year terms.

Background — Related Bills

HB 5051 (File 596), § 15, favorably reported by the Education and

Appropriations committees, has similar provisions.

sSB 249, favorably reported by the Commerce Committee and passed by the Senate, prohibits the OEC commissioner from issuing more than 20 licenses under the family child care license expansion and eliminates the license expiration date of June 30, 2026.

§ 40 — SMART START COMPETITIVE GRANT PROGRAM

Removes the cap on annual operating expense grants under the Connecticut Smart Start program

Beginning FY 25, the bill no longer prohibits a town from receiving more than \$300,000 in annual operating expense grants under the Connecticut Smart Start Competitive Grant Program, which provides grants for capital and operating expenses for local and regional boards of education to establish or expand preschool programs.

§ 41 — REPEALER

Repeals various sections related to school readiness programs in light of the bill establishing Early Start CT

The bill makes conforming changes by repealing several early childhood statutes that relate to the following:

1. state grants for planning, constructing, renovating, developing, and operating licensed child care centers, group child care homes, and family child care homes (CGS § 8-210);
2. various school readiness provisions, including (a) OEC's Head Start and Early Head Start competitive grant program, (b) state financial assistance and eligibility for funding school readiness programs, and (c) school readiness program requirements, including per-child cost limitations and sliding fee scale requirements (CGS §§ 10-16n to 10-16r);
3. participation by five-year-old children in school readiness programs (CGS § 10-16t);
4. school readiness program grants in transitional school districts (CGS § 10-16u);

5. the competitive district grant account (CGS § 10-16aa);
6. early childhood teacher credentialing (CGS § 10-520b);
7. school readiness provider grants (CGS § 17b-749a); and
8. licensed child care center sliding fee scales (CGS § 17b-749d).

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

COMMITTEE ACTION

Education Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute Change of Reference - APP

Yea 44 Nay 0 (03/18/2024)

Appropriations Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 52 Nay 0 (04/04/2024)