

# Education Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No.:** SB-5

**Title:** AN ACT CONCERNING SCHOOL RESOURCES.

**Vote Date:** 3/18/2024

**Vote Action:** Joint Favorable Substitute

**PH Date:** 3/11/2024

**File No.:** 201

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## SPONSORS OF BILL:

Education Committee

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Sen. Christine Cohen, 12<sup>th</sup> Dist.

Sen. Herron Gaston, 23<sup>rd</sup> Dist.

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Sen. Ceci Maher, 26<sup>th</sup> Dist.

Sen. Martha Marx, 20<sup>th</sup> Dist.

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Sen. Matthew L. Lesser, 9<sup>th</sup> Dist.

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Sen. Douglas McCrory, 2<sup>nd</sup> Dist.

Sen. Marilyn V. Moore, 22<sup>nd</sup> Dist.

Sen. MD Rahman, 4<sup>th</sup> Dist.

Sen. Gary A. Winfield, 10<sup>th</sup> Dist.

Rep. James Sanchez, 6<sup>th</sup> Dist.

Rep. Kadeem Roberts, 137<sup>th</sup> Dist.

Rep. Susan M. Johnson, 49<sup>th</sup> Dist.

## REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill contains several provisions that would support the state's public schools. Starting in FY25, it requires the state to fully reimburse school districts for special education excess costs that are more than four and a half times the net current expenditures per pupil of each board of education. It also eliminates the current tiered reimbursement structure and a previous bill's language that grants must be paid "within available appropriations."

This bill also requires SDE to select and utilize an existing artificial intelligence (AI) tool for classroom instruction and student learning, which must comply with FERPA and other laws to protect student data and privacy. It also requires SDE to consult with the Connecticut Commission for Education Technology to develop a professional learning program for

educators and students on how to safely utilize AI as part of classroom instruction. Additionally, this bill requires Superintendents to annually provide updated copies of blueprints and floor plans of each school to all law enforcement, fire, public health, emergency management and emergency medical services personnel to facilitate emergency response procedure.

This bill also contains provisions that expands the Care 4 Kids program to include parents or guardians of children who are enrolled in Medicaid, requires SDE and RESCS to implement a pilot program that explores the impact of social media, and requires each local or regional board of education to submit maintenance records of its HVAC systems to the DAS any time such records have been updated.

### **SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:**

The substitute language of this bill specifies that SDE must select and utilize an existing AI tool for classroom use, rather than developing such a tool. It also requires SDE to consult with the Connecticut Commission for Education Technology to develop a professional learning program on proper utilization of AI in school. Additionally, the substitute language of this bill strikes the language of the Raised bill that requires superintendents annually provide copies of blueprints and floorplans of all schools to law enforcement and emergency services agencies, and replaces such language with content from SB 229, which creates a new school mapping data grant for local school districts to be administered by DESPP. Finally, the substitute language removes references to Baby Bonds and instead expands the Care 4 Kids program to include parents or guardians of children who are enrolled in Medicaid and adds them to the priority intake and eligibility list.

### **RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:**

[Office of Early Childhood \(OEC\), Commissioner, Beth Bye:](#) expresses appreciation for the intent of Sect. 7 of this bill; however, due to concerns that expanding eligible participants for the Care 4 Kids program to include children enrolled in the Baby Bond Trust Fund would add significantly more children into the application and enrollment system, expanding the number of families waiting to enroll their children into the program, and potentially denying care to parents who are working and need child care to remain in their job, they state that they cannot support this section of the bill\*.

*\*The substitute language of this bill amends the referenced provisions.*

[Department of Administrative Services \(DAS\), Commissioner, Michelle Gilman:](#) expresses concern with Sect. 8 of this bill, stating that requiring each local or regional board of education to submit records for the maintenance of its HVAC systems to the DAS any time its records have been updated would require additional software applications at a significant cost along with staff and other resources to implement. They also state that due to the maintenance of public-school HVAC systems being a municipal function, the DAS does not currently have the expertise to interpret the record data\*.

*\*The substitute language of this bill has removed the referenced provisions.*

[Department of Administrative Services \(DAS\), Chief Information Officer, Mark Raymond:](#) expresses a combination of concerns and recommendations for this bill. Firstly, they state that relevant policies emanating from the Education committee should address the

potential benefits and risks of artificial intelligence (AI) as it relates to data privacy; the digital skills required by students, teachers, and education leaders; and that access to technology is available for all learners. Secondly, they state that addressing AI in schools should require the engagement of a diversity of stakeholders, especially teachers. Thirdly, they recommend providing ongoing support to teachers for professional development that develops the skills needed to navigate emerging educational technologies, specifically highlighting groups like the International Society for Technology in Education and the Regional Education Service Centers as effective training resources. They state that the language in Sect. 3, which calls for the development of a "training program" on AI for teachers and educators, would require an estimated \$500,000 in unbudgeted funding to complete this work, and therefore do not support this section. Finally, they suggest rather than developing a new tool, the state should appoint a collective group of stakeholders to review and endorse multiple AI-enabled tools for use in the classroom\*.

*\*The substitute language of this bill amends the referenced provisions.*

**State Department of Education (SDE), Commissioner, Charlene Russell-Tucker:**

expresses a combination of concerns and recommendations for this bill. Firstly, they suggest the Legislature consider advancing the submission dates of the uncapped appropriations for the excess cost grant to allow SDE to provide the Legislature with a firm estimate of any additional appropriation needed in the current year. They also suggest clarifying the effective date in Sect. 1. Secondly, they state the SDE cannot develop an artificial intelligence (AI) tool that meets all educational needs; however, they can offer professional learning opportunities for educators that help them to evaluate AI tools. Thirdly, they request modifications to Sect. 3, asking to replace "training" with "professional learning." They also request to develop the training program in consultation with the Connecticut Commission for Educational Technology. Lastly, in Sect. 6, they request a date modification for the implementation of a pilot program to be extended to January 1, 2024, to provide the time needed to select districts, design, and develop the pilot, determine how the pilot will be evaluated and to potentially develop an agreement with the regional educational service centers (RESCs)\*.

*\*The substitute language of this bill amends the referenced provisions.*

**NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

**Senate Democrats Caucus, Senate President Pro Tempore, Martine Looney:** expresses support for this bill and provides comments on the merits of several sections. Firstly, they state the provisions that make the Excess Cost grant an entitlement will allow districts to anticipate their special education costs needs are met, which will eliminate uncertainty the current system creates. Secondly, they state support for the provisions that charge SDE to develop AI tools for classroom instruction and student learning, develop a training on proper and safe use of AI in classrooms, and develop a pilot program curriculum for students about how social media impacts student relationships and school climate. Third, the state for the provisions focused on student safety in schools, including those that require superintendents annually update their schools' blueprints to be provided to local law enforcement, fire, public health, and emergency services personnel; and those that require schools to update DAS on their maintenance of their HVAC systems. Finally, they state support for the provisions that make children who are eligible for Baby Bonds automatically eligible for Care 4 Kids services\*.

*\*The substitute language of this bill amends the referenced provisions.*

**Hebron Public Schools, Superintendent, Thomas Baird:** expresses support for this bill, highlighting the provisions that fully fund the Department of Education's Excess Cost grant. They state this would provide \$69,470 in funding to Hebron Public Schools, which would support their students with disabilities.

**Ledyard High School, Student, Mason Banks:** expresses support for this bill, citing one study that suggests 75% of U.S. high schoolers have negative feelings about school, which, they state, may be correlated to underfunding. They state this bill could be beneficial to their high school and Connecticut's education system at-large.

**New Haven Federation of Teachers Local 933, President, Leslie Blatteau:** expresses support for this bill stating that the educator must have a central voice and play an integral role in the decision-making process at the legislative and CSDE levels. They highlight Sects. 2 and 3, and request that classroom teachers from AFT-CT are included in any decision-making about the design and implementation of AI tools and training\*.

*\*The substitute language of this bill amends the referenced provisions.*

**Jewish Federation Association of CT (JFACT), Executive Director, Michael Bloom:** expresses support for this bill, highlighting with particular approval the provisions that mandate the superintendents of each respective school district annually provide updated copies of the blueprints and floor plans for each school to all law enforcement, fire, public health, emergency management, and emergency medical services personnel\*. Moreover, they request that these provisions include non-public schools, including Jewish day schools.

*\*The substitute language of this bill amends the referenced provisions.*

**Kooth Digital Health, VP Sales, Stefanie Bolotin:** expresses support for this bill, highlighting Sect. 6, stating that their app, called Soluna, would be a perfect fit for the pilot program outlined in this section. They state that Soluna equips students with tools that will help them navigate the digital world and learn how to prioritize and navigate real world relationships. They report that Soluna has already made a significant impact, being available to more than twenty million individuals across Pennsylvania, Kentucky, California, and the United Kingdom.

**Newington Public Schools, Superintendent, Dr. Maureen Brummett:** expresses support for this bill and makes comments and recommendations on several sections. Firstly, they state support for the bill's elimination of the tier distribution and recommend fully funding the excess cost grant for all towns. Secondly, they state that while SDE is responsible for creating an artificial intelligence (AI) tool that can be used in classrooms, it is probable that costs would be incurred for local implementation. Thirdly, they suggest it may be more productive to update floor plans to law enforcement, fire, emergency management, and health agencies on a five-year schedule or when new schools or new classrooms are added, as opposed to annually\*. Lastly, they state that the requirement to maintain and update HVAC school records to be sent to DAS will create additional unfunded local costs.

*\*The substitute language of this bill removes the referenced provisions.*

**CT Education Association, Legislative Coordinator, Louis Burch:** expresses support for this bill and makes comments and recommendations on several sections. They express concerns with Sect. 2, stating that SDE does not possess the fiscal capacity, time, or expertise necessary to develop an AI tool for use in the classroom. Instead, they suggest that

this bill charge the CT Commission on Educational Technology (CET) to develop policy, guidance, and training opportunities for the use of AI in schools, as well as review certain AI tools designed for classroom use\*. In Sect. 6, they request the committee to seek input from CEA regarding key components of a pilot social media curriculum. Finally, they express full support for Sect. 8, stating the data provided will assure the right school buildings are being prioritized and funding decisions are being made in a manner that supports districts that have the greatest needs.

*\*The substitute language of this bill amends the referenced provisions.*

**Bethel Public Schools, Superintendent, Dr. Christine Carver:** expresses support for this bill, highlighting the removal of the cap from the Excess Cost Grant as particularly beneficial to school districts and students with disabilities. Additionally, they note that the provisions which require Superintendents to submit updated blueprints and floor plan to law enforcement is already a requirement in their submissions of All Hazards Safety and Security Plans\*.

*\*The substitute language of this bill removes the referenced provisions.*

**CT Alliance of YMCAs, VP Government Relations, John Cattelan:** expresses general support for this bill; however, they state concern with the provisions in Sect. 7 that incorporate children eligible for Baby Bonds into Care 4 Kids\*. They state this would introduce an additional 16,000 infants and toddlers to the program which would severely strain the current waitlist.

*\*The substitute language of this bill amends the referenced provisions.*

**Derby Public Schools, Superintendent, Dr. Matthew Conway, Jr.:** expresses support for the provisions of this bill that fully funds the Excess Cost Grant. However, they state concern that there is still a \$74 million shortfall for this fiscal year.

**The Sherman School, Superintendent, Dr. Patricia Cosentino:** expresses full support for the language of this bill as written.

**CT Roundtable on Climate & Jobs (CRCJ), Executive Director, Aziz Dehkan:** expresses support for Sect. 8 of this bill, stating the requirement for boards of education to submit their HVAC maintenance records to DAS will support the effort to protect the health and wellbeing of each school's occupants.

**Special Education Equity for Kids of CT (SEEK), President, John Flanders:** expresses support for this bill and provides comments and recommendations on several sections. In substitute of the provisions in Sect. 1, they recommend allocating \$250 million to improve special education in schools, training teachers in structured literacy, building therapeutic settings to end exclusionary discipline, paying teachers and paraeducators increased wages, and to add a 25% weight based on the number of special education students in district to the ECS formula. For Sects. 2 and 3, they recommend SDE work in collaboration with experts in the field of AI tools as they develop the tool\*. For Sect. 6, they suggest that students with disabilities and their parents be involved, and work in collaboration with, SDE as they develop the social media pilot program.

*\*The substitute language of this bill amends the referenced provisions.*

**CT Council of Small Towns, Executive Director, Betsy Gara:** expresses support for the provisions that fully fund the Excess Cost grant, stating they will provide greater predictability and certainty in budgeting for the delivery of special education services. However, they express concerns that the state has not provided any additional funding to Alliance Districts since 2012 to reflect increases in operating costs due to inflation and other factors. They suggest the report from SDE that examines the effectiveness of the Alliance District Program be submitted as soon as possible to ensure that additional funding is made available to these school districts.

**School and State Finance Project, Executive Director, Lisa Hammersley:** expresses general support for this bill, however, they state concerns that provisions in Sect. 1 do not adequately address the underlying issue, in that due to special education being funded through a high-cost services model, the state has no other means of funding special education at the state level, which results in nearly 92,000 students with disabilities not receiving state funding specifically to support their special education needs and services. Instead, they recommend adding a special education weight to the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) formula.

**CT AFL-CIO, President, Ed Hawthorne:** expresses support for this bill, highlighting the importance of Sect. 8, stating good indoor air quality is vital to a healthy learning environment and that these provisions are essential to reducing the risk of respiratory illness and reducing the environmental footprint of educational institutions.

**ConnCAN, Executive Director, Steven Hernandez:** expresses support for the provisions that fully fund the Excess Cost grant, stating this will allow district leaders, families and students to plan more effectively and build sustainable systems of support. They also provide several recommendations regarding the provisions on AI in schools. First, they recommend SDE to produce actionable, flexible guidelines on AI that align with the federal, "Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Teaching and Learning: Insights and Recommendations." Second, they recommend SDE provide guidance for school districts to make decisions on AI in the classroom that works for their schools through technical support, resources, and consistent communication. Third, they recommend the implementation of pilot programs with reference to Georgia's pilot program. Finally, they recommend keeping educators, parents, and students centered in every decision, and to keep student privacy at the forefront of conversations around AI.

**Greenwich Public Schools, Superintendent, Toni Jones:** expresses full support for the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS) testimony concerning school resources and reiterates their support for fully funding the Excess Cost grant.

**CT Voices for Children, Research & Policy Fellow, Carla Abdo-Katsipis:** expresses support for Sect. 1 of this bill, stating it addresses the needs of local and regional boards more accurately and more equitably. They also state support for Sect. 3, stating these provisions are pivotal to making the integration of AI into our education system a success. Moreover, they state support for the spirit of Sect. 7, however, they express concern with barriers of high costs and existing ECE infrastructure\*.

*\*The substitute language of this bill amends the referenced provisions.*

**Early Childhood Collaborative of Southington (ECCS), Executive Director, Joanne**

**Kelleher:** expresses support for this bill, highlighting Sect. 7 as a particularly important means of allowing more families to utilize private providers to receive assistance with their childcare expenses. However, they express concern that the expansion of eligibility for Care 4 Kids demands an additional \$145 million for Care 4 Kids in FY25\*.

*\*The substitute language of this bill amends the referenced provisions.*

**Stamford Public Schools, Superintendent, Dr. Tamu Lucero:** expresses support for the provisions of this bill that fully fund the Excess Cost grant. They state that the increased funding will provide Stamford \$2.6 million in state funding, which would cover 10.5% of the district's projected FY25 special education out-of-district tuition costs, and allow them to maintain critical programs, staff, and services for all of their special education students.

**Vernon Public Schools, Superintendent, Joseph Macary:** expresses support for this bill stating that the current projection of state funding to Vernon is \$1,199,364, creating a \$446,749 shortfall in their budget. With the passage of this bill to fully fund the Excess Cost grant, however, they state this issue would be rectified.

**Southington Public Schools, Superintendent, Steven Madancy:** expresses support for this bill stating for the current academic year, Southington had an approximately \$700,000 shortfall, forcing the district to make difficult cuts or sacrifices in other areas. They state passage of this bill and fully funding the Excess Cost grant will alleviate this issue.

**New Milford Public Schools, Superintendent, Janet Parlato:** expresses support for this bill stating the variability in funding that districts currently receive from year to year make accurate budgeting impossible and create a crucial burden on taxpayers.

**Essex Board of Education, Board Chair, Lon Seidman:** expresses general support for this bill and makes comments and recommendations on several sections. Firstly, they state concern that SDE would not be able to comply with developing a training program for educators and students on safe AI use in the classroom by January 1, 2025\*. They also express concern with the timing outlined in the provisions regarding SDE's implementation of a pilot program on social media use.

*\*The substitute language of this bill amends the referenced provisions.*

**CT Conference of Municipalities (CCM), Legislative Committee Chair, Lindsay Seti:** expresses general support for this bill but recommends lowering the rate to 2 times the cost of the average expenditure per student rather than 4.5 times.

**State Advisory Council for Special Education (SAC), Legislative Committee Chair, Jeffry Spahr:** expresses strong support for the provisions in this bill that fully fund the Excess Cost grant.

**Critical Response Group, Regional Director, Austin Sprague:** expresses support for this bill, however, they suggest changes to the provisions that concern the requirement for superintendents to annually provide updated copies of blueprints and floor plans for each school to all law enforcement, fire, public health, emergency management and emergency medical services personnel\*. They state school blueprints and floor plans are inaccurate and

not designed for emergency response; thus, they suggest adopting similar language to SB 229 to modernize mapping standards in schools across the state.

*\*The substitute language of this bill removes the referenced provisions.*

**All Our Kin, Policy Specialist, Jade Thomas:** expresses support for this bill; however, they state concern for several sections. They state that expanding access to the Care 4 Kids program will grow and further frustrate the current waitlist\*. Additionally, they express the need for additional investments to provide increased wages to early childcare providers, who are currently being disincentivized from remaining in the field due to low wages.

*\*The substitute language of this bill amends the referenced provisions.*

**Commission for Educational Technology (CET), Teacher, Chinma Uche:** expresses support for this spirit of this bill; however, they state concern and recommendations for several provisions. First, they request additional funding for courses in digital literacy and Computer Science education. Second, they state that AI in the classroom has the potential to widen the achievement gap between social classes and therefore support the provisions that require SDE to design an AI tool to be used in classrooms, allowing each child to have access to the same resources\*. Third, they state that educators and teachers need continued training on the use of AI tools. Finally, they request for clarity on the meaning of AI tools as stated in line 153ff.

*\*The substitute language of this bill amends the referenced provisions.*

***The following Center Director and Childcare Providers from CT Early Childhood Alliance submitted testimony in support of this bill.*** They state that expanding access to Care 4 Kids would be economically beneficial to the state and helpful for families struggling to pay the full cost of childcare.

**CT Early Childhood Alliance, Childcare Provider, Brenda Castro**  
**CT Early Childhood Alliance, Childcare Provider, Kathy Guzman**  
**CT Early Childhood Alliance, Childcare Provider, Britnee Henderson**  
**CT Early Childhood Alliance, Childcare Provider, Debra Horton**  
**CT Early Childhood Alliance, Center Director, Marianne Legassey**  
**CT Early Childhood Alliance, Childcare Provider, Jeannine Lewis**  
**CT Early Childhood Alliance, Childcare Provider, Elizabeth Mauro**  
**CT Early Childhood Alliance, Childcare Provider, Barbara Mazzei**  
**CT Early Childhood Alliance, Childcare Provider, Mary Oster**  
**CT Early Childhood Alliance, Childcare Provider, Charise Floyd-Pickering**  
**CT Early Childhood Alliance, Childcare Provider, Jessica Quinones**  
**CT Early Childhood Alliance, Childcare Provider, Erica Sapp**  
**CT Early Childhood Alliance, Childcare Provider, Virginia Sharene**  
**CT Early Childhood Alliance, Childcare Provider, Kathleen Skelly**  
**CT Early Childhood Alliance, Childcare Provider, Francheska Velazquez**  
**CT Early Childhood Alliance, Childcare Provider, Tshana Williams**  
**CT Early Childhood Alliance, Childcare Provider, Robin Willoughby**  
**CT Early Childhood Alliance, Childcare Provider, Maureen Wilson**  
**CT Early Childhood Alliance, Anonymous**

**NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**



[YWCA New Britain, Executive Director, Tracey Hennessey](#): expresses opposition to this bill stating the provisions that increase the eligibility of Care 4 Kids without additional funding would severely strain the waitlist and put more families at risk of not receiving the childcare they need\*.

*\*The substitute language of this bill amends the referenced provisions.*

[Homeschooling 4 America, Jan Kerin](#): expresses opposition to this bill and suggests the state promote more homeschooling to reduce the burden on the taxpayer and allow parents to have more control over the school curriculum.

[ConnCASE, President, Aimee Turner](#): expresses opposition to Sect. 1(d) of this bill, but state support for full funding of the Excess Cost grant and reducing the threshold from 4.5 times the Per Pupil Expenditure (PPE) to 3.5 times.

***Six individuals submitted anonymous testimony in opposition to this bill.***

**Reported by: James Magson**

**Date: 4/1/24**