
OLR Bill Analysis

sSB 1

AN ACT INCREASING RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS, SCHOOLS AND SPECIAL EDUCATION.

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SUMMARY

This bill makes numerous changes to the education statutes as

described in the section-by-section analysis below.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Various, see below.

§§ 1-11 — UNIVERSAL PRESCHOOL TRUST

Establishes the Universal Preschool Trust, funds it with transfers of unappropriated surplus, and requires the state treasurer to administer and invest the trust's funds; creates the Universal Preschool Trust Board; allows funds in the trust to be used for expenses for early care and education programs, the eligible categories of which expand in phases based on the trust's rate of return

The bill establishes the Universal Preschool Trust, funds it with transfers of unappropriated surplus, and requires the state treasurer to administer and invest the money in it. It also creates the Universal Preschool Trust Board and charges it with administering the fund.

Under the bill, the trust may be used to reimburse boards of education and child care providers for early care and education program eligible expenses. It expands the categories of expenses that may be reimbursed from the trust in phases, generally based on the fund's rate of return.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage, except the changes to the tri-share program (§ 11) and a conforming change (§ 10) are effective July 1, 2025.

Transfers to the Fund (§ 3)

Each fiscal year, after the General Fund accounts have been closed and the comptroller has determined the amount of any unappropriated surplus, the bill requires the treasurer to transfer to the Universal Preschool Trust the unappropriated surplus as follows:

1. For FY 25, up to \$300 million and
2. For FY 26 and beyond, the entire amount of the surplus, except that if the Budget Reserve Fund is below its maximum threshold (i.e. 18% of net General Fund appropriations for the current fiscal year), the transfer amount must be reduced and an amount equal to the reduction must be transferred to the budget reserve fund.

The bill requires the amounts the bill transfers to the trust to be deducted when determining the amount of unappropriated surplus to

be transferred to the Budget Reserve Fund as required by law. The state constitution requires any unappropriated surplus to be used (1) to fund a budget reserve fund; (2) to reduce bonded indebtedness; or (3) for any other purpose authorized by at least three-fifths of the members of each chamber (Conn. Const., art. III, § 18 (c)).

Fund Expenditures and Reimbursements (§§ 4, 5 & 11)

Starting with FY 26, the bill requires the treasurer to authorize spending from the trust in phases.

Under the bill, early care and education programs offered by eligible boards of education and licensed child care providers (i.e. “designated beneficiaries”) may apply for reimbursement from the trust for eligible expenses. An “eligible board of education” is a local or regional board of education that (1) is eligible for a Connecticut Smart Start competitive grant; (2) offers full-day preschool; and (3) does not charge tuition for the program, unless the tuition is required as part of a state or federal grant or subsidy program.

The bill phases in categories of eligible expenses, as shown in the table below. Generally, the trust must achieve a certain rate of return before moving to the next phase. The main expense the trust covers is the “unpaid portion” of tuition for eligible early care and education programs, the scope of which broadens as the various phases are implemented. The “unpaid portion” equals the tuition charged for a child’s enrollment in the program minus (1) state and federal child care subsidies the program received for the child and (2) an amount that does not exceed 7% of the annual household income for the child’s family.

Table: Eligible Expenses for Reimbursement From the Universal Preschool Trust, Phases I to IV

<i>Phase</i>	<i>Begins When</i>	<i>Eligible Expenses</i>
Phase I	FY 27, and operates when the trust’s rate of return meets or exceeds the amount necessary to fund all covered children as of July 1, 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The unpaid portion of a child’s tuition for a preschool program offered by a designated beneficiary through the tri-share program (see below) • The costs charged to a family for a preschool program operated by an eligible board of education (presumably, this would

Phase	Begins When	Eligible Expenses
		cover tuition required under state or federal law)
Phase II	When the two-year annual rate of return meets or exceeds the amount necessary to fund Phase I plus Phase II expenses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phase I expenses • Costs associated with expanding slots offered by existing designated beneficiaries (e.g., transportation costs, capital costs, and accreditation costs)
Phase III	At least one year after Phase II begins <u>and</u> when the two-year annual rate of return meets or exceeds the amount necessary to fund Phase I and the first year of phase II	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phase I & II expenses • The unpaid portion of a child's tuition for a preschool program operated by a designated beneficiary who is a private child care services provider
Phase IV	At least one year after Phase III begins <u>and</u> when the two-year annual rate of return meets or exceeds the amount necessary to fund Phases I, II, and III	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phase I, II, & III expenses • The unpaid portion of a child's tuition for an infant and toddler program operated by a designated beneficiary

Tri-Share Program. Under current law, the Office of Early Childhood (OEC) must administer a tri-share pilot program in New London county, under which child care costs are shared equally between employees, employers, and the state. The bill makes this program statewide and permanent. It also requires that costs for child care be split as follows:

1. a participating employer must pay at least one-third of an employee's full-day child care costs for a program offered by a designated beneficiary,
2. an employee must be responsible for child care costs in an amount that does not exceed 7% of the employee's annual household income, and
3. the remaining balance (i.e. the "unpaid portion") must be paid from the Universal Preschool Trust.

The bill also eliminates a provision in current law that made employees ineligible for the pilot program if they were receiving other public assistance for child care.

Reimbursement. Under the bill, designated beneficiaries seeking reimbursement from the trust must submit a claim by the 15th of each month to the child care resource and referral agency designated by the OEC commissioner. The child care resource and referral agency must give the treasurer the claims. After review and approval, the treasurer must disburse an amount equal to the total sum of claims to the child care resource and referral agency, who must distribute the funds to designated beneficiaries in the amount the treasurer approved for the claim.

Universal Preschool Trust Board (§ 6)

The bill establishes the Universal Preschool Trust Board, places it within the treasurer’s office for administrative purposes only, and makes it responsible for administering the trust. It consists of (1) the OEC commissioner, the treasurer, and the Office of Policy and Management (OPM) secretary, or their designees and (2) seven appointed members meeting certain qualifications, as shown in the table below.

Table: Appointed Board Members

Appointing Authority	Qualification
House Speaker	Early childhood workforce employee
Senate President Pro Tempore	Representative from the Service Employees’ International Union, Local 2001
House Majority Leader	Parent or guardian of a child enrolled in an eligible board of education-provided preschool program
Senate Majority Leader	Member of the Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance
House Minority Leader	Eligible board of education member
Senate Minority Leader	Member of OEC’s parent cabinet
Governor	Representative of a corporation with a significant physical presence in the state whose employees may benefit from early childhood education and state child care initiatives

Appointments and Meetings. The bill requires the various appointing authorities to make appointments to ensure representation for all geographic regions in the state, to the extent practicable, and to make initial appointments by September 1, 2025. Members serve at the pleasure of the appointing authority, but no longer than the appointing

authority's term of office or until the member's successor is appointed and qualified, whichever is longer. Vacancies must be filled by the appointing authority, and any vacancy that occurs other than by a term expiring must be filled for the balance of the unexpired term.

Under the bill, the treasurer (or his designee) serves as the board's chairperson and must schedule and hold the first meeting by October 1, 2025. The board must meet at least quarterly and upon the treasurer's request. At the first meeting, and semiannually after that, the treasurer (or his designee) must give the board an actuarial chart that includes a review of the total amount of funds in the trust, the health of the trust's investments, the trust's anticipated growth, and any recommended models for the timing and rate of drawing down from the trust.

Annual Report. Starting by January 1, 2026, the board must annually report to the Education, Children, and Appropriations committees on the trust's actuarial future, its current phase and the anticipated date of advancing to the next phase (if any), and an assessment of the trust's success and efficacy.

Trust Requirements (§§ 2 & 7-10)

Under the bill, the trust is an instrumentality of the state performing essential governmental functions. It receives and holds all deposits, contributions, gifts, bequests, endowments, government grants, and other sources of funds, and the earnings on those funds, until disbursed as the bill requires.

The bill requires that deposits be made in cash and specifies that funds in the trust are not the property of the state and cannot be combined with state funds. The bill also specifies that the trust is not a state department, institution, or agency, and the state has no claim on funds in the trust. The trust must continue to exist as long as it has deposits or obligations and until terminated by law. Unclaimed assets escheat to the state upon the trust's termination, and the bill exempts the trust's property from the law for determining when property held by a fiduciary is considered abandoned.

Under the bill, any contract entered into by the trust, or any obligation of the trust, is not a state debt or obligation, and the state has no obligation on account of the trust. Amounts that must be paid from the trust are limited to the amount deposited in the trust available for the payments. The trust's deposits may be disbursed only in accordance with the bill.

Treasurer's Authority and Powers. Under the bill, the state treasurer must receive, maintain, administer, invest, and disburse the trust's money. On behalf of the trust and to carry out its purposes, he may:

1. receive and invest the trust's money as described below;
2. enter into contractual agreements for services for the trust (e.g., legal, actuarial, administrative, and consulting) and pay for them with the trusts' assets;
3. get insurance in connection with the trust's property, assets, activities, or deposits;
4. apply for, accept, and spend public or private gifts, grants, or donations;
5. adopt regulations;
6. sue and be sued;
7. establish funds within the trust; and
8. take other necessary action to carry out the bill's purposes and incidental to the treasurer's duties under the bill.

Memorandums of Understanding. The bill requires the treasurer, on the trust's behalf and for its purposes, to enter into memorandums of understanding (MOUs) with the OEC commissioner and the child care resource and referral agency to establish information sharing practices for the purpose of implementing the bill's provision on trust expenditures. These MOUs must comply with all applicable state and

federal laws.

Investment. The bill requires the state treasurer to (1) invest the trust's funds in a reasonable way to achieve its objectives; (2) exercise a prudent person's care and discretion; and (3) consider things like rate of return, risk, maturity, portfolio diversification, liquidity, projected disbursements and expenditures, and expected deposits and other gifts.

Under the bill, these requirements apply regardless of existing state laws on the treasurer's investment authority, including the (1) requirement that the treasurer's trust fund investments be reviewed by the Investment Advisory Council and (2) statutory constraints that limit the percentage of state funds invested in common stock and investments in companies doing business in specified countries.

The treasurer need not require that the trust invest in government bonds or other funds he administers. The bill requires that the trust's assets be continuously invested and reinvested, consistent with the trust's objectives, until they are disbursed for eligible expenditures or spent on the trust's operational expenses.

It also explicitly subjects the treasurer's trust investments to the same oversight and requirements that the law establishes for other treasurer-administered funds, such as the Teachers' Pension Fund, the State Employees Retirement Fund, and the Connecticut Municipal Employees' Retirement Fund.

Tax Exemption. The bill provides that the trust's property and earnings are exempt from all state and local taxes.

§ 12 — ONLINE ENROLLMENT PORTAL

Requires OEC to develop a centralized portal to allow families to find early care and education programs, determine eligibility, and apply for available government financial assistance

The bill requires OEC to develop a centralized online enrollment portal that allows families to find early care and education programs, determine eligibility, and apply for available government financial assistance. Specifically, the portal must allow designated beneficiaries

to apply for payments from the Universal Preschool Trust and families to apply for subsidies or financial assistance under:

1. a Head Start or Early Head Start program,
2. Care 4 Kids,
3. early care and education programs receiving financial assistance under Early Start CT,
4. preschool programs under the Connecticut Smart Start grant programs,
5. temporary family assistance program,
6. foster care placements or certified relative foster care placements through the Department of Children and Families (DCF), or
7. any other state or federal child care assistance program.

The portal must also (1) help families identify early care and education programs in their area, (2) determine a family's eligibility for a subsidy and allow families to apply for a subsidy they are eligible for, and (3) estimate the amount of tuition a family would pay after deducting subsidies and the amount covered by the Universal Preschool Trust.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2025

§ 13 — UPDATES TO SBE'S FIVE-YEAR PLAN PROCESS

Requires the education commissioner to make semiannual presentations on the progress of SBE's five-year plan, SBE to use these presentations to inform the plan's implementation, and these progress reports to be published online

By law, the State Board of Education (SBE) must prepare a five-year plan (every five years) with long-term goals and short-term objectives related to elementary, secondary, vocational, career, and adult education and specific steps to achieve them. Additionally, SBE is required to annually report the progress made implementing the plan to the governor and Education Committee.

The bill requires the education commissioner to make semiannual presentations at regularly scheduled SBE meetings to give updates on the priorities, actions, and outcomes outlined in the five-year plan. Additionally, under the bill, SBE must use the information provided in the presentations in the plan's implementation and their annual progress report and make these progress reports available on the State Department of Education's (SDE's) website.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2025

§ 14 — SUPERINTENDENTS' ANNUAL INFORMATION REPORT TO THEIR BOARD OF EDUCATION (BOE)

Requires all superintendents to submit information regarding the district's contracts, students, staff, and savings annually to their BOE

Annually, between June 1 and September 29, the bill requires each school district's superintendent to provide the following information at a regularly scheduled board of education (BOE) meeting:

1. the number and names of all community-based organizations in which the district is in a formal MOU, memorandum of agreement, or contract that pertains to providing student support services (by school and type of support service);
2. the number of students in credit and non-credit internships and workforce development programs (by type and duration);
3. classroom sizes and student-teacher ratios during the previous school year (by school and subject);
4. certified and noncertified staff turnover, other than same-district transfers (by school and subject); and
5. any savings earned through vacancies in approved budgeted positions for the academic year.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2025

§ 15 — POSTING DISCONNECTED YOUTH REPORT ONLINE

Requires any state agency that contributes data to the disconnected youth report to post the report on their website

The bill requires any state agency that contributes data for the Connecticut Preschool through Twenty and Workforce Information Network's (P20 WIN) disconnected youth report to post the report on their website.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

Background — Disconnected Youth Report

By law, the P20 WIN executive board is required to annually report on disconnected youth using the data model established through the data-sharing agreement 0043 regarding Research on Disengaged and Disconnected Youth in Connecticut (i.e. a 2023 agreement between various state agencies (including SDE, DCF, the Department of Labor, and Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services), a nonprofit, and a private consulting firm to share certain data from P20 WIN).

A “disconnected youth” is an individual age 14-26 who is (1) an at-risk student (in danger of not graduating due to certain factors) or (2) not enrolled in high school and (a) does not have a high school diploma or its equivalent; (b) has a diploma or equivalent but is unemployed and not enrolled in an adult education program, higher education institution, or a workforce training or certification program, including an apprenticeship program, or otherwise pursuing postsecondary education; or (c) is incarcerated.

§ 16 — ESTABLISHMENT OF REGIONAL EDUCATION ACCOUNTABILITY REVIEW BOARDS

Establishes regional education accountability review boards for the purpose of supporting priority school districts

The bill establishes a regional education accountability review board for each planning region within the state (see BACKGROUND). Each board must (1) provide technical, financial, and other assistance, and related accountability, to their priority school districts (see BACKGROUND); (2) develop budgeting and expenditure guidelines for their priority school districts; and (3) analyze these districts' educational spending. The boards are within SDE for administrative purposes only.

Each regional education accountability review board must be chaired by the education commissioner and state treasurer or their designees. Each board must also include the following members:

1. a professional in children’s health and wellbeing, the chief elected official of a community within the board’s planning region, and a third individual (appointed by the Governor);
2. a second professional in children’s health and wellbeing (appointed by the Senate minority leader);
3. one individual who is an experienced member of an organization that is in a collective bargaining agreement with a school district within the planning region, chosen from a list recommended by specified unions (appointed by the Senate president pro tempore);
4. one active superintendent (appointed by the House speaker); and
5. one current or former education law attorney (appointed by the House minority leader).

Under the bill, each regional education accountability review board must submit to SBE an annual expenditure report for each priority district located in their planning region. SDE must make the reports available on the department’s website.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2025

Background — Planning Regions

Planning regions are geographic areas of Connecticut that consist of unified municipalities for the purpose of collaborating on common interests. By law, OPM designates the boundaries of planning regions. Currently, Connecticut is composed of nine planning regions.

Background — Priority School Districts

Priority school districts are districts (1) whose students receive low standardized test scores, (2) that have high levels of poverty, or (3) in the eight towns with the largest population in the state (CGS § 10-

266p(a)). There are 16 priority districts in the 2024-25 school year.

§ 17 — UPDATES TO ANNUAL EXPENDITURE REPORT PROCESS BETWEEN SCHOOL BOARDS AND SDE

Requires SDE to publish the penalties for BOEs failing to submit an expenditure report that aligns with SDE's criteria and for SDE to provide BOEs with an online application to assist them in uploading their report's data

By law, BOEs must have their school superintendents annually report returns of the school district's receipts, expenditures, and statistics to SDE, who must then post on its website this data by education program type, expense function, expense object, and funding source. Additionally, the department must publish an online guide defining each expenditure and funding source category. The bill requires this publication to also include the corrective actions or penalties SDE can impose on a BOE if the data in their reports fails to align with these definitions.

Furthermore, in existing law, SDE must publish the data from the reports in a format allowing for financial comparisons between districts and schools. The bill requires that SDE provide each BOE an application program interface (through SDE's education data portal or an alternative method) to assist the board in posting their report's data on SDE's website.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2025

§ 18 — UPDATES TO SDE'S CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION PLAN

Expands on SDE's chronic absenteeism prevention and intervention plan by incorporating additional required and permissible components and requiring SDE to review the plan biannually

By law, SDE was required to develop, in consultation with the Interagency Council for Ending the Achievement Gap, a chronic absenteeism prevention and intervention plan to be used by BOEs.

The bill requires SDE to review, and revise as needed, the plan biannually. When making revisions, SDE must incorporate the findings from the disconnected youth report (see *Background — Disconnected Youth Report* in § 15 of this analysis). The bill also specifically requires

the plan to include the truancy policies and procedures that school boards must adopt by law (e.g., requiring a meeting with parents or guardians after a student's fourth unexcused absence in a month or 10th in a school year).

In existing law, the plan must include, among other things, a way to collect and analyze data on chronic absenteeism that allows for the data to be separated into various subgroups, including race, gender, free or reduced lunch eligibility, disability status, and primary language other than English. The bill adds housing status as an additional category. Additionally, it requires that the plan include using an early indication tool to identify students who are at risk for becoming chronically absent or disconnected from school, such as students who may not be able to graduate, have a history of behavioral or disciplinary issues, or are homeless. This tool can be provided by SDE or a third party.

By law, SDE may include a research-based and data-driven mentorship model to address chronic absenteeism in their plan. These mentors can be students, teachers, administrators, athletic coaches, school resource officers, and community partners. The bill allows for SDE to also use a home visiting model. Under the bill, both home visiting and mentorship models are subject to the same list of mentors, and the bill adds family navigators and student success coaches to this list.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2025

§§ 19-21 — UNSPENT FUND ACCOUNT AND EDUCATIONAL EXPENDITURES RESERVE FUND UPDATES

Requires local BOEs to create a report on nonlapsing, unspent funds and include similar information in an existing report; similarly updates requirements related to regional BOE educational expenditures reserve funds

Addition to an Existing Cost Report

By law, local BOEs are allowed to deposit unspent education funds into a nonlapsing account. The deposit may be up to 2% of the previous fiscal year's budgeted appropriation for education, and account expenditures must be only for educational purposes.

Under existing law, each BOE must publish an annual report with a summary showing the (1) total cost of maintaining the schools, (2) amount received from the state and other sources for this purpose, and (3) net cost to the municipality of the school budget. The bill adds that the report must also include the balance of any nonlapsing, unspent funds account.

New Report on Nonlapsing, Unspent Funds

Beginning for FY 26, the bill requires each local BOE to create an annual report on their nonlapsing, unspent fund account. This report must include the following information:

1. the total balance of the account,
2. the amount deposited into the account in a fiscal year, and
3. an accounting of the expenditures made from the account.

The report must be submitted to SDE and the exclusive bargaining representative for certified employees.

Updating Exclusive Bargaining Representatives on Nonlapsing, Unspent Funds

Under the bill, starting for FY 26, each local BOE must annually notify the exclusive bargaining representative for certified employees of the:

1. establishment of a nonlapsing, unspent funds account; or
2. board's intended uses for any funds in the account during the next fiscal year.

This notification must be made no later than 30 days from the adoption of the board's budget.

Requirements Regarding Educational Expenditures Reserve Fund

By law, a regional BOE, by a majority vote of its members, can create an educational expenditures reserve fund (limited to 2% of the district's budget, to be used for educational purposes). These boards must annually report to member towns on the condition of the fund.

Under the bill, beginning FY 26, each board must annually:

1. make available and annually update information regarding the fund, including the fund's total balance, the amount deposited into the fund in a fiscal year, and an accounting of the expenditures made from it; and
2. notify the exclusive bargaining representative for certified employees of the educational expenditure reserve's establishment or the board's intended uses for the funds during the next fiscal year (this notification must be made no later than 30 days from the adoption of the board's budget).

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2025

§ 22 — POSTING CLASSROOM AND STAFFING DATE

Requires school boards, RESCs, and charter schools to post on their websites information on class size, student-teacher ratios and other staffing, and the nonprofits that provide student support services to their students; requires SDE to also post this information on its website

By law, school boards, regional education service centers (RESC), and state charter school governing authorities (i.e. governing boards) must annually post on their websites aggregate spending on items for each school such as salaries, benefits, instructional supplies and equipment, and special education tuition, among other things. The bill requires the same entities, beginning with FY 26, to quarterly post information on their websites about:

1. actual class size and student-teacher ratios, disaggregated by school;
2. the number of full-time equivalent staff positions, disaggregated by SDE categories;
3. the number of staffing vacancies, and any accrued savings from the vacancies during the current fiscal year; and
4. the nonprofit organizations with which they have an agreement or contract to provide support services, including to youth at risk

of becoming disconnected from school (leaving school) and the scope of services they provide.

For school boards and charter school governing authorities, they must also include any agreements they have with RESCs and the scope of services the RESC provides, including for at-risk youth.

School boards and RESCs must submit this information to the applicable town legislative body or board of selectmen, if the legislative body is a town meeting, and the teachers' union. Charter school governing authorities are only required to submit it to the teachers' union.

By January 1, 2027, and annually thereafter, SDE must make the required information available on its website.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2025

§ 23 — CONTACTING LOCAL HOMELESS EDUCATION LIAISONS BEFORE EXPULSION HEARINGS

Requires districts to contact their local homeless education liaisons prior to an expulsion hearing to determine if the student is homeless

Under the bill, before a school expulsion hearing, a school administrator, counselor, or social worker must contact the local homeless education liaison designated by the local or regional BOE to determine if the student is homeless (see *Background*). If the student is found to be homeless, the entity conducting the hearing (the BOE or the impartial hearing board) must consider the impact of homelessness on the student's behavior, and the student cannot be expelled without a plan to alleviate this impact.

The bill also requires the BOE to provide a meeting with the local homeless education liaison for any child who is determined to be homeless and is expelled two times.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2025

Background — School Expulsion Hearings

By law, a school board must hold a hearing before expelling a

student, except in an emergency (i.e. the student’s continued presence would be so disruptive or dangerous as to allow the student’s removal before the hearing). In the latter instance, the expulsion hearing must take place as soon as possible after the student’s removal.

Background — Homeless Youth and Homeless Education Liaisons

Federal law defines “homeless children and youths” as individuals who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, and includes those sharing the housing of others due to loss of housing, economic hardship, or a similar reason (42 U.S.C. § 11434a).

The federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act requires every school district in the country to designate a homeless liaison, who is a local educational agency staff person. This liaison is responsible for identifying and supporting homeless students across the district (42 U.S.C. § 11431 et seq.).

§ 24 — STUDENT SUCCESS COACH PILOT PROGRAM

Requires SDE to administer a three-year student success coach pilot program in select school districts

The bill requires SDE to administer a student success coach pilot program in the Bridgeport, Hartford, New Britain, New Haven, New London, Norwich, Waterbury, and Windham school districts for FYs 26 through 28. The program must utilize evidence-based strategies shown to effectively support students with attendance, behavioral, or credit attainment challenges and other risk factors making them more likely to become disconnected from school and misuse drugs (including opioids).

Under the bill, a participating local BOE can apply for a grant of up to \$2,000,000 from SDE, and SDE must award grants in line with the law on the Opioid Settlement Advisory Committee. To be eligible for a grant, the BOE must:

1. utilize an early indicator tool from SDE to identify students with the greatest need for a student success coach, and

2. be evaluated by SDE's Center for Connecticut Education Research Collaboration, or a third party selected by SDE.

Under the bill, by February 15, 2029, SDE must:

1. evaluate the program's implementation and effectiveness, and
2. report findings and recommendations to SBE, the Opioid Settlement Advisory Committee, the Education Committee, and the Committee on Children.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2025

§§ 25 & 56 — HVAC GRANTS TO SCHOOL DISTRICT

Repeals the school construction HVAC grant and instead merges it with an existing DAS school construction grant that provides grants for a broader range of school building projects; merges most of the existing law's grant provisions, such as the application and eligibility criteria, into the existing grant but leaves out some aspects, such requiring applicants to go through the annual priority list process with legislative approval

The bill repeals the existing school construction heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems (HVAC) grant and instead merges it with an existing school construction grant law that provides grants for a broader range of school building projects (such as roof replacements and addressing building code violations). The bill subjects the new HVAC grants to the same application and eligibility criteria as for existing non-priority school building projects (see *Inspection and Maintenance Requirements*).

Under the bill, current law's provisions are generally added to the existing Department of Administrative Services (DAS) school construction grant that authorizes the commissioner to award grants without going through the annual priority list process, which the legislature approves annually in a bill (these projects are often referred to as the "non-priority list projects"). The priority list includes major projects such as building new schools or complete renovations of existing schools.

Under current law, the DAS commissioner may approve grants to reimburse school districts for project costs to install, replace, or upgrade

HVAC systems or related improvements. Under the bill, the commissioner may approve grants to upgrade HVAC systems or make other improvements to indoor air quality in school buildings. The bill language does not include installing or replacing systems.

While the statutes for each of these grants do not include a dollar limit, the non-priority list projects tend to be smaller than the priority list projects, ranging from \$100,000 to \$5 million. Priority list projects commonly range from \$1 million to, in some cases, \$200 million.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2025

Inspection and Maintenance Requirements

The bill maintains the following current law requirements:

1. prohibiting awarding grants for HVAC or indoor air quality improvements to recipients unless they have certified compliance with the uniform inspection and evaluation of their school buildings' HVAC systems as required by law (CGS § 10-220(d)),
2. deeming the following expenses as ineligible for reimbursement:
 - (a) routine maintenance and cleaning of the HVAC system and
 - (b) work performed at or on a public school administrative or service facility that is not located or housed within a public school building, and
3. requiring grant recipients to (a) be responsible for the routine maintenance and cleaning of the HVAC system and (b) provide training to school personnel and maintenance staff concerning the system's proper use and maintenance.

Repealed HVAC Grant Provisions

The bill repeals the following provisions:

1. grant eligibility for charter schools;
2. specific grant eligibility criteria including (a) the age and condition of the current HVAC system or equipment being

replaced or upgraded in the school, (b) current air quality issues at the school, (c) the age and condition of the overall school building, (d) the school district's master plan, (e) the availability of maintenance records, (f) the school's routine HVAC maintenance contract or plan, and (g) the applicant's ability to finance the remaining costs;

3. requiring DAS to reconsider grant applications it has denied through the end of FY 26 and provide technical assistance to the denied school board to help the board gain approval of the grant;
4. requiring DAS, if there is not enough grant funding, to prioritize schools with the greatest need based on the eligibility criteria; and
5. requiring an HVAC project to be completed by the end of the next calendar year after the grant was awarded unless extended by DAS for good cause.

§§ 26, 27 & 56 — NETWORK OF SCHOOLS PROGRAM REPEALED

Repeals the SDE commissioner's Network of Schools program aimed at improving academic achievement in low-performing schools

The bill repeals the education commissioner's Network of Schools program through which she selects up to 25 low-achieving schools each school year that receive intensified SBE supervision and direction (CGS § 10-223h).

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2025

Currently, the program sets steps the commissioner, school district turnaround committees, and local and regional boards of education must take to improve academic achievement. Each school's turnaround committee must create and implement a turnaround plan, based on a turnaround model it chooses. The law requires the commissioner to give participating schools funding and technical and operational support. Schools remain in the network for three years with an option for an additional two.

The bill does not specify what happens to the schools currently participating in the program that have not completed their designated time.

The bill also repeals a related law that addresses contracts between school boards and non-profit educational management organizations selected as part of a participating school's turnaround plan to manage the school (CGS § 10-223i).

Among other things, these contracts must require the management organizations to annually report to the education commissioner on (1) the educational progress of the school's students; (2) its financial relationship with the school, including a certified audit statement of all revenues from public and private sources and expenditures; and (3) the time their employees and consultants devoted to the school.

The bill also makes related technical and conforming changes to various statutes.

§§ 28-56 — REPEALS ALLIANCE DISTRICT PROGRAM AND RELATED CHANGES

Repeals the alliance district program, which places certain requirements on the lowest performing 36 school districts in order for them to receive a portion of their ECS grant

The bill repeals the alliance district program, and in doing so (1) updates terminology in several statutes, replacing "alliance districts" with "priority school districts," (PSD) "literary districts," or "eligible communities," as described below; (2) narrows eligibility for certain programs from alliance districts to PSDs; (3) expands eligibility for certain education programs to all school districts instead of only alliance districts; and (4) expands eligibility for several programs to primary school districts instead of education reform districts as under current law.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2025

Alliance District Program Repeal

The bill repeals the alliance district program, which requires each of the state's 36 lowest performing school districts (as measured by the

accountability index; see *Background – Accountability Index Scores*) to submit an improvement plan to SDE for approval before the department releases the district’s alliance funding (i.e. a portion of the annual education cost sharing (ECS) grant that these districts receive). The plan must detail how a district will use its alliance funding to improve student achievement. In addition to the plan, the law permits the alliance district funding to be spent according to SDE’s minority candidate certification, retention, or residency year program (see below) and with any SBE guidelines (CGS § 10-262u).

Current law specifies improvement plan components, such as (1) a tiered intervention system for the district’s schools based on their needs; (2) ways to strengthen reading programs to ensure reading mastery in grades K-3; (3) additional learning time, including extended school day or year programs run by school personnel or external partners; and (4) a talent strategy that includes teacher and school leader recruitment and assignment and career ladder policies that draw on district-approved guidelines for a teacher evaluation.

The program also includes SDE interventions and oversight to help districts carry out their plans.

The bill also makes related minor, technical and conforming changes to various statutes (§§ 28, 35, 39, 42, 48, 54 & 56).

Terminology Changes

The bill changes terminology in various education statutes by replacing the term “alliance district” with the following:

1. PSDs, which are districts that meet certain town population, student performance, and poverty measures and receive state grants for certain programs (e.g., reading, afterschool, and dropout prevention programs);
2. “literacy districts,” which are districts the education commissioner identified as needing literacy assistance based on their students’ performance on the state reading mastery exam; and

3. “eligible communities,” which are one of the 50 towns in the state with the lowest equalized net grand list.

Additionally, the bill substitutes the term “education reform district” (i.e. the lowest scoring 10 districts within the state’s 36 alliance districts) with PSD.

Currently, there are 36 alliance districts and 16 PSDs. By substituting alliance districts with PSDs the bill makes 20 districts no longer eligible for certain programs or subject to alliance district statutory provisions, as described below.

ECS Grant (§§ 40, 41 & 43). The bill applies to PSDs, instead of alliance districts, the following ECS grant provisions:

1. a “hold harmless” provision that guarantees PSDs receive a grant amount that is at least as much as they received in the previous fiscal year;
2. the “base aid ratio” used to calculate ECS grants that sets a minimum floor of 10% for a PSD’s wealth factor, instead of 1% for non-PSDs (districts with higher ratios receive higher per student grant amounts); and
3. a minimum budget requirement (MBR) provision that generally prohibits PSDs from lowering their MBR for education from one year to the next.

By law, the state ECS grant is calculated annually based on the number and demographics of students enrolled in a district (those eligible for free and reduced meals and English language learners are weighted more in the grant calculation) and the town’s property wealth (towns with higher property wealth receive less per student than those with less property wealth).

Additional Grant Programs for PSDs (§§ 37, 38, 44, 45, 49 & 52). The bill replaces alliance districts with PSDs in the following six grant programs:

1. CT Grown for CT Kids Grant Program, which helps education boards develop farm-to-school program to increase availability of local foods in child nutrition programs (CGS § 10-215l);
2. Local Food for Schools Incentive Program, which reimburses education boards for purchasing locally- and regionally-sourced food to use in its school meal program (CGS § 10-215m);
3. School Building Improvements Grant Program, which helps districts pay for general improvements to school buildings (generally for projects that are smaller than those that are part of the school construction annual priority lists process) (CGS § 10-265h);
4. Municipal Aid for New Educators Grant Program, which gives grants to education boards to hire certain students enrolled in teacher preparation programs (CGS § 10-265o);
5. Preparation for Academic Transition to Higher Education (PATH) Grant Program, which gives grants to nonprofit organizations that assist high school students with the college application and financial aid process (CGS § 10a-11k); and
6. state grants in lieu of taxes to certain properties, for purposes of determining which towns will be considered a Tier I municipality (i.e. those with an equalized net grand list per capita of under \$100,000) (CGS § 12-18b(d)).

Literacy Districts (§§ 31-33). The bill applies the following programs to literacy districts instead of alliance districts, as under current law: (1) state grants for new curricula and related training, textbooks, and materials; (2) the intensive reading instruction program for students in grades kindergarten to grade three; and (3) the reading readiness program.

Eligible Communities (§ 29). The bill applies the following programs to eligible communities instead of alliance districts, as under current law: (1) the Housing Environmental Revolving Loan and Grant

Program and (2) the pilot program for energy efficiency projects for multifamily residences located in environmental justice communities or eligible communities.

Expanding Certain Programs to All School Districts (§§ 36, 51, 52 & 55)

The bill expands eligibility for several programs currently available only to alliance districts by instead making them available to any school district. These programs include the following:

1. the aspiring educator diversity scholarship program, which gives annual scholarships to diverse students who graduated from a public high school in an alliance district and are enrolled in a teacher preparation program at a four-year higher education institution (CGS § 10-156ii);
2. the alliance districts educator and counselor loan subsidy program, which subsidizes interest rates on loans to teachers, paraeducators and school counselors employed in alliance districts (CGS §§ 10a-247 & 247a); and
3. probate court truancy clinics in alliance districts (CGS § 45a-8c).

Expanding Certain Programs for Educational Reform Districts (§§ 30, 46, 47 & 53)

The bill also applies several programs to PSDs, instead of educational reform districts, as under current law. In doing so, it expands access to these programs by making 16 districts, instead of 10, eligible.

Specifically, these programs include the following:

1. mortgage assistance for certain teachers (CGS § 8-265pp),
2. the wraparound services grant program (CGS § 10-265p),
3. the educational reform district science grant program (CGS § 10-265q), and
4. the Neighborhood Assistance Act tax credit (GS § 12-635).

Background — Accountability Index Scores

The “accountability index” for a school district or an individual school is the score resulting from multiple weighted measures that (1) include the mastery test scores (i.e. performance index) and, if appropriate, high school graduation rates, and (2) may include academic growth over time, attendance and chronic absenteeism, postsecondary education and career readiness, enrollment in and graduation from institutions of higher education and postsecondary education programs, civics and arts education, and physical fitness (CGS § 10-223e(a)).

§ 34 — EARLY CHILDHOOD CABINET MEMBERSHIP

Adds a library consortium member to the Early Childhood Cabinet

The bill increases the Early Childhood Cabinet’s membership, from 31 to 32, by adding the executive director of the Connecticut Library Consortium or a cooperating library service unit, or his or her designee. The bill does not indicate how it will be decided whether the new board member is the director of the library consortium or of a library service unit.

The bill also makes conforming changes by substituting the term “alliance district” with “primary school district” for two existing cabinet members (one school board member and one parent of a student in an educational reform district) to reflect the bills’ repeal of the alliance district program (see §§ 28-56 above).

By law, the Early Childhood Cabinet (1) advises OEC, (2) develops an annual action plan that assigns state agencies certain tasks specified in the federal Head Start Act, and (3) submits an annual statewide strategic report that addresses agencies’ progress in meeting the action plan’s requirements.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2025

Background — Related Bills

sSB 6, § 8 (File 199), favorably reported by the Committee on Children, adds the Connecticut Library Consortium’s executive director

to the Early Childhood Cabinet’s membership.

HB 5003, §§ 1 & 2 (File 198), favorably reported by the Committee on Children, transfers unappropriated surplus funds into a fund dedicated to early childhood care and education programs, and the treasurer manages the fund and invests its assets.

SB 1458, favorably reported by the Education Committee, repeals the Network of Schools program and revamps the Alliance District program by reducing, from 36 to 15, the number of districts and renames them opportunity districts.

HB 6922 (File 311), favorably reported by the Education Committee, repeals the existing school construction HVAC grant and merges it with an existing school construction grant law that gives grants for a broader range of school building projects.

§ 56 — REPEALERS

Repeals provisions on the SDE commissioner’s network of schools, alliance districts, minority candidate retention and residency program, and allowing limited reemployment of retired teachers; makes related technical and conforming changes

In addition to repealing provisions on the (1) DAS HVAC system grant program for school boards (see § 25 above); (2) SDE commissioner’s Network of Schools program (see §§ 26, 27 & 56 above); and (3) alliance district program (see §§ 28-56 above), the bill additionally repeals the following provisions and makes related technical and conforming changes:

1. requiring SDE to administer the Minority Candidate Certification Retention or Residency Year Program (“Retention or Residency Program”) (CGS § 10-156gg), and
2. allowing limited reemployment of retired teachers (CGS § 10-183v).

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2025

Teacher Candidate Retention or Residency Program

Current law requires SDE to administer the Retention or Residency

program in coordination with a RESC or a private, nonprofit certification program. It also requires each school district designated as an alliance district to partner with a residency program operator to enroll minority candidates and place them in the district for their 10-month teacher candidate residency. SDE must (1) withhold from each alliance district 10% of any increase in alliance aid and (2) use the funds for grant payments to cover program-related costs (CGS § 10-156gg).

Reemployment of Retired Teachers

Under current law, retired teachers are allowed to be reemployed for certain periods of time under specified conditions and still receive their pension benefit (they do not contribute to their pension during this time). Generally, they are reemployed (1) under the “45% rule” (earning up to 45% of the position’s maximum salary and returning any payment received over that amount) or (2) in a shortage area or at a PSD for up to two years with no salary limit. (An existing third option for those who retired after at least 34 years of teaching and are now reemployed with an alliance district expired in 2024 (CGS § 10-183v).)

COMMITTEE ACTION

Education Committee

Joint Favorable

Yea 30 Nay 15 (03/24/2025)