
OLR Bill Analysis

sSB 1288

AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION.

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BACKGROUND

SUMMARY

This bill makes numerous additions and changes to the education

laws, as described in the section-by section analysis that follows.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2025, except the sections on grants to Goodwin University Education Services (i.e. Goodwin magnet schools) are effective upon passage.

§ 1 — MAGNET SCHOOL ENROLLMENT STANDARDS FOR OPERATING GRANTS AND MAGNET STUDENT RESIDENCY FOR ECS GRANTS

Makes permanent (1) magnet school enrollment standards for operating grants and (2) magnet school students counting in the town they reside in for ECS grant purposes

Enrollment Standards

The bill makes permanent the requirement that the education commissioner consider whether a *Sheff* magnet school meets the reduced-isolation (i.e. desegregation) enrollment standards required under *Sheff* to award operating grants to the school. *Sheff* magnet schools help the state meet its obligations under the *Sheff v. O'Neill* Connecticut Supreme Court desegregation decision (see BACKGROUND).

Under current law, the requirement expires by the end of FY 25. A magnet school that does not meet the standards may still receive grants if the commissioner (1) finds it 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.

For non-*Sheff* magnet schools, the bill makes permanent the prohibition on the commissioner awarding a grant to any magnet that (1) has more than 75% of the total school enrollment from one school district (i.e. not enough out-of-district students attending) or (2) does not have school enrollment that meets the education commissioner's magnet school enrollment standards for reduced isolation. Under current law, this prohibition expires at the end of FY 25. As with the *Sheff* magnets, the commissioner can continue grants if it is appropriate and she approves a plan to bring the school into compliance.

The law sets minimum criteria for the commissioner to use in setting the reduced isolation standards, including (1) at least 20% of a magnet school's enrollment must be reduced isolation students and (2) a

school's enrollment may have up to 1% below the minimum percentage if she approves a plan for the school to reach the 20% minimum or the percent she established in the standards. It also requires the commissioner to define "reduced isolation student."

The act also makes permanent the commissioner's authority to impose a financial penalty on a magnet school that does not meet the reduced-isolation standards for at least two 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. Under current law, this authority expires at the end of FY 25.

ECS Grants and Magnet School Students

The bill makes permanent counting a magnet school student in the town where the student lives (rather than in the town that hosts the magnet school) for education cost sharing (ECS) grant purposes. This provision is set to expire at the end of FY 25, although it has already been a long-time State Department of Education (SDE) practice.

ECS grants are per-student grants that depend on, among other things, the number of resident students for a town. ECS is the largest form of state education aid to school districts.

§ 2 — SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS AND OPEN CHOICE

Clarifies duties for receiving and sending districts participating in Open Choice for special education students and students with 504 accommodations

The bill places certain duties on school districts that send or receive Open Choice students who require special education services. Open Choice is a voluntary interdistrict attendance program that allows students from the Hartford, New Haven, Bridgeport, Danbury, and Norwalk school districts to attend suburban schools, and vice versa, on a space-available basis. The state awards per-student grants to the districts that receive Open Choice students.

The bill requires the sending district (district where the student resides) to hold the planning and placement team (PPT) meeting for the student and invite representatives from the receiving district to

participate in the meeting. By law and unchanged by the bill, the sending district must pay the receiving district for the student's special education costs that exceed the state grant amount for the student. PPT meetings are annual planning meetings held with parents and school staff to plan services for special education students; the plan they agree to is known as the student's individualized education program (IEP).

The bill also requires the receiving district to ensure that out-of-district students who require special education services receive the services mandated by the student's IEP regardless of whether the services are provided by the sending or receiving district.

504 Accommodations

Under the bill, an Open Choice receiving district must ensure that a student with a 504 accommodation plan (a plan pursuant to Section 504 of the federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973) receives the services required under the plan and the receiving district bears the costs of providing the services to the student. These accommodations often involve more time for standardized tests, preferential seating (away from distractions), assistive technology, and instructional adjustments (visual aids or alternative methods of instruction).

§§ 3 & 4 — MAGNET SCHOOL CAPITAL EXPENSES GRANTS

Allows existing grant funds for magnet school capital expenses to be given to Goodwin University Education Services in addition to RESCs

The bill amends two existing SDE bond authorizations for grants for capital expenses at magnet schools. Under the current authorizations, the grants may be given to regional educational service centers (RESCs). The bill additionally allows grants to be given to magnet-school operator Goodwin University Education Services.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

§ 5 — SHEFF REGION MAGNET SCHOOL TRANSPORTATION GRANTS

Changes the calculation for Sheff magnet school transportation grants by eliminating the per-pupil grant calculation and the supplemental grants structure and instead basing the grants on actual costs of transportation services

The bill changes the calculation for transportation grants to magnet schools that help the state meet its obligations under the *Sheff v. O'Neill* desegregation court decision (see BACKGROUND). Under current law, SDE awards (1) *Sheff* magnet school transportation grants, in an amount equal to \$2,000 per pupil, and (2) supplemental *Sheff* magnet school transportation grants, within available appropriations.

Starting with FY 25, the bill eliminates the supplemental grant and the per-pupil calculation and instead requires that *Sheff* magnet transportation grant amounts equal the actual cost of transportation services. Under the bill, the grant must be provided within available appropriations and subject to a comprehensive financial review. By law, unchanged by the bill, non-*Sheff* magnet school transportation grants are calculated based on \$1,300 per pupil.

Starting with FY 25, the bill also changes the payment schedule for grants. Under current law, up to 95% of the grant must be paid by June 30 of that fiscal year based on documentation provided before May 31. The bill (1) changes the date the remaining 5% is due from September to November following the fiscal year's completion and (2) additionally specifies that 50% of the estimated transportation costs must be paid by October 31 of the fiscal year.

Lastly, the bill makes technical and conforming changes.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2025

§ 6 — READING INSTRUCTION SURVEY REMOVAL

Removes the reading instruction survey requirement for K-3 teachers

The bill removes the reading instruction survey requirement for certified K-3 teachers. Under current law, local and regional boards of education (“school boards”) must require their K-3 teachers to take a biennial survey developed by SDE on reading instruction. SDE’s survey identifies strengths and weaknesses of the teachers’ reading instruction practice and knowledge on an individual, school, and district level.

Under current law, results from these surveys must be kept confidential under the Freedom of Information Act. The bill ensures

that, with the survey requirement terminated, this confidentiality will continue to apply to past results.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2025

§ 7 — UPDATES TO THE TEACHER EDUCATION AND MENTORING (TEAM) PROGRAM

Makes technical and conforming updates to the TEAM program

The bill makes conforming updates to the TEAM program to align with 2024 changes to the law on educator certification.

The TEAM program provides guided support to new teachers. Under current law, teachers are eligible for a provisional educator certificate when they complete the program.

PA 24-41 reduced the number of teacher certification levels from three to two by eliminating the provisional level as of July 1, 2025 (existing certificates remain valid until expired). The bill makes conforming changes to the TEAM law by replacing references to “provisional educator certificate” with “professional educator certificate” and specifying that these teachers also must meet the law’s other requirements for professional educator certification.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2025

§ 8 — REQUIREMENT FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION PROVIDERS TO PROVIDE BASE TUITION AND COSTS

Requires private special education providers to submit their base tuition and costs for services for each school year by December 31 of the year before the services will be provided

The bill requires that beginning July 1, 2025, any written contract entered or amended between a school board and a private special education provider (see BACKGROUND) must require the provider to submit a base tuition and cost for services to the school board for each school year services are provided (according to the contract).

This submission must occur by December 31 of the year before the services will be provided (which is prior to school boards’ budget cycles).

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2025

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.

Special Education Services Contracts

The state reimburses school districts for special education costs that exceed four and a half times the cost of educating a student in that district (the exact level of reimbursement depends on the state appropriation for the grant for that fiscal year). This reimbursement is known as an excess cost grant.

By law, if a district pays a private provider for special education services, the district must enter a written contract with the provider in order for those services to be eligible for the excess cost grant.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Education Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 32 Nay 12 (03/28/2025)