



Substitute Senate Bill No. 220

Public Act No. 26-149

AN ACT CONCERNING STUDENT LITERACY, ASPIRING EDUCATORS, AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE AS PART OF THE WORLD LANGUAGES CURRICULUM AND THE PARAEDUCATOR HEALTH BENEFIT PLAN SUBSIDY PROGRAM.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

Section 1. (NEW) (*Effective July 1, 2026*) (a) The Department of Education shall develop and disseminate guidance to local and regional boards of education regarding the implementation of multitiered systems of support or response to intervention frameworks for students who are identified as struggling in reading. Such guidance shall be based on data collected from the results of approved reading assessments, as described in section 10-14t of the general statutes.

(b) Not later than January 1, 2028, the Commissioner of Education shall submit a report on the guidance developed pursuant to subsection (a) of this section and any recommendations for legislation to the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to education, in accordance with the provisions of section 11-4a of the general statutes.

Sec. 2. Section 10-156ii of the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective July 1, 2026*):

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(a) There is established an aspiring educators [diversity] scholarship program administered by the Department of Education. The program shall provide an annual scholarship to [diverse students] aspiring educators who (1) graduated from a public high school in [an alliance district, as defined in section 10-262u] this state, and (2) are enrolled in a teacher preparation program at any four-year institution of higher education. [A diverse student] An aspiring educator may receive an annual scholarship in an amount up to ten thousand dollars for each year such [diverse student] aspiring educator is enrolled and in good standing in a teacher preparation program. As used in this section, ["diverse" has the same meaning as provided in section 10-156bb] "aspiring educator" means an individual who is in a population subgroup that is underrepresented in the teaching profession in this state and for which such population subgroup has been identified as a teacher shortage area by the Commissioner of Education pursuant to section 10-8b, as amended by this act.

(b) Not later than January 1, [2023] 2027, the department shall, in consultation with the chairpersons of the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to education, develop a policy concerning the administration of the scholarship. Such policy shall include, but need not be limited to, provisions regarding (1) any additional eligibility criteria, (2) payment and distribution of the scholarships to [diverse students] aspiring educators through the teacher preparation programs in which they are enrolled, and (3) the notification of students in high school [in alliance districts] of the scholarship program, including the opportunity to apply for a scholarship under the program while enrolled in high school and prior to graduation if such student will be enrolled in a teacher preparation program during the following fall semester at a four-year institution of higher education.

(c) For the fiscal [years] year ending June 30, [2024] 2027, and each

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fiscal year thereafter, the department shall annually award scholarships in accordance with the provisions of this section and the guidelines developed pursuant to subsection (b) of this section.

(d) The Commissioner of Education shall develop scholarship repayment criteria for recipients who are not employed as a certified teacher by a local or regional board of education in [the] this state following graduation from a teacher preparation program. Any amounts repaid to the department shall be deposited in the General Fund.

(e) For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2026, the commissioner shall determine if there are any unexpended funds appropriated for purposes of this section for the fiscal year. If the commissioner determines that there are unexpended funds in said fiscal year, the commissioner shall transfer, not later than July 15, 2026, through a memorandum of understanding with the Comptroller, up to three hundred thousand dollars of such unexpended funds for the purpose of expanding the subsidy program, established pursuant to section 203 of public act 23-204, as amended by section 124 of public act 24-81 and this act, to include paraeducators who are employed by a charter school in the fiscal year ending June 30, 2027.

[(e)] (f) The department may accept gifts, grants and donations, from any source, public or private, for the aspiring educators [diversity] scholarship program.

[(f)] (g) Not later than January 1, [2024] 2028, and annually thereafter, the department shall develop a report that includes annual data on the [race and ethnicity of the diverse] population subgroups of students who receive a scholarship under the program and the teacher preparation program in which they are enrolled. The department shall submit such report to the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to education, in

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accordance with the provisions of section 11-4a.

Sec. 3. Section 10-8b of the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective July 1, 2026*):

(a) The Commissioner of Education shall annually, by December first, ~~[determine subject and geographic]~~ identify the following areas in which a teacher shortage exists; ~~[and]~~ (1) Subject, (2) geographic, and (3) population subgroups that are underrepresented in the teaching profession in this state. The commissioner shall certify such ~~[shortages]~~ teacher shortage areas to the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority for purposes of section 8-265pp. In ~~[determining]~~ identifying such teacher ~~[shortages]~~ shortage areas, the commissioner shall consider the following: ~~[(1)]~~ (A) The number of teacher vacancies in a particular subject area or geographic area; ~~[(2)]~~ (B) the number of new certificates in such subject areas and geographic areas or population subgroups issued by the Department of Education during the preceding year; ~~[and (3)]~~ (C) the number and types of classes being taught by persons whose training is not specific to the field in which they are teaching; and (D) those population subgroups that are underrepresented in the teaching profession in this state using data collected in the state-wide public school information system pursuant to section 10-10a.

(b) The Department of Education shall annually, by March first, electronically distribute to the president of every institution of higher education in this state offering a teacher preparatory program information concerning teacher shortage areas, ~~[determined]~~ identified pursuant to subsection (a) of this section, for at least the prior five years.

Sec. 4. (NEW) (*Effective January 1, 2027*) (a) The Department of Education shall establish an American Sign Language education working group that consists of (1) a representative from each of the following: The Departments of Education and Aging and Disability Services, the Labor Department, the Office of Higher Education, the

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Connecticut Council of Language Teachers, the American School for the Deaf and the Connecticut Association of the Deaf, and (2) at least one American Sign Language instructor who teaches in a public school in the state.

(b) The working group shall provide recommendations to the Department of Education regarding the following:

(1) Curriculum guidance for American Sign Language instruction that includes, but is not limited to, aligning such curriculum with nationally recognized proficiency frameworks;

(2) Teacher certification standards based on standards established by the American Sign Language Teachers Association and the American Sign Language Proficiency Interview that include, at a minimum, (A) establishment of a proficiency benchmark, (B) recognition of an alternative certification pathway for native American Sign Language users and interpreters, and (C) reciprocity with American Sign Language teaching certifications from other states; and

(3) Guidance to educator preparation programs in the state concerning, but not limited to, the (A) expansion of American Sign Language and interpretation education programs, (B) creation of educational incentives, such as tuition support, credit enhancement or alternative route programs, and (C) establishment of bridge, endorsement or alternative programs for native American Sign Language users and certified interpreters seeking teacher certification.

(c) Not later than January 1, 2028, and annually thereafter, the Department of Education shall submit a progress report, in accordance with the provisions of section 11-4a of the general statutes, to the joint standing committee of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to education concerning the work of the American Sign Language education working group.

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Sec. 5. (NEW) (*Effective July 1, 2026*) Not later than July 1, 2030, the Department of Education shall issue to each local and regional board of education the guidance developed pursuant to subdivision (1) of subsection (b) of section 4 of this act to ensure consistent implementation of the American Sign Language portion of the world languages curriculum required pursuant to section 10-16b of the general statutes.

Sec. 6. Section 203 of public act 23-204, as amended by section 124 of public act 24-81, is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective July 1, 2026*):

(a) As used in this section:

(1) "Health benefit plan" has the same meaning as provided in section 38a-1080 of the general statutes; [] and

(2) "Partnership plan" has the same meaning as provided in section 3-123aaa of the general statutes.

(b) For the fiscal [years] year ending [June 30, 2024, and June 30, 2025] June 30, 2027, and each fiscal year thereafter, the Comptroller shall establish a program to provide a subsidy, within available appropriations, to each paraeducator who (1) opens a health savings account, pursuant to Section 223 of the Internal Revenue Code of 1986, or any subsequent corresponding internal revenue code of the United States, as amended from time to time, or is eligible for Medicare and enrolls in a high deductible health plan, and (2) is employed [by a local or regional board of education] in a public school. Such subsidy shall be in an amount up to a certain percentage, as specified by the Comptroller, of the deductible for the health plan in which such paraeducator is enrolled, minus the amount of any employer contributions to a health savings account or health reimbursement account, and not exceeding an amount specified by the Comptroller. No paraeducator may receive

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more than one subsidy pursuant to this section. The Comptroller may work with the local or regional board of education that employs such paraeducator to distribute such subsidy.

(c) For the fiscal year ending ~~June 30, 2025~~ June 30, 2027, and each fiscal year thereafter, the Comptroller shall establish a program to provide a subsidy, from any funds appropriated for such purpose, to each local or regional board of education that provides coverage to paraeducators and their dependents under a health benefit plan or a partnership plan for such fiscal year or any portion thereof. Such subsidy shall be (1) in an amount not more than ten per cent of the aggregate premium cost, inclusive of the employee and employer shares, paid by such board of education for coverage under such health benefit plan or partnership plan, divided by the number of paraeducators employed by such board of education and enrolled in health coverage, and (2) used to offset the employee's share of such premium that is deducted from the payroll check of each paraeducator employed by such board of education during any pay period during such fiscal year. The provisions of this subsection shall not apply to a local or regional board of education that provides coverage under a high deductible health plan, as that term is used in subsection (f) of section 38a-520 of the general statutes. Pursuant to the provisions of subsection (b) of section 10-66dd of the general statutes, the provisions of this section shall apply to charter schools.

[(d) The Comptroller and the Commissioner of Education shall enter into a memorandum of understanding, in accordance with the provisions of section 4-97b of the general statutes, to allow the Comptroller to utilize the sum of \$5,000,000 that is appropriated to the Department of Education for assistance to paraeducators pursuant to section 1 of public act 23-204 to implement the provisions of this section.]

Sec. 7. (Effective from passage) The Comptroller shall calculate the cost

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of expanding the subsidy program, established pursuant to section 203 of public act 23-204, as amended by section 124 of public act 24-81 and this act, to include paraeducators who are employed by charter schools. Not later than January 1, 2027, the Comptroller shall submit such cost calculation to the joint standing committees of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to education and appropriations, in accordance with the provisions of section 11-4a of the general statutes.