
OLR Bill Analysis

sHB 5323

AN ACT CONCERNING VARIOUS REVISIONS TO THE EDUCATION STATUTES.

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

SUMMARY

§§ 1 & 2 — DISORDERED EATING TASK FORCE AND SCREENING TOOL

Creates a task force to develop recommendations on disordered eating in children, including recommending an evidence-based screening tool; requires school-based health centers to give the tool to patients in grades 6 to 12 during their annual health assessment

§ 3 — HOLISTIC FOOD EDUCATION WORKING GROUP

Creates a working group to develop a statewide food education road map and model school nutrition curriculum

§§ 4 & 5 — REGION 6 AND LITCHFIELD AUDIT

Requires (1) the Auditors of Public Accounts to audit the financial operations of former regional district 6 and the former Litchfield district and (2) member towns of former region 6 to pay outstanding expenses owed by the former board

§ 6 — ARMED SECURITY GUARDS

Allows retired parole officers meeting specified criteria to provide armed security services in public schools; prohibits police and probation officers who left employment during an investigation or after disciplinary action from providing armed security services in schools

§ 7 — SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

Requires the Advisory Council for School Administrator Professional Standards to create a new school administrator mentorship program

§ 8 — ACADEMIC STANDARDS FOR EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Requires students in grades 9-12 who participate in extracurricular activities to meet CIAC and CAS academic eligibility standards

§ 9 — THERAPEUTIC ARTS PROGRAM GRANTS

Requires SDE to create a grant program, within available appropriations, for therapeutic arts program in public schools starting in the 2027-28 school year

§ 10 — CONNECTICUT EDUCATION PREPARATION AND CERTIFICATION BOARD (CEPCB)

Extends the deadline for CEPCB's first annual report by one year

SUMMARY

This bill makes several unrelated changes to education laws. A section-by-section analysis follows.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2026, except provisions on the task force (§ 2), working group (§ 3), and audits (§§ 4 & 5) are effective upon passage.

§§ 1 & 2 — DISORDERED EATING TASK FORCE AND SCREENING TOOL

Creates a task force to develop recommendations on disordered eating in children, including recommending an evidence-based screening tool; requires school-based health centers to give the tool to patients in grades 6 to 12 during their annual health assessment

Task Force

The bill creates a task force to develop recommendations on early identification, awareness, and treatment of disordered eating in children, including recommending an evidence-based screening tool for school-based health centers to use (see below).

The task force must have the following 12 members (or, generally, their designees):

1. the Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity and Opportunity (CWCSEO) executive director;
2. the commissioners of education, public health, and mental health and addiction services;
3. the child advocate;
4. the comptroller;
5. the executive directors of the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents (CAPSS), Connecticut Association of Boards of Education (CABE), and Connecticut Association of School-Based Health Centers;
6. the chief executive officers of the United Way of Connecticut and the Connecticut Hospital Association; and

7. a member of the Transforming Children’s Behavioral Health Policy and Planning Committee, appointed jointly by the committee’s chairpersons.

The bill requires the CWCSEO executive director or her designee to be the task force’s chairperson and allows the chairperson to appoint additional members with expertise in eating disorders. It also (1) allows the non-executive branch task force members to be legislators and (2) requires the Education Committee’s administrative staff to serve the task force.

Initial appointments must be made within 30 days after the bill takes effect, and vacancies must be filled by the appointing authority. The chairperson must schedule the first meeting and hold it within 60 days after the bill takes effect.

The bill requires the task force to submit a report, by January 1, 2028, to the Education and Public Health committees with its findings and recommendations. The task force ends on this date or on the date it submits its report, whichever is later.

Screening Tool at School-Based Health Centers

Starting January 1, 2028, the bill requires each school-based health center to use an evidence-based screening tool for early identification of disordered eating to supplement existing methods for diagnosing disordered eating. School-based health centers must give the screening tool to each patient in grades 6 to 12 during the patient’s annual health assessment, and the patient (or their parent or guardian) may complete the screening tool at their discretion.

§ 3 — HOLISTIC FOOD EDUCATION WORKING GROUP

Creates a working group to develop a statewide food education road map and model school nutrition curriculum

The bill creates a Holistic Food Education Working Group to develop a statewide roadmap and model school nutrition curriculum that includes developmentally appropriate, evidence-based education programs on disordered eating behaviors, nutrition, culinary skills, growing food, food safety, and food systems.

The working group must have the following members (or, generally, their designees):

1. the CWCSEO executive director;
2. the commissioners of aging and disability services, agriculture, education, energy and environmental protection, public health, and social services;
3. one representative from each of four specified UConn extension programs (community nutrition, sustainable food systems, 4-H, and master gardeners and food safety), appointed by the UConn president;
4. the executive directors of CAPSS, CABE, the School Nutrition Association of Connecticut, the Connecticut Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, and the Area Agencies on Aging; and
5. other members appointed by CWCSEO.

The bill requires the CWCSEO executive director to appoint at least one of each of the following:

1. a public school educator,
2. a student in grade 9 to 12,
3. a representative from a community-based nonprofit that provides food or nutrition education,
4. a representative from a medical school in the state who teaches nutrition, and
5. a parent of a public school student in the state.

The bill requires the CWCSEO executive director to choose the working group's co-chairpersons from among its members and allows her to appoint additional members with expertise related to eating disorder prevention and nutrition education. It also (1) allows the non-executive branch working group members to be legislators and (2)

requires the Education Committee's administrative staff to serve the working group.

Initial appointments must be made within 30 days after the bill takes effect, and vacancies must be filled by the appointing authority. The chairpersons must schedule the first meeting and hold it within 60 days after the bill takes effect.

The bill requires the working group to submit a report, by January 1, 2028, to the Education Committee with its findings and recommendations. The task force ends on this date or on the date it submits its report, whichever is later.

§§ 4 & 5 — REGION 6 AND LITCHFIELD AUDIT

Requires (1) the Auditors of Public Accounts to audit the financial operations of former regional district 6 and the former Litchfield district and (2) member towns of former region 6 to pay outstanding expenses owed by the former board

The bill requires the Auditors of Public Accounts to audit the financial operations of former regional district 6 and the former Litchfield school district for the 2023-24 school year and any expenses they incurred after that. They must do so by October 1, 2026, and submit the report to the chief executive officers of the three member towns of former region 6 (Goshen, Morris, and Warren) and Litchfield, as applicable.

The bill requires the former region 6 member towns to pay any outstanding expenses the regional school board owes, allocated to each town proportionately based on the town's share of students.

§ 6 — ARMED SECURITY GUARDS

Allows retired parole officers meeting specified criteria to provide armed security services in public schools; prohibits police and probation officers who left employment during an investigation or after disciplinary action from providing armed security services in schools

Current law limits who a municipality or school board can hire or contract with for armed school security services in a public school to (1) sworn members of local police departments and (2) qualified retired police officers who left in good standing. The bill (1) additionally allows former parole officers meeting specified criteria to provide these services and (2) defines "good standing."

Parole Officers

By law, to serve as an armed school security officer, a retired police officer must be a “qualified retired law enforcement officer” under the federal Law Enforcement Officers Safety Act (LEOSA). (LEOSA permits qualified officers, both active and retired, to carry a concealed firearm across state lines so long as they are carrying the proper identification and meet the statutory requirements.) Under the bill, parole officers must meet comparable requirements in order to qualify to provide armed school security services.

The bill allows municipalities or school boards to hire a former parole officer to provide armed security services if the officer:

1. served as a parole officer for at least 10 years or separated from service, after completing any probationary period, due to a service-connected disability, as determined by the Department of Correction (DOC);
2. has met the DOC-determined qualification standards for active patrol officer firearm training in the last 12 months, at the officer’s expense;
3. has not been found unqualified, due to mental health, to meet these firearm training standards by a mental health professional and has not entered an agreement with DOC indicating that he or she does not meet the standards;
4. is not under the influence of alcohol or another intoxicating or hallucinatory drug or substance; and
5. is not prohibited by law from receiving a firearm.

The bill subjects these former parole officers to the same annual training requirements that other retired officers must complete in order to qualify (school security training provided by the Police Officer Standards and Training Council (POST) and firearms training provided by a certified firearms instructor who meets or exceeds the POST standards or the LEOSA standards). Under the bill, these former parole

officers are also exempt from the licensing requirements for private security officers, just as current law provides for retired police officers serving as armed school security officers.

Good Standing

Under existing law, to be hired as armed school security, former officers must have retired or separated from service in good standing. Under the bill, this means that the officer did not leave his or her employment with a state or local law enforcement unit or DOC (1) due to disciplinary action or (2) while under investigation or while a disciplinary action was pending. (The bill does not define “good standing” for federal law enforcement officers or officers from another state.)

Background — Related Bill

SB 402, favorably reported by the Public Safety and Security Committee, disqualifies anyone who is prohibited from being hired by a law enforcement unit from being eligible to provide armed school security services as a retired police officer.

§ 7 — SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

Requires the Advisory Council for School Administrator Professional Standards to create a new school administrator mentorship pilot program

The bill requires the Connecticut Advisory Council for School Administrator Professional Standards, in consultation with the Connecticut Association of Schools, to create a pilot program for a new school administrator mentorship program. The pilot program must include supports, training, and professional development for new school administrators.

The council must submit a pilot program implementation plan to the Education Committee by July 1, 2027, and implement the program for the 2027-28 school year in the districts it identifies in the plan. By January 1, 2029, the council must report to the Education Committee on the pilot’s results, including recommended improvements and requirements for further implementation.

§ 8 — ACADEMIC STANDARDS FOR EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

Requires students in grades 9-12 who participate in extracurricular activities to meet CIAC and CAS academic eligibility standards

Starting July 1, 2027, the bill requires school boards to require students in grades 9 to 12 who participate in extracurricular activities to meet academic eligibility standards established by the Connecticut Association of Schools and the Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference (CAS-CIAC). This includes students who participate in after-school clubs, student publications, intramural athletics, and interscholastic athletics.

In practice, CAS-CIAC standards apply to student activities it administers. The current CAS-CIAC standards applicable to interscholastic athletics generally require students to have earned a passing grade in at least four quarter credits at the end of the most recent marking period or, for fall sports, at least four credits toward graduation during the prior school year or marking period. These standards act as a minimum standard for all schools and they allow school boards to set higher or additional standards for participation.

§ 9 — THERAPEUTIC ARTS PROGRAM GRANTS

Requires SDE to create a grant program, within available appropriations, for a therapeutic arts program in public schools starting in the 2027-28 school year

The bill requires the State Department of Education (SDE) to establish, within available appropriations, a grant program for a therapeutic arts program in public schools starting in the 2027-28 school year. Any school board or Regional Education Service Center (RES-C) is eligible for grants, but SDE must prioritize school boards and RESCs that serve school districts with high rates of exclusionary discipline (like suspensions), low access to behavioral health services, and an existing social-emotional learning program.

By January 1, 2027, SDE must determine the grant amounts and post information on its website about the program, eligibility criteria, and available grant funds. Starting by July 1, 2028, SDE must annually report to the Education Committee on the number of grants awarded and their recipients.

§ 10 — CONNECTICUT EDUCATION PREPARATION AND CERTIFICATION BOARD (CEPCB)

Extends the deadline for CEPCB's first annual report by one year

By law, CEPCB is responsible for developing standards and proposals related to educator preparation and certification, including developing flexible certification pathways and creating systems to help educators broaden their scope of practice, among other things.

CEPCB is required to annually report on standards and proposals for legislation or regulations that it or the State Board of Education develops. The bill extends the deadline for CEPCB's first annual report by one year, from January 1, 2026, to January 1, 2027.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Education Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 45 Nay 0 (03/16/2026)