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## **OLR Bill Analysis**

### **sSB 220 (File 650, as amended by Senate "A")\***

#### ***AN ACT CONCERNING STUDENT LITERACY.***

#### **SUMMARY**

This bill makes the following unrelated changes to education laws:

1. requires the State Department of Education (SDE) to create guidance for school districts on implementing targeted reading intervention to students identified as struggling in reading and codifies SDE reading assessment requirements (§§ 1 & 2);
2. modifies the aspiring educators diversity scholarship program by (a) making “aspiring educators,” rather than “diverse educators,” eligible the scholarship and (b) allowing the SDE commissioner to use a portion of unspent funds to promote the teaching profession (§§ 3 & 4);
3. requires SDE to establish the American Sign Language (ASL) education working group (§§ 5 & 6); and
4. makes permanent two health care subsidy programs for paraeducators employed by local or regional boards of education and expands the programs to include paraeducators at charter schools (§ 7).

The bill also makes several minor and technical changes.

\*Senate Amendment “A” adds the provisions on the aspiring educators scholarship, ASL working group, and paraeducator health care subsidies.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2026, except that (1) the codification of the assessment requirement and aspiring educator provisions are effective upon passage and (2) the creation of the American Sign Language working group is effective January 1, 2027.

## **§§ 1 & 2 — READING INTERVENTION AND ASSESSMENTS**

The bill requires SDE to create guidance on implementing multitiered systems of support (MTSS) or response to intervention (RTI) frameworks for students identified as struggling in reading and distribute it to local and regional boards of education (school boards). Generally, MTSS and RTI are educational approaches that identify struggling students and offer them targeted, personalized instruction to meet their needs, with services that increase in intensity (for example, in frequency or duration) as student need gets higher.

The bill codifies the requirement that school boards administer reading assessments at least three times per year to students in grades kindergarten through three. (SDE already requires all districts to do so in practice.) The assessment must be used to identify students who are reading below grade level and need more help. SDE must base the guidance it creates on data collected through these assessments.

By January 1, 2028, SDE must submit to the Education Committee a report on the guidance it creates and any legislative recommendations.

## **§§ 3 & 4 — ASPIRING EDUCATOR SCHOLARSHIP**

The bill makes “aspiring educators,” rather than “diverse educators,” eligible for existing law’s diversity teacher recruitment scholarship, which potentially broadens the pool of eligible candidates.

Under current law, the scholarship targets “diverse” students, which are those whose race is other than white, or whose ethnicity is defined as Hispanic or Latino by the federal Office of Management and Budget for use by the U.S. Census Bureau. Under the bill, an “aspiring educator” is someone from a population subgroup that (a) is underrepresented in the teaching profession in Connecticut and (b) has been identified under state law as a teacher shortage area.

Under current law, SDE commissioner annually determines geographic and subject areas with teacher shortages based on teacher vacancies, new certificates issued, and classes being taught by people without training specific to the subject area. Under the bill, the commissioner must also determine the population subgroups in which

a teacher shortage exists and, when doing so, consider those that are underrepresented in teaching in the state based on data in the statewide public school information system (see BACKGROUND).

This potentially broadens eligibility for the scholarship and shortage designation. Although the bill does not define “subgroup,” presumably, subgroup categories could include things in addition to race and ethnicity, such as gender, socio-economic status, disability, or other similar status.

The bill also allows the education commissioner to use up to \$250,000 of unexpended scholarship funds to promote the teaching profession.

### ***Scholarship Program***

Under current law, the aspiring educators diversity scholarship program, which the bill renames the aspiring educators scholarship program, awards annual scholarships of up to \$10,000 to students who graduated from high school in an alliance district (see BACKGROUND) and are enrolled in good standing in a teacher preparation program at any four-year institution of higher education. The bill eliminates the requirement that students graduate from an alliance district and replaces it with any school district in the state, which broadens eligibility.

The bill requires SDE, in consultation with the Education Committee chairpersons, to develop a policy for administering the scholarship with the new criteria by January 1, 2027. SDE must annually award scholarships under the new criteria beginning FY 27 and, beginning January 1, 2028, annually submit a report to the Education Committee with data on the scholarship recipients’ population subgroups and the teacher preparation programs in which they are enrolled.

### ***Use of Unexpended Funds to Promote Teaching Profession***

The bill allows the commissioner, by March first of each year, to determine if there are any unexpended funds in the program for the fiscal year and if so, she may use up to \$250,000 of them to implement the teaching profession promotion plan.

By law, the plan must include (1) a way for school districts to develop partnerships with in-state educator preparation programs and (2) counseling programs to inform high school students about, and recruit them to, the teaching profession. It also requires SDE to distribute to boards of education information that promotes the teaching profession, including materials on in-state educator preparation programs and alternative route to certification programs.

### **§§ 5 & 6 — AMERICAN SIGN LANGUAGE WORKING GROUP**

The bill requires SDE to establish the ASL education working group with at least eight members to make recommendations to SDE on (1) curriculum guidance for ASL instruction, (2) teacher certification standards based on standards set by the ASL Teachers Association and the ASL Proficiency Interview, and (3) guidance to educator preparation programs in the state for (a) expanding ASL and interpretation education programs and (b) incentives to become an ASL educator.

The working group must have a representative from (1) SDE, (2) the Aging and Disability Services Department, (3) the Labor Department, (4) the Office of Higher Education, (5) the Connecticut Council of Language Teachers, (6) the American School for the Deaf, and (7) the Connecticut Association of the Deaf. It must also include at least one ASL instructor who teaches in a public school in the state.

Starting by January 1, 2028, SDE must annually report to the Education Committee on the working group's progress.

By July 1, 2030, SDE must issue the ASL instruction curriculum guidance described in the bill to each local and regional board of education to ensure consistent implementation of ASL as part of the world languages curriculum required under state law. By law, world languages include ASL if it is taught by a qualified instructor who is supervised by a certified teacher.

#### ***Working Group Duties***

The bill requires the working group's recommendations to address:

1. ASL instruction curriculum guidance that includes aligning the

- curriculum with nationally recognized proficiency frameworks;
2. teacher certification standards based on standards set by the ASL Teachers Association and the ASL Proficiency Interview, including (a) establishing a proficiency benchmark, (b) recognizing an alternative certification pathway for native ASL users and interpreters, and (c) reciprocity with ASL teaching certifications from other states; and
  3. guidance for educator preparation programs in the state on (a) expanding ASL and interpretation education programs; (b) creating educational incentives, such as tuition support, credit enhancement, or alternative route programs; and (c) establishing bridge, endorsement, or alternative programs for native ASL users and certified interpreters seeking teacher certification.

## **§ 7 — PARAEDUCATORS HEALTH CARE SUBSIDY**

The bill makes permanent two health care subsidy programs for paraeducators employed by local or regional boards of education and expands the programs to include paraeducators at charter schools. Under current law, the programs expired on June 30, 2025 (but the state budget included funds for the comptroller to continue the subsidies for FY 26).

One program provides subsidies for paraeducators who (1) open a health savings account (HSA) or (2) are Medicare-eligible and enroll in a high deductible health plan (HDHP). The subsidy covers a percentage, determined by the comptroller, of the deductible for the paraeducator's health plan minus the amount of any employer contributions to an HSA or health reimbursement account.

The second program provides subsidies to school boards that provide paraeducators coverage under an employer health plan (generally, a health insurance plan) or the partnership plan (a health benefit plan the comptroller offers to nonstate public employers and certain others). The subsidy covers up to 10% of the aggregate premium cost (including both the employee and employer shares), paid by the board of education for

the coverage, divided by the number of paraeducators the board employs who are enrolled in the health plan. The subsidy must be used to offset the paraeducators' share of the premium.

The bill also eliminates an obsolete provision.

## **BACKGROUND**

### ***Public School Information System***

SDE must administer this system to (1) establish a standardized electronic data collection and reporting protocol to comply with state and federal reporting requirements, (2) improve the exchange of information from school-to-school and district-to-district, and (3) maintain the confidentiality of individual student and teacher data. In addition to students and teachers, the system includes data on individual schools and districts and preschool children (CGS § 10-10a(b) & (c)).

### ***Alliance Districts***

The alliance district program requires each of the state's 36 lowest performing school districts (as measured by the accountability index scores) to submit an improvement plan to SDE for approval before the department releases the district's alliance funding (a portion of the annual education cost sharing grant that these districts receive). The plan must detail how it intends to use its alliance funding and how this will increase student achievement.

## **COMMITTEE ACTION**

Education Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute Change of Reference APP  
Yea 46 Nay 0 (03/18/2026)

Appropriations Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute  
Yea 51 Nay 0 (04/01/2026)