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## **OLR Bill Analysis**

### **sSB 380**

#### ***AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE TASK FORCE TO SUPPORT PROMISE PROGRAMS IN THE STATE.***

#### **SUMMARY**

This bill requires the Office of Higher Education (OHE) to (1) give annual grants to each promise program in the state that was established during or prior to the previous fiscal year, beginning by September 1, 2026, and (2) create a program to support establishing new promise programs, which must prioritize alliance districts, with a goal of establishing eight new promise programs in the state by January 1, 2031. Under the bill, “promise programs” are scholarship programs that give recipients postsecondary scholarships and associated services, such as mentoring, peer support, and internships.

Additionally, the bill requires OHE to establish the Scholar Success Grant program beginning for the Fall 2026 semester. The program must award postsecondary scholarship grants to qualifying students in an amount that covers a percentage of the net cost of attendance at in-state higher education institutions. Under the bill, the grant amount a student receives depends on (1) the student’s household income bracket and (2) whether the institution is public or independent.

The bill also appropriates to OHE \$4,800,000 for promise program grants and \$30,000,000 for the Scholar Success Grant program from the General Fund for FY 27.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2026

#### **PROMISE PROGRAMS**

The bill requires OHE to (1) give grants to existing promise programs and (2) create a program to support the establishment of new promise programs.

### ***Existing Promise Programs Grants***

The bill requires OHE to give annual grants equal to \$3,000 per enrolled student to each promise program in the state that was established during or prior to the previous fiscal year, beginning by September 1, 2026.

Additionally, beginning by July 1, 2027, each promise program that receives a grant must report annually to OHE on scholarship recipient outcomes, including information on graduation rates, postsecondary program enrollment, and job placements.

### ***OHE Program to Create New Promise Programs***

The bill requires OHE to establish a program to support the creation of new promise programs throughout the state. The program must prioritize programs serving students in alliance districts (see BACKGROUND) and maintain a goal of establishing eight new promise programs by January 1, 2031.

Through the program, OHE must:

1. coordinate with municipalities and regional coalitions;
2. support each new promise program with funding for start-up expenses (in an amount designated by the commissioner);
3. provide each new promise program with start-up technical assistance, including on strategies related to funding, stakeholder engagement, program design, evaluation, and sustainability;
4. hire a consultant with expertise in developing and operating promise programs; and
5. annually submit to the General Assembly a progress report from the consultant until January 1, 2031, or until eight new promise programs are established, whichever is first.

### **SCHOLAR SUCCESS GRANT**

The bill requires OHE to establish the Scholar Success Grant program beginning with the Fall 2026 semester. Under the program, OHE must

award grants in an amount that covers a percentage of the net cost of attendance, with the amount depending on (1) the student's household income bracket and (2) whether the institution is public or independent. Under the bill, the "net cost of attendance" equals the rate of tuition and fees established by the higher education institution for the 2026-2027 academic year minus an average amount of financial aid received by a student in that student's income bracket.

Under the bill, OHE must issue each Scholar Success Grant directly to the higher education institution where the qualifying student is enrolled.

Additionally, OHE must annually report on the program to the Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee beginning by January 1, 2026. The report must include the (1) number of students that received grants, (2) recipients' household income brackets, and (3) amount of grants received by each higher education institution.

***Student Eligibility Qualifications***

To qualify for a grant under the program, a student must:

1. be a Connecticut resident,
2. have attended a public or private high school in the state for all four years and graduated from it with a cumulative attendance rate of at least 90%,
3. enroll full-time at a higher education institution in a bachelor degree program not more than one year after graduating high school, and
4. make satisfactory academic progress and maintain good academic standing while enrolled at the institution.

Additionally, qualifying students must have completed the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and have accepted all available financial aid, including scholarships, grants, and federal, state,

and institutional aid (“financial aid” does not include federal, state, or private student loans).

Under the bill, qualifying students can receive grants (1) for up to six consecutive years or (2) until they graduate, whichever comes first.

### ***Requirements for Higher Education Institutions***

Under the bill, higher education institutions that enroll students who receive a grant under this program must provide these students with:

1. a first-year experience program that supports the student’s transition from high school to higher education through specialized academic support, peer mentorship, orientation, and connection to campus resources;
2. a financial literacy program during the spring or summer before the student enrolls;
3. a transparent, easily understandable multi-year financial aid award letter; and
4. an advisor to help make financial, academic, and career decisions.

### ***Award Amounts***

The following tables shows the percentage of the net cost of attendance covered under the grant based on the qualifying student’s household income if the student attends a public (Table 1) or independent (Table 2) higher education institution.

**Table : Scholar Success Grant Amounts for Public Higher Education Institutions**

<b><i>Household Income of Qualifying Student</i></b>	<b><i>Percentage of the Net Cost of Attendance Covered Under the Grant</i></b>
\$30,000 or less	40%
Above \$30,000 and up to \$48,000	36%
Above \$48,000 and up to \$75,000	32%
Above \$75,000 and up to \$110,000	28%
Above \$110,000	24%

**Table : Scholar Success Grant Amounts for Independent Higher Education Institutions**

<i>Household Income of Qualifying Student</i>	<i>Percentage of the Net Cost of Attendance Covered Under the Grant</i>
\$30,000 or less	20%
Above \$30,000 and up to \$48,000	16%
Above \$48,000 and up to \$75,000	12%
Above \$75,000	8%

## **BACKGROUND**

### ***Alliance Districts***

By law, the education commissioner has designated 36 alliance districts for five years, beginning with FY 23. The current designation applies to (1) the 33 school districts with the lowest accountability index scores and (2) three previously designated districts that were no longer among the 33 with the lowest scores. The index is based on several student-centered measures, including statewide assessment results and high school graduation rates, among others.

## **COMMITTEE ACTION**

Higher Education and Employment Advancement Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 18                      Nay 0