

OFFICE OF LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH
PUBLIC ACT SUMMARY



PA 19-166—sHB 7215
Committee on Children
Education Committee

AN ACT CONCERNING SCHOOL CLIMATES

SUMMARY: This act makes numerous changes to the laws related to school bullying and safe school climate. Principally, it:

1. establishes a 33-member social and emotional learning and school climate advisory collaborative and tasks it with, among other things, developing a biennial state-wide school climate survey, model positive school climate policy, and student suicide risk assessment (§§ 1-3);
2. requires the State Department of Education (SDE), by August 1, 2021, to publish on its website the model policy and school climate survey the collaborative develops (§ 2);
3. modifies the definition of bullying by, among other things, eliminating the requirement that the action occur between students (§ 3);
4. (a) specifies that schools, when they contact parents and guardians whose children have been involved in bullying, must let the parents know the results of the investigation into the incident and (b) requires the schools to also notify the parents or guardians that they may refer to information on the board of education's website about rights and remedies under school law (§ 3);
5. requires boards of education to publish such information in plain language on their websites by June 30, 2021 (§ 4); and
6. requires boards of education, in consultation with the collaborative and SDE, to provide on the department website certain training materials for school administrators on bullying prevention and intervention (§ 5).

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage for the collaborative provisions (§§ 1 & 2); July 1, 2021, for the bullying provisions (§ 3), and July 1, 2019, for the plain language explanation of rights and discrimination training provisions (§§ 4 & 5).

§§ 1-3 — SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND SCHOOL CLIMATE ADVISORY COLLABORATIVE

The act establishes a 33-member Social and Emotional Learning and School Climate Advisory Collaborative and tasks it with the following:

1. collecting information on school climate improvement efforts of local and regional boards of education;
2. documenting any needs the boards articulate for technical assistance and training to foster positive school climates;
3. identifying best practices to promote positive school climates;

OLR PUBLIC ACT SUMMARY

4. directing resources to support state-wide and local initiatives to foster and improve positive school climates and improve access to social and emotional learning in schools;
5. developing a (a) suicide risk screening for students in grades 3-12, which must be submitted by July 1, 2020, to the Children's and Education committees, along with any associated recommendations, (b) biennial state-wide school climate survey, and (c) model positive school climate policy;
6. (a) developing a plain language explanation to distribute to parents and guardians that describes their right to file a written complaint with the State Board of Education alleging the local or regional board of education's failure to implement the state's educational interests and the related remedies and (b) providing the explanation of these rights and remedies to each board of education by January 1, 2021; and
7. performing other functions concerning social and emotional learning and fostering positive school climates.

Definitions

Under the act, a "school climate" means the quality and character of school life based on patterns of students', parents', and school employees' experiences of school life, including norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures. Prior law defined "school climate" as the quality and character of school life, with a particular focus on the quality of the relationships within the school community between and among students and adults.

The act defines a "positive school climate" as a school climate in which:

1. norms, values, expectations, and beliefs are promoted that support feeling socially, emotionally, and physically safe;
2. students, their parents and guardians, and school employees feel engaged and respected and work together to develop and contribute to a shared school vision;
3. educators model and nurture attitudes that emphasize the benefits and satisfaction gained from learning; and
4. each person feels comfortable contributing to the school's operation and care of its physical environment.

"Social and emotional learning" means the process through which people achieve emotional intelligence through self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

"Emotional intelligence" means a person's ability to:

1. perceive, recognize, understand, and manage his or her emotions and those of others;
2. use emotions to facilitate cognitive activities, including reasoning, problem solving, and interpersonal communication; and
3. understand and identify emotions.

OLR PUBLIC ACT SUMMARY

Membership

The collaborative members include 22 legislative appointees as described in the table below.

Legislative Appointees

Appointing Authority	Number of Appointees	Qualifications
House speaker	Five	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CT Association of Boards of Education representative • Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee member • School administrator with experience in district-level, equity-focused, and cross-disciplinary social and emotional learning • Representative of an organization that provides free or reduced-cost legal services • CT Parent Power representative
Senate president pro tempore	Five	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CT Association of Schools representative • CT Association of School Administrators representative • Social Emotional Learning Alliance for CT representative • CT School Counselor Association representative • CT Association of Public School Superintendents representative
House majority leader	Three	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special Education Equity for Kids of CT representative • CT Parent Advocacy Center representative

OLR PUBLIC ACT SUMMARY

Appointing Authority	Number of Appointees	Qualifications
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • African Caribbean American Parents of Children with Disabilities, Inc. representative
Senate majority leader	Three	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Center for Children's Advocacy representative • Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence representative • Representative of UConn's Neag School of Education
House minority leader	Three	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • American Federation of Teachers – CT representative • Center for Social and Emotional Learning at Central CT State University representative • CT Parent Teacher Association representative
Senate minority leader	Three	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CT Education Association representative • National Alliance on Mental Illness – CT representative • Youth Suicide Advisory Board representative

The collaborative members also include the:

1. chairpersons and ranking members of the Children's and Education committees and
2. education commissioner, child advocate, and Commission on Women, Children and Seniors (CWCS) executive director, or their designees (PA 19-117, §§ 105-143 & 388, merges the CWCS and the Commission on Equity and Opportunity into a single entity, the Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity and Opportunity.)

Appointments to the collaborative must be made by August 7, 2019, and the collaborative must hold its first meeting by September 6, 2019. Under the act, the

OLR PUBLIC ACT SUMMARY

collaborative must be chaired by the CWCS executive director or his designee and a co-chairperson elected from among the members. CWCS staff must serve as the collaborative's administrative staff. The appointing authorities must fill any vacancies.

The collaborative may designate subcommittees and advisory groups to carry out its functions, as long as they are composed of collaborative members.

Reporting Requirement

The collaborative must annually report to the Children's and Education committees, beginning by January 1, 2021, any recommendations and its efforts to:

1. monitor the school climate improvement efforts of the boards of education,
2. document needs for technical assistance and training to foster positive school climates,
3. identify best practices for promoting positive school climates, and
4. direct resources to support state-wide and local initiatives on fostering and improving positive school climates and improving access to social and emotional learning.

Model Positive School Climate Policy

The act requires the collaborative, by January 1, 2020, to develop a model positive school climate policy. In doing so, it may review safe school climate plans that local and regional boards of education have developed and implemented (see "Safe School Climate Plans" below).

School Climate Survey

The act requires the collaborative, by July 1, 2021, to develop a biennial state-wide school climate survey and provide it to SDE. The survey must be designed to obtain confidential information from school employees and students' parents and guardians concerning their impressions of the school's climate. The survey must ask about their impressions of:

1. the school's student learning environment, including academic supports and resources, and school safety;
2. school employee communication to parents and guardians about students;
3. the teaching environment at the school, including employee resources, supports, and professional development; school leadership; and collaborative planning time availability;
4. whether there is a positive climate at the school;
5. whether individuals of all races, ethnicities, and cultural backgrounds feel welcome at the school; and
6. (a) the availability of supports and strategies to develop and retain teachers and administrators, including minority teachers and administrators, school

OLR PUBLIC ACT SUMMARY

psychologists, and counselors, and (b) suggestions for increasing the availability of such supports and strategies.

§ 3 — BULLYING DEFINITION

The act modifies the definition of “bullying” to mean an act that is direct or indirect and severe, persistent, or pervasive and (1) causes a student emotional or physical harm, (2) places a student in reasonable fear of such harm, or (3) infringes on a student’s rights or opportunities at school. Under this definition, the actions do not necessarily have to occur between two students.

Prior law defined “bullying” as one or more students’ repeated use of a written, oral, or electronic communication directed at or referring to a student in the same school district, or a physical act or gesture repeatedly directed at another student in the district, that (1) causes a student physical or emotional harm or property damage, (2) places the student in fear of such harm or property damage, (3) creates a hostile school environment for the student, (4) infringes on his or her rights at school, or (5) substantially disrupts the school’s education process or orderly operation.

As under existing law, bullying includes written, oral, or electronic communication or a physical act or gesture on the basis of having, or associating with individuals who have, certain actual or perceived characteristics (e.g., race, gender, or disability).

§ 3 — SAFE SCHOOL CLIMATE PLANS

Existing law requires boards of education to develop and implement a safe school climate plan to address bullying in schools, among other things. The plan must require schools, within 48 hours of completing an investigation into alleged bullying, to notify the parents or guardian of the (1) student who committed the bullying and (2) student against whom the bullying was directed.

The act specifies that this notice must include the results of the investigation. It additionally requires the notice, which must be verbal and by email if the parents’ or guardians’ email addresses are known, to inform them that they may refer to the plain language explanation of their legal rights and remedies that is published on the board of education’s website as required by the act.

§ 5 — SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR TRAINING

The act requires boards of education to develop training materials for school administrators in consultation with SDE and the collaborative the act establishes. The materials, which must be provided on SDE’s website, must provide information on preventing and intervening in discrimination against, and targeted harassment of, students based on their (1) actual or perceived differentiating characteristics (e.g., race, color, or physical disability) or (2) association with individuals or groups who have one or more such characteristics. The materials may be developed in consultation with, or provided by, one or more organizations

OLR PUBLIC ACT SUMMARY

offering training on identifying, preventing, and intervening in discrimination.