

Education Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-6621

AN ACT CONCERNING ASSORTED REVISIONS AND ADDITIONS TO THE

Title: EDUCATION STATUTES.

Vote Date: 3/22/2021

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/17/2021

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Education Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill seeks to makes revisions and additions to the education statutes.

Section 1: Current law allows 1% of a town's electors to petition the board of education to hold a public hearing on any question; the bill limits the topic of the hearing to only questions related to the board's provision of education.

Section 2: Allows annual in-school vision screening for grades K-1 and 3-5 in public schools to be performed using (1) a Snellen chart or an equivalent screening device or (2) an automated vision screening device (current law offered the equivalent screening device for the automated device, not the Snellen chart).

Section 3: Establishes a 14-member task force to study issues relating to special education, including providing special education, the cost of special education and the annual percentage increase or decrease per school district, how special education costs affect a district's minimum budget requirement, and state special education reimbursement to boards of education

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Charlene Russell Tucker, Acting Commissioner, State Department of Education:

The Department generally supports this proposal but has comments for further clarification. The purpose of the amended language in Section 2 is to allow the vision screening required by the statute to be performed by use of an automated vision screening device. The existing statute required the automated vision screening device to be equivalent to a Snellen chart; this effectively precluded the use of an automated vision screening device because such a device is not equivalent to a Snellen Chart. The statute as amended allows a school district, if it so chooses, to use an automated vision screening device and to obtain the benefits which result from the use of such a device. There are other vision tests/charts that are appropriate to be used for children not developmentally able to respond to the Snellen Chart (These concerns seem to have been addressed in substitute language). We also recommend that the statute include definition of “an automated vision screening device” to provide assurances as to the validity of the device being used.

Bryan Hurlburt, Commissioner, State Department of Agriculture: Farm-to-School empowers children and their families to make informed food choices while strengthening the local economy provides benefits to students, parents, schools, communities, and food producers, including increased market opportunities for small and diverse farms. For the program to have maximum effectiveness for our students and local farms, the program must be designed to enable the Department of Agriculture to efficiently execute this program by designating an annual funding level and allowing us to take advantage of any and all funding and educational resources available on a local, state, and national level.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Erica Biagetti, President, School Nutrition Association of Connecticut; Jiff Martin; Martha Page, Chair, Hartford Advisory Commission on Food Policy

Connecting children to local gardens and farms has positive long lasting educational, health and economic impacts. Despite the pandemic, some districts have managed to continue to bring in fresh produce and maintain their school gardens, but there is much rebuilding that needs to occur. Having CT Grown for CT Kids grants will strengthen existing connections and enable more schools and districts to participate in CT grown programs.

Samantha Levy, New York Policy Manager, American Farmland Trust/FINYS:

Farm-to-School incentive and grants programs are investments in public health and economic growth when we need them most. The type of systemic culture changes necessary to improve students’ diets at school wouldn’t happen without a widely accessible program addressing the number one barrier schools reported facing when trying to bring local food into the cafeteria: cost. The progress made so far on the incentive program would not be possible without the Farm to School Grants Program.

Valerie Bryan; Robert Chang, Owner, Echo Farm; Kelly Caisse, Farmer; April Flores; Christina Connolly; Dawn Crayco, Program Director, FoodCorps Connecticut; Deborah Greig, Farm Director, Common Ground; Shannon Raider; Robin Lamott Sparks, Executive Director, End Hunger CT!; Alexander Leigh, District Chief, Brigaid; Lisa Lenskold, Co-Founder, Norwalk Grows; Susan Mitchell, Owner, Cloverleigh Farm; Krizl Soriano, Board Chair, New Britain ROOTS; Dana Stevens, Farm to Institution New England

The CT Grown for CT Kids grant program is a triple win: for our children, who deserve nutritious and delicious food at school; for our farmers, who need an opportunity for growth; and for our economy. The program will strengthen the connection communities have with fresh, healthy food and local food producers by changing food purchasing and education practices at schools and early care sites. Funding from CT Grown for CT Kids can support food-insecure students with healthy, local food, educational experiences for students through STEM and nutrition curriculum, mental well-being of students by bolstering resilience, and providing social emotional support, and school districts as well as early childhood providers in cultivating relationships with local farmers to purchase, promote, and serve CT Grown food.

Sally Mancini, Director of Advocacy Resources, UConn Rudd Center for FPO; Michael Podeszwa, Principal, Winthrop STEM Elementary Magnet School

This grant supports the unique farm to school programming needs of CT communities including early care and education settings. Furthermore, a CT Grown for CT Kids Grant Program works to counteract the marketing of unhealthy, processed food that surrounds children and negatively affects their diet and health. Exposure to food marketing increases calories consumed, preferences for unhealthy product categories, and perceptions of product healthfulness.

Paul McComiskey, Executive chef, New London High Multi-Magnet Campus: Creating a direct link between the youth that reside in this community and the local food producers just outside their orbit provides an invaluable resource in education, nutrition, and food security. Farmers are natural educators, informing their community on a variety of health and ecological benefits through the production and consumption of responsibly farmed, local food.

Tim Sullivan, Superintendent, CREC Schools:

We urge the committee to incorporate the \$4.5 million into a general fund line item to be included within the SDE budget for purposes of funding this program annually for all districts. This funding would support four planned cohorts for up to 60 residents of color starting their Alternate Route to Certification this summer.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

There are no sources of opposition for this bill.

Reported by: Dallas Emerle

Date: 3/25/2021