



PA 21-199—SB 1032

Education Committee

AN ACT CONCERNING VARIOUS REVISIONS AND ADDITIONS TO THE STATUTES RELATING TO EDUCATION AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

SUMMARY: This act makes the following changes in the education statutes:

1. creates a new reporting requirement for boards of education that decline to implement the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) of the National School Lunch Program in certain schools or districtwide (§ 1);
2. requires local and regional boards of education to develop a policy by July 1, 2022, for equitable identification of gifted and talented students that uses multiple identification methods that comply with State Department of Education (SDE) guidelines (§ 2);
3. requires boards of education to create a policy for student placement in advanced academic courses or programs that is not based exclusively on academic performance (§ 3);
4. creates a new content requirement for grade 6-12 student success plans and generally requires the plans to be created in collaboration with students and their parents or guardians (§ 4);
5. requires boards of education to adopt a new challenging curriculum policy (§ 5);
6. requires boards of education to adopt a policy to improve the completion rates for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) among grade 12 students or students in adult education programs (§ 6);
7. adds to the list of goals that a board of education may include in its alliance district funding application (§ 7);
8. requires SDE to publish and make available on its website the annual FAFSA student completion rate for the graduating class of each high school and each school district (§ 8);
9. requires the education commissioner to establish a working group to develop ways to improve student FAFSA completion rates (§ 9);
10. raises, from 17 to 18, the age when a student may withdraw from high school but also allows a parent or guardian of a 17-year-old to withdraw the student if he or she enrolls in an adult education program (§ 10);
11. generally raises, from 17 to 18, the minimum age at which a student can get permission from the education commissioner to take the GED or another SDE-approved high school equivalency test (§ 11);
12. authorizes the education commissioner to make recommendations to the Office of Policy and Management (OPM) and the Education Committee about policies to make higher education more affordable (§ 12); and
13. requires boards of education to update their written weighted grading

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policy to address additional courses and programs (§ 13).

The act also makes technical and conforming changes.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2021, except the provisions on the FAFSA working group (§ 9) and SDE recommendations about new initiatives (§ 12) take effect upon passage.

§ 1 — SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAM REPORTING

The act creates a new reporting requirement for certain boards of education that participate in the National School Lunch Program administered by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. One component of this program, CEP, generally gives federal reimbursement to a school or an entire district to serve free breakfast and lunch to all students without collecting household applications. A school may do this if at least 40% of its enrolled students participate in another means-tested program, such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. Eligible Connecticut schools and districts that wish to participate must submit required documentation to SDE.

Under the act, any board of education that has at least one school in its district that qualifies for the maximum federal reimbursement for all school meals served under the CEP, and chooses not to implement the CEP, must annually report to SDE starting by December 1, 2021, on the reasons why. The report must include (1) specific impediments to implementing the CEP; (2) actions required to remove these impediments; and (3) a plan to implement the CEP the following school year, if possible.

§ 3 — ADVANCED COURSE ENROLLMENT POLICY

Under the act, local and regional boards of education must adopt a policy (or revise an existing one) by July 1, 2022, about student eligibility to enroll in advanced courses or programs. The act defines these courses and programs as honors or advanced placement classes, the International Baccalaureate or Cambridge International programs, dual enrollment, dual credit, early college, or any other advanced or accelerated course or program offered by a school board in grades 9-12.

This policy cannot be based solely on students' previous academic performance (i.e., prior courses taken, course grades and grade point averages). Any policy that uses prior academic performance must rely on evidence-based indicators of how a student will perform in the advanced course or program. Additionally, the policy must align with SDE guidance and offer multiple ways for students to become eligible, including recommendations from teachers, administrators, school counselors, or other school personnel.

§ 4 — STUDENT SUCCESS PLANS

By law, boards of education must create a student success plan for each public school student beginning in grade 6. The plan must include the student's career

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and academic choices in grades 6 to 12.

Beginning July 1, 2021, the act requires student success plans to be created in collaboration with each student and his or her parent or guardian, if possible. Beginning July 1, 2022, the plans must include an academic plan that complies with the respective school district's challenging curriculum policy (see § 5 below) to the extent that it does not conflict with the career choices in the plan.

§ 5 — CHALLENGING CURRICULUM POLICY

Under the act, each board of education must adopt a challenging curriculum policy by July 1, 2022, that aligns with SDE guidance and includes at least the following: (1) criteria for identifying grade 8 and 9 students who may enroll in an advanced course or program and (2) the requirement that these students have an academic plan.

The academic plan must be designed to enroll the student in one or more advanced courses or programs and allow the student to earn college credit or result in career readiness. Furthermore, the academic plan must be aligned with the following:

1. the courses or programs currently offered by the board of education,
2. the student's student success plan (see § 4 above),
3. the high school graduation requirements established in state law, and
4. any other board-adopted policies or standards relating to student enrollment eligibility for advanced courses or programs.

The act allows a student or his or her parent or guardian to decline to implement the academic plan's provisions.

§ 6 — FAFSA COMPLETION RATES

The act requires boards of education to adopt a policy by July 1, 2022, to improve the FAFSA completion rates among grade 12 students or students in adult education programs. It allows boards to accept gifts, grants, and donations, including in-kind donations, to implement the adopted policy provisions.

§ 7 — ALLIANCE DISTRICT PLANS

The act adds to the list of goals that a board of education may include in its application to the SDE commissioner for alliance district funds. Specifically, it allows boards to add the goal of implementing its policy to improve FAFSA completion rates by students in grade 12 or adult education, or by their parents when applicable (see § 6 above). By law, the state awards these funds to the 30 school districts that have the lowest achievement as rated by the state's accountability index, plus any districts previously designated as alliance districts (CGS § 10-262u).

§ 8 — FAFSA COMPLETION RATE PUBLICATION

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The act requires SDE, starting by July 1, 2024, to annually publish and make available on its website the student FAFSA completion rate for the graduating class of each high school and each school district. It also allows SDE to refrain from publishing completion data for certain students entering careers that are not relevant or applicable to FAFSA completion.

§ 9 — FAFSA WORKING GROUP

The act requires the education commissioner to establish a working group to develop ways to improve student FAFSA completion rates. The group's membership must be comprised of at least 11 members, including the Office of Higher Education executive director, Connecticut State Colleges and Universities president, and UConn president, or their designees and one representative from each of the following organizations:

1. Connecticut Association of Boards of Education;
2. Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents;
3. Connecticut Education Association;
4. American Federation of Teachers-Connecticut;
5. Connecticut Association of Schools;
6. RESC Alliance;
7. Connecticut School Counselor Association; and
8. Connecticut Students for a DREAM.

The act requires the working group to report its strategies and recommendations to the Education and Higher Education and Employment Advancement committees by December 1, 2024.

§ 10 — AGE OF WITHDRAWAL FROM HIGH SCHOOL

The act raises, from 17 to 18, the age when a student may withdraw from high school, beginning in the 2023-24 school year. The student or his or her parent must appear in person at the school to withdraw.

The act also allows a parent or guardian to withdraw a 17-year-old student but requires the student's simultaneous enrollment in an adult education program. The parent or guardian must appear in person at the school district office to sign an adult education withdrawal and enrollment form, which must include an attestation from (1) a school counselor or administrator stating that the school district has provided the parent or guardian information about the educational options available in the school system and community and (2) the parent or guardian stating that the student will be enrolled in an adult education program upon withdrawing from school.

§ 11 — GED AGE

The act correspondingly raises the minimum age, from 17 to 18 years old, at which a student who has officially withdrawn from school can get permission from the education commissioner to take the GED or another SDE-approved high

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school equivalency test in order to earn a state high school diploma. However, a 17-year old student may also take the test with the commissioner's permission, for good cause shown.

§ 12 — SDE RECOMMENDATIONS TO OPM AND THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

The act allows the education commissioner, with State Board of Education approval, to make recommendations by January 1, 2022, to the OPM secretary and the Education Committee on the following topics:

1. educating students and families about the net cost of college, the use of federal Pell grants to increase college affordability, and the varying income potential of different college and certificate programs;
2. strategies for removing barriers and simplifying access to high-quality postsecondary education and training options, including nondegree programs;
3. the feasibility of establishing an early high school graduation program in which boards of education grant scholarships to students who graduate high school in three years or less to attend an undergraduate, in-person program at a non-profit Connecticut higher education institution; and
4. the feasibility of developing a standardized exit survey for all grade 12 students.

Under the act, the education commissioner must consult with parents, teachers, and school administrators in developing the above recommendations. The commissioner may also establish a working group to help create the recommendations.

§ 13 — WEIGHTED GRADING POLICY

The act requires boards of education to update as necessary the written weighted grading policy for honors and advanced placement classes that they must have under existing law. It specifies that this policy must address how students' grade point averages are calculated.

Under the act, the board must update the policy to address whether the following courses or programs also receive added weight for grade point average and class rank calculation, in addition to honors and advanced placement classes under existing law: International Baccalaureate, Cambridge International, dual enrollment, dual credit, or early college.