
OLR Bill Analysis

sSB 1

AN ACT CONCERNING TRANSPARENCY IN EDUCATION.

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BACKGROUND

§§ 1-3 — REVIEW OF CHART OF ACCOUNTS

Requires SDE, starting by January 1, 2024, to annually review of each school district's chart of accounts for the previous fiscal year; requires SDE to prepare a report for each school board using the chart of accounts that includes information in certain categories;

requires SDE to submit the chart of accounts to the Education and Appropriations committees by July 1, 2023

The bill requires the State Department of Education (SDE), starting by January 1, 2024, to annually review each local or regional board of education's (i.e., "school board") chart of accounts for the previous fiscal year, which current law generally requires each school board to file with SDE (see below). Following the review, SDE must prepare for each school board a report that includes the school district's financial information for the following categories:

1. expense function (e.g., instruction, support services, operation and maintenance, transportation, etc.);
2. expense object (e.g., salaries, benefits, purchased services, supplies, etc.);
3. education type;
4. pre-k flag (presumably, the pre-k code used by SDE's Education Financial System);
5. allocation; and
6. funding source.

Within each category, the financial information must be disaggregated by each SDE education financial system code.

The bill requires the report and the chart of accounts for each school board to be made available on the SDE website.

By law, SDE must develop and implement a uniform system of accounting for school revenues and expenditures that includes a chart of accounts for use at the school and school district level. The chart of accounts generally must include all amounts and sources of revenue and cash or real property donations, that in aggregate total \$500 or more, that a board of education, regional education service center (RESC), charter school, or charter management organization receives.

Current law also requires school boards, RESCs, and state charter schools to implement this uniform system by filing annual financial reports. The bill sets a new deadline by requiring that the first annual financial reports apply to FY 24, essentially waiving the requirement for FY 23 reports. It also makes a corresponding change requiring SDE to submit the chart of accounts to the Education and Appropriations committees by July 1, 2023.

The bill changes references in the related law to specify that the receipts, expenditures, and statistics are submitted by filing the chart of accounts. And as under current law, the bill allows any revisions of the information to be submitted by December 31, but it also specifies that this must be done using the chart of accounts. The bill also eliminates a provision that the education commissioner can waive the penalty (between \$1,000 and \$10,000) for good cause.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage, except the provision on SDE's annual review of each school board's chart of accounts and reports for each school district is effective July 1, 2023.

§§ 4 & 5 — NEW BOARD OF EDUCATION MEMBER REQUIRED TRAINING

Requires SDE to provide, and newly elected school board members to take, training on the responsibilities and obligations of being a school board member

The bill requires SDE to develop a training program that at least includes the role and responsibilities of a school board member, the duties and obligations of a board of education, and school district budgeting and education finance. SDE must begin offering the annual training by July 1, 2023, and first-time elected school board members must complete the training at a time and in a way SDE determines, but within one year after assuming office.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2023

§ 6 — FIELD EXPERIENCE FOR STUDENT TEACHERS

Removes a requirement that student teacher field experience be divided between different groups of school districts categorized by DRG status

By law, teacher preparation programs must require students in their

programs to perform clinical experience, field experience, or student teaching during four semesters of the program. Current law requires this experience to be performed in two separate categories of school districts. The categories are determined by District Reference Groups (DRGs), which is a method of sorting school districts by lettered groups “A” through “I,” with “A” being the group of school districts that is the top performing academically and “I” being the lowest.

The bill eliminates the requirement that the clinical, field, or student teaching experience occur in two categories: one from the DRGs in the category that includes from “A” to “E” and one from the DRGs “F” to “I.”

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2023

§ 7 — ALLIANCE DISTRICTS

Modifies the alliance district program by, among other things, removing the limit on new districts and specifically allowing alliance funds to be used on new family resource centers

Under current law, the education commissioner has designated 36 alliance districts for five years, beginning with FY 23. The designation applies to (1) the 33 school districts with the lowest accountability index (AI) scores and (2) three districts that were designated in previous years but may not now be among the 33 with the lowest scores (see *Background*).

The bill removes a limit on the number of alliance districts by allowing the education commissioner to designate additional school districts as alliance districts without a limit. The bill also removes the five-year term on the designation.

The alliance program generally requires the comptroller to withhold from an alliance district town any increase in education cost sharing (ECS) funds that exceeds the amount the town received in 2012 or, for districts designated last year, the amount of the ECS funds over the FY 22 amount. The comptroller transfers the money to the education commissioner to withhold until she approves the district’s alliance district application and plan to improve academic performance. The bill makes a conforming change for newly designated alliance districts,

requiring the comptroller to withhold any increase in ECS funds received over the amount the town received in the fiscal year prior to the alliance designation.

The bill also expands the items that alliance funding can be spent on to include establishing a family resource center in each elementary school under the school board's jurisdiction. Family resource centers provide child care services, remedial educational and literacy services, families-in-training programs, and support services to parents receiving temporary family assistance or other parents in need.

By law, alliance districts must spend their alliance funds (1) according to the plan submitted with the application; (2) on the minority candidate certification, retention, and residency program; (3) on ECS spending requirements; and (4) for any other items allowed under SDE guidelines.

Background — Accountability Index Scores

By law, the “accountability index score” for a school district or an individual school is the score resulting from multiple weighted measures that (1) include the mastery test scores (i.e., the performance index score) and high school graduation rates and (2) may include academic growth over time, attendance and chronic absenteeism, postsecondary education and career readiness, enrollment in and graduation from higher education institutions and postsecondary education programs, civics and arts education, and physical fitness (CGS § 10-223e(a)).

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2023

§ 8 — PATHWAYS IN TECHNOLOGY EARLY COLLEGE HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAM GRANT

Requires SDE to create a grant for new or expanded pathways in technology early college high school programs in alliance districts

The bill requires SDE to create a grant for new or expanded pathways in technology early college high school programs in alliance districts. Under the bill a “pathways in technology early college high school program” is an instructional program in which students in grades nine

to 12, inclusive, complete high school and college-level coursework while also engaging in industry-guided workforce development.

Starting with FY 2024, SDE must annually issue a request for proposals to alliance district school boards to (1) enhance an existing pathways in technology early college high school program or (2) establish a new public-private partnership (i.e., a relationship between an alliance district board of education, a community college, and a private entity to create a pathways in technology early college high school program).

The department must review the proposals and award a grant to two school boards for the costs associated with establishing a new public-private partnership or enhancing a pathway in technology early college high school program.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2023

§ 9 — LIMITS ON SALE OF CERTAIN FOODS IN SCHOOL

Prohibits the sale of food in school if the name or brand on the packaging is similar to that of a product sold outside of school but the nutritional value is different

The bill prohibits the sale of food in a public school (or to a board of education) if the name or branding on the food packaging offered in the school is the same or similar as on the packaging offered outside of the school in the general market place, but the nutritional value is different.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2023

§ 10 — WHOLESOME SCHOOL MEALS PILOT PROGRAM

Requires SDE to administer a wholesome school meals pilot program to award five grants to alliance districts to embed a professional chef in the district to assist school meal programs

For FYs 24 to 26, the bill requires SDE to administer a wholesome school meals pilot program that awards five grants to embed a professional chef in five alliance districts. The chef must help school meal programs build food service staff capacity, improve meal quality, increase diner satisfaction, streamline operations, and establish a financially viable school meal program.

The bill requires SDE to partner with an organization that specializes in placing chefs for the pilot program's purposes.

Under the bill, an alliance district may apply for the grant by October 1, 2023, on an application the department sets.

Application Review and Grant Awards

The bill requires SDE to review each application and award five grants. Each grant recipient must receive an annual \$150,000 grant in each year of the pilot. The grant must be spent on the wholesome meals pilot program.

Report to the Legislature

By January 1, 2027, SDE must report on the school meals pilot program to the Education and Appropriations committees.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2023

BACKGROUND

Related Bill

sHB 5003, favorably reported out by the Education Committee, revises the alliance district program by lowering the number designated from 36 to 20 and renames them educational reform districts.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Education Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 28 Nay 16 (03/24/2023)