

OFFICE OF LEGISLATIVE RESEARCH
PUBLIC ACT SUMMARY



PA 24-78—sSB 14
Education Committee
Appropriations Committee

**AN ACT ASSISTING SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN IMPROVING
EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES, IMPLEMENTING THE
RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND
THE TECHNICAL EDUCATION AND CAREER SYSTEM AND
ESTABLISHING EARLY START CT**

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Allows the OEC commissioner to allocate funds to (1) RESCs to provide professional development services, technical assistance and evaluation, and program planning and implementation activities, and (2) other entities, including boards of education

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Adjusts contract or grant amounts for FY 25 for certain early childhood programs that are repealed and replaced by the Early Start CT program on July 1, 2025

§ 39 — FAMILY CHILD CARE HOME LICENSE EXPANSION

Allows the OEC commissioner to issue licenses for up to 20 family child care home facilities anywhere in the state; adjusts the expiration date for all of the licenses the OEC commissioner issued under the family child care home license expansion

§ 40 — SMART START COMPETITIVE GRANT PROGRAM

Removes the cap on annual operating expense grants under the Connecticut Smart Start Program

SUMMARY: This act makes numerous unrelated changes to the education and early childhood statutes, as summarized in the section-by-section analysis below.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2024, unless otherwise noted below.

§§ 1 & 2 — TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS AND RESOURCES

Requires SDE's Center for Literacy Research and Reading Success to make certain resources available to the faculty of teacher preparation programs; expands the requirement that SDE's Office of Dyslexia and Reading Disabilities verify compliance with certain standards for educator preparation programs and educator certification applicants

The act requires the State Department of Education's (SDE's) Center for Literacy Research and Reading Success to make available to the faculty of teacher preparation programs (1) resources and research supporting scientifically based reading instruction (see *Background — Scientifically Based Reading Research and*

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Instruction) and (2) Connecticut's K-3 Literacy Strategy that the center develops. It replaces prior law's requirements that the center make available (1) materials related to the science of teaching reading, (2) the intensive reading instruction program, and (3) samples of available reviewed and approved reading curriculum models or programs. It also eliminates the requirement for the center to report on teacher preparation programs' progress in including these models or programs.

By law, SDE's Office of Dyslexia and Reading Disabilities must verify that educator preparation programs and applicants for educator certification comply with standards for dyslexia instruction and training. The act extends this requirement to cover intermediate administrator and supervisor preparation programs. It also expands the scope of the verification requirements to include verification that programs and applicants comply with (1) scientifically based reading, research, and instruction and (2) structured literacy instruction and training.

Background — Scientifically Based Reading Research and Instruction

Existing law defines "scientifically based reading research and instruction" as (1) a comprehensive program or a collection of practices based on reliable, valid evidence showing that when these programs or practices are used, students can be expected to achieve satisfactory reading progress and (2) the integration of strategies for continuously assessing, evaluating, and communicating the student's reading progress and needs in order to implement ongoing interventions so all students can read and comprehend text and apply higher-level thinking skills. The program or collection of practices must include instruction in oral language, phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, rapid automatic name or letter name fluency, and reading comprehension.

§§ 3 & 4 — FEASIBILITY STUDY ON POTENTIAL STATE-WIDE PROGRAM TO SUPPORT STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN ADVANCED PLACEMENT COURSES

Requires SDE to conduct a study on the feasibility of establishing and administering a state-wide program to support public high school students' participation in advanced placement courses

The act requires SDE to conduct a study on the feasibility of establishing and administering a state-wide program to support public high school students' participation in advanced placement courses or programs, giving priority to students from low-income families. Under the act, these programs include an honors class, advanced placement class, International Baccalaureate program, Cambridge International program, dual enrollment program, dual credit course or program, early college program, or any other advanced or accelerated course or program offered and awarded credit by a local or regional board of education in grades 9 through 12, inclusive.

The act requires SDE to consult with local and regional boards of education and public and independent higher education institutions in conducting the study. Under the act, the study must review current instate programs providing advanced courses

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or programs, identify and analyze similar programs in other states, and make recommendations on the framework and criteria for implementing a statewide program.

The act requires SDE to submit a report and any recommendations on the establishment and implementation of the program to the Education Committee by January 1, 2026.

§ 5 — STATE SEAL OF BILITERACY

Allows a broader range of schools to award the Connecticut State Seal of Biliteracy on their high school diplomas

The act expands the types of schools that may affix the Connecticut State Seal of Biliteracy to the high school diplomas of students who achieve a high level of proficiency in English and one or more foreign languages.

It does this by allowing the governing body of any school that awards diplomas, instead of only local and regional boards of education, to use criteria the State Board of Education sets for awarding this designation. (Presumably, this includes private schools in addition to public schools authorized under existing law.) The act also expands the definition of “foreign language” to include any language spoken by a Native American tribe, instead of only tribes that are federally recognized as under prior law.

§§ 6 & 8 — GOODWIN UNIVERSITY MAGNET SCHOOLS TUITION AUTHORITY

Authorizes GUMS to charge tuition to boards of education whose students attend grades kindergarten to 12 at a GUMS-operated school

The act extends to Goodwin University Magnet Schools (“GUMS”) the same authority to charge tuition for its magnet schools, and the same conditions, as regional education service centers (RESCs). GUMS operates two magnet schools.

The act does this by granting the authority more broadly to any interdistrict magnet school operator that is (1) the board of governors or equivalent for an independent higher education institution or (2) any other third-party not-for-profit corporation the education commissioner approves. GUMS is the only current magnet school operator in this category.

The act authorizes GUMS to charge per-student tuition to sending districts whose students attend grades kindergarten to 12 at a GUMS-operated school. The tuition equals the difference between the (1) sending school’s average per-pupil expenditure for the previous fiscal year and (2) magnet school grant amount received plus any revenue from other sources, calculated on a per-pupil basis. Starting in FY 25, the law caps tuition charged for all magnet schools at 58% of the per-student tuition charged for FY 24, which the act applies to GUMS.

Sheff Magnet Schools

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By law, RESC magnet schools that help the state meet its obligations under the *Sheff v. O'Neill* Connecticut Supreme Court desegregation decision (see *Background — Sheff v. O'Neill State Supreme Court Decision*) may charge up to \$4,053 for tuition to parents or guardians of children attending preschool at these schools, but they cannot charge tuition to any parent or guardian with a family income that is at or below 75% of the state median income. The state must cover the unpaid tuition for these parents, within available appropriations.

The act adds GUMS to the group that may charge preschool tuitions and applies the same limitations.

Background — Sheff v. O'Neill State Supreme Court Decision

In this 1996 decision, the Connecticut Supreme Court ruled that the state had a constitutional obligation to remedy the educational inequities in the Hartford schools caused by racial and ethnic isolation (238 Conn. 1 (1996)). The court ordered the state legislature and the governor to craft a solution, and legislation was passed to create voluntary desegregation in Hartford by creating interdistrict magnet schools and using programs such as Open Choice.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

§ 7 — CONTINUOUS EMPLOYMENT AND TEACHER TENURE

Allows Goodwin magnet school teachers hired from other districts to be considered continuously employed for tenure and accumulated sick leave purposes

The act allows teachers employed by GUMS or Goodwin University Educational Services, Inc. (GUES) to be considered continuously employed when they previously worked for a local or regional board of education during the school year immediately before employment with GUMS. It applies to teacher tenure and paid sick leave accumulation and accrual from year to year. By treating the employment as continuous, a teacher does not lose tenure rights or accumulated sick leave earned before gaining employment with Goodwin University.

GUES and GUMS operate two magnet schools adjacent to Goodwin University in East Hartford. GUES is the parent organization, and GUMS has the day-to-day responsibility to run the magnet schools.

By law, a similar provision exists for teachers who are either being hired by a newly formed regional school district or are no longer employed by a regional district due to its dissolution.

§§ 9 & 10 — SHEFF MAGNET SCHOOL REQUIREMENTS

Renews until June 30, 2025, the (1) requirement that Sheff magnet schools meet the required enrollment standards and (2) education commissioner's authority to assess a financial penalty on noncompliant schools; makes technical changes

The act renews until June 30, 2025, the requirement that the education commissioner consider whether a *Sheff* magnet school meets the reduced-isolation

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standards required under *Sheff* to award grants to the school. The requirement had expired at the end of FY 21. A magnet school that does not meet the standards may still receive grants if the commissioner (1) finds that it is appropriate to award a grant for an additional year or years and (2) approves a plan to bring the school into compliance with the standards.

The act also renews until June 30, 2025, the commissioner's authority to impose a financial penalty on a magnet school that does not meet the reduced-isolation standards for two or more consecutive years. Specifically, the commissioner may impose the penalty on the school's operator or, after consulting with the operator, take other appropriate steps to help the operator comply.

The act also makes related technical changes.

§ 11 — CONNECTICUT-GROWN FOR CONNECTICUT KIDS WEEK

Requires SDE to provide technical assistance and support for schools to arrange for interactions between students and farmers, including field trips and presentations, as part of Connecticut-Grown for Connecticut Kids Week

The act modifies SDE's responsibilities regarding the Connecticut-Grown for Connecticut Kids Week. Among other things, this annual, week-long event promotes Connecticut agriculture and foods to children through school meal and classroom programs and at farms, farmers' markets, and other community locations. Prior law required SDE to arrange for interaction between students and farmers, including field trips to farms and in-school presentations by farmers. The act instead requires SDE to provide technical assistance and support for schools to do this.

§§ 12-16 — TRANSITION SERVICES AND PROGRAMS FOR STUDENTS RECEIVING SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES

Modifies the statutory definition of "transition service"; transfers responsibility for developing and maintaining an accessible online listing of transition resources and services from SERC to SDE's transition services coordinator; makes minor and conforming changes

Definitions (§§ 12-16)

The act modifies the statutory definition of "transition service" for purposes of planning and providing these services to special education students who are leaving, or about to leave, the kindergarten-12 education system (§ 12).

Prior law defined a transition service as a service for special education students that facilitates their transition from school to postsecondary activities such as education, training, employment, or independent living.

The act replaces this definition with the federal definition of transition services, which is more detailed and names some specific activities (e.g., supported employment). The federal definition means activities for a child with a disability that are (1) results-oriented and focused on improving the child's academic and functional achievement to facilitate the child's movement from school to post-

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school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation, and (2) based on the individual child's needs, taking into account their strengths, preferences, and interests (34 C.F.R. § 300.43).

Additionally, the act makes technical and conforming changes to the definition of transition program (§§ 12-16).

Visits of Transition Programs (§ 12)

Under prior law, SDE's transition services coordinator had to perform unannounced visits of transition programs. The act removes the requirement that the visits be unannounced but allows the coordinator or SDE to make unannounced visits in addition to the required visits.

Online Transition Resources and Services Listing (§ 14)

The act transfers, from the State Education Resource Center (SERC) to SDE's transition services coordinator, responsibility for developing and maintaining an easily accessible online listing of transition resources, services, and programs.

Prior law required SERC to develop and maintain the listing in collaboration with SDE, the departments of Developmental Services, Social Services, and Aging and Disability Services, and the offices of Policy and Management and Workforce Strategy. The act transfers this responsibility to SDE's transition services coordinator and instead requires the coordinator to collaborate with the following agencies: the departments of Developmental Services, Aging and Disability Services, Children and Families, Labor, Mental Health and Addiction Services, Public Health, Social Services, and Correction, and the Office of Early Childhood (OEC). Existing law already requires these agencies to each appoint an employee to act as a liaison with the transition services coordinator.

The act also makes a corresponding change to require the collaborating agencies listed above to post a link to the online listing in an easily accessible location on their respective agency websites.

§§ 17-22 — CTECS CONFORMING CHANGES

Makes several changes to conform the law to current practice and CTECS's establishment as an independent state agency

The act makes several changes to conform the law to the Connecticut Technical Education and Career System's (CTECS's) establishment as an independent state agency. Specifically, it removes obsolete references to (1) SDE in a statute requiring CTECS to indemnify certain donors of tangible property and (2) the effective date of the 2017 legislation that established CTECS (§§ 19 & 22).

It also allows CTECS to allocate funds to allow RESCs to provide professional development services, technical assistance, special education services, and evaluation activities to technical education and career schools. Under the act, the

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commissioner may do this regardless of certain state procurement laws. Existing law grants similar authority to SDE (§ 20).

The act also makes changes to conform the law to current practice for CTECS. It requires, rather than allows, CTECS to offer part-time and evening programs and requires it to offer extracurricular programs in vocational, technical, technological, and postsecondary education and training. The act also requires that students admitted to a CTECS postsecondary education program without a high school diploma have completed the school year in which they turn 22 (rather than be age 21 or older) (§§ 21 & 22).

Lastly, the act makes other technical and conforming changes (§§ 17 & 18).
EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage, except that the SDE reference and other technical and conforming changes are effective July 1, 2024.

§ 23 — CTECS AND TRANSITION SERVICES

Explicitly requires CTECS to provide and fund transition services; requires CTECS to convene a planning and placement team meeting for home-schooled special education students before they enroll in a CTECS school

Existing law requires CTECS to, among other things, provide an appropriate educational program for each child requiring special education. The act explicitly requires CTECS to provide and fund transition services (see §§ 12-16 above) as part of this requirement.

The act also requires CTECS (rather than the local or regional board of education) to convene a planning and placement team meeting for home-schooled special education students before they enroll in a CTECS school. As under existing law, the meeting must address the student's transition to a CTECS school and ensure that his or her individualized education program reflects the current supports and services he or she requires.

§§ 24, 25 & 41 — EARLY START CT

Eliminates various early childhood care programs and provisions and makes OEC responsible for operating and administering a state-funded early care and education system to coordinate and facilitate efficient delivery of early childhood care ("Early Start CT")

Beginning in FY 26, the act eliminates various programs (see below) and replaces them with a new program ("Early Start CT") and makes OEC responsible for operating and administering it to fund early care and education programs throughout the state and coordinate efficient delivery of the programs to eligible children.

Goals of Early Start CT

The act establishes requirements for OEC to operate Early Start CT, which are similar to the goals previously established for the development of a network of school readiness programs, which the act repeals. OEC, under the Early Start CT

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program, must (1) provide open access for infants and toddlers and pre-school age children to high quality early care and education programs that promote the health and safety of children and prepare them for school, and (2) prevent or minimize the potential for developmental delay in children before age five. The goals described below are similar to those previously established.

Service Coordination. Under the act, Early Start CT must encourage coordination and cooperation among early care and education programs, prevent the duplication of services, and identify the specific service needs and unique resources available to particular municipalities. The office must also improve the availability and quality of its own programs and coordination with child care providers' services. Additionally, the act requires OEC to operate Early Start CT to facilitate the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic diversity of the children, families, and staff in early care and education programs.

Impact on Families. The act requires Early Start CT to provide opportunities for parents to choose among affordable, accredited early care and education programs (programs accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, the National Association for Family Child Care, or another nationally recognized accreditation, or certified by the commissioner or received Early Head Start or Head Start federal approval).

Under the act, Early Start CT must also strengthen families through encouragement of family engagement and partnership in a child's development and education, and enhancement of a family's capacity to meet the special needs of its children, including children with disabilities. It must assure that children with disabilities are integrated into early care and education programs available to children who do not have disabilities.

Funding. The act requires Early Start CT to maximize local and federal early care and education funding to expand capacity and access, and reduce educational costs by decreasing the need for special education services for school-age children.

Repeal of Early Childhood Programs and Early Childhood-Related Provisions

On July 1, 2025, the act repeals various early childhood funding programs and various other early childhood-related provisions. These include the following:

1. state grants for (a) neighborhood projects, including child care centers, elderly centers, multipurpose human resource centers, emergency homeless shelters, and domestic violence shelters and (b) developing and operating child care centers and group and family child care homes for disadvantaged children (CGS § 8-210);
2. various school readiness provisions, including (a) OEC's Head Start and Early Head Start competitive state supplemental grant program; (b) state financial assistance and eligibility for funding school readiness programs; and (c) school readiness program requirements, including per-child cost limitations (CGS §§ 10-16n to 10-16r);
3. participation by five-year-old children in school readiness programs (CGS § 10-16t);
4. school readiness program grants in transitional school districts (CGS § 10-

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16u);

5. the competitive district grant account (CGS § 10-16aa);
 6. early childhood teacher credentialing (CGS § 10-520b);
 7. school readiness provider grants and purchase or provision of subsidies to parents for child care services (CGS § 17b-749a); and
 8. licensed child care center sliding fee scales (CGS § 17b-749d).
- EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2025

§ 26 — EARLY START CT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Allows eligible entities to enter directly into a contract with OEC to receive state financial assistance to operate early childhood care and education programs under Early Start CT; establishes eligibility requirements and allows the OEC commissioner to consider certain criteria when determining eligibility; allows OEC to allocate a certain amount of funding for coordination, program evaluation, and administration

Eligibility Requirements

Under Early Start CT, the act allows the following entities to enter into a contract with OEC to receive state financial assistance (i.e., grants): municipalities, local and regional boards of education, RESCs, family resource centers, Head Start programs, preschool programs, nonprofit organizations, child care centers, group or family child care homes, and any other program that meets the OEC commissioner's standards. The assistance is for operating early care and education programs that focus on providing services based on economic, social, or environmental conditions, including in regions with insufficient access to child care.

To receive this financial assistance, the act requires a (1) child care center or group or family child care home to be licensed by the OEC commissioner, and (2) local or regional board of education or RESC preschool program to be approved by SDE. Under the act, at least 60% of eligible children enrolled in an early care and education program receiving financial assistance under Early Start CT must be members of a family that is at or below 75% of the state median income.

The act requires the commissioner to ensure that the majority of early care and education programs receiving financial assistance serve children that reside in, or attend early care and education programs in, priority school districts, former priority school districts, or towns with schools deemed severe need schools because 40% or more of lunches are served to students eligible for free or reduced priced lunches.

The act allows the OEC commissioner, when determining whether to enter into a contract for financial assistance, to consider (1) a community's Care 4 Kids participation and (2) the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's social vulnerability index as the census tract determines.

The act requires any contract for financial assistance to be made contingent upon available funding and a successful application submitted to OEC that has been informed by the appropriate local governance partner's needs assessment and community plan (see § 27).

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The act exempts from the request for proposal requirement any Early Start CT facility that has (1) been approved to operate an early care or education program financed through the Connecticut Health and Education Facilities Authority and (2) received a commitment for debt services from the Department of Social Services on or before June 30, 2014, or from OEC on or after July 1, 2014.

Funding for Program Administration and Operation

Under the act, OEC may allocate the lesser of \$150,000 or up to 10% of the total financial assistance under the contract with each local or regional governance partner for coordination, program evaluation, and administration. The act requires the allocated amount to be increased by the lesser of up to \$50,000 or the amount of local funding provided for early childhood education coordination, program evaluation, and administration. The act requires each partner to designate a staff person for coordination, evaluation, and administration, and to serve as liaison to the OEC commissioner.

The act also prohibits funds received from being used to supplant federal, state, or local funding received for early childhood education on behalf of children in an early childhood education program.

The act allows OEC to use up to 3% of funds allocated to the early care and education appropriation to evaluate program effectiveness and impact on participating children, families, and programs, including (1) child outcomes, (2) later school performance, (3) quality standards, (4) professional development and preparation, and (5) parent engagement impact.

Payments

The act allows OEC to pay, in an individual contract for FY 26, a per-child rate or an amount per-classroom that the commissioner determines.

Under the act, OEC must pay, for each eligible child enrolled in an Early Start CT program, a per-child rate of at least:

1. \$10,500 for each child ages three or four, or age five and not eligible to enroll in school; or
2. \$13,500 for each child under age three who is in toddler or infant care and not in a preschool program.

The act requires the commissioner to determine an amount per classroom, at equivalent rates per child multiplied by the classroom's total capacity on a case-by-case basis and established in the contract.

For purposes of these payment provisions, the act requires OEC to (1) develop policies and procedures governing classroom sizes, payments, and required enrollment rates and (2) use data-driven, outcomes-based contract provisions to facilitate and incentivize full enrollment.

Anti-discrimination

The act prohibits any Early Start CT care and education program that receives

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financial assistance from discriminating based on ancestry; race; color; national origin; sex; gender identity or expression; sexual orientation; religion; learning, physical, intellectual, or mental disability; or any other protected class.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2025

§§ 27 & 41 — LOCAL OR REGIONAL GOVERNANCE PARTNERS

Replaces school readiness councils with local or regional governance partners to assist in a community receiving Early Start CT funds; requires the membership of each local governance partner to reflect the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic composition of the town or region it serves and to consist of early care and education stakeholders

The act eliminates local or regional school readiness councils, which were required to, among other things, (1) make recommendations on school readiness issues, including certain grants; (2) foster partnerships; (3) work with OEC; and (4) identify resources and services, and facilitate coordination of the latter, for children and families. The act instead establishes local or regional governance partners, within available appropriations, to help provide early care and education in a community under Early Start CT.

The act allows (1) a town or school district, and appropriate representatives of groups or entities interested in early care and education in the town or district, to establish a local governance partner, and (2) two or more towns or districts, and appropriate representatives of groups or entities interested in early childhood education in a region, to establish a regional governance partner. It requires OEC to monitor each local or regional governance partner for compliance with the act's provisions.

Membership

The act requires the membership of each local or regional governance partner to reflect the racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic composition of the town or region it serves. Membership must consist of early care and education stakeholders, including the following:

1. elected and appointed officials;
2. parents;
3. representatives with expertise in early care and education;
4. a Smart Start representative, where applicable;
5. local education and healthcare providers in the community;
6. a local homeless education liaison;
7. community representatives from workforce or job training entities; and
8. other community representatives who provide services to children.

Role and Responsibilities

Under the act, a local or regional governance partner must do the following:

1. conduct and administer a data-driven needs assessment for its respective community or region (see below),

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2. employ strategies to solicit parental engagement and membership,
3. provide periodic technical assistance on best practices in early care and education and family engagement for its town or region,
4. jointly sponsor professional development opportunities with OEC, and
5. ensure that community outreach is regularly conducted and maintained with community stakeholders.

Data-Driven Needs Assessment

The act requires each local or regional governance partner, within available appropriations, to conduct a data-driven needs assessment for the town or region it serves, which may include (1) recommendations for the preferred distribution and allocation of child care spaces in the town or region and (2) subject to OEC's approval, a data-driven methodology to reassign child care spaces during the term of a contract with OEC.

Under the act, OEC must create the needs assessment in collaboration with communities. The assessment must directly inform, among other things, child care space assignment across a mixed delivery system, including licensed family child care providers, group child care homes, child care centers, and license-exempt public schools.

Staff Liaison

The act requires each local or regional governance partner to hire a staff liaison to aid and support the partner and ensure collaboration with OEC related to planning improvements to the state early care and education governance structure. The staff liaison must also ensure that:

1. partnerships are established and fostered among child care providers,
2. cooperation is maintained with OEC in monitoring and evaluating child care and education programs,
3. existing and potential resources and services available to children and families are identified,
4. recommendations are made to school officials about transition from child care programs to preschool programs and kindergarten,
5. effective community engagement strategies are used to ensure diverse participation, and
6. OEC-approved biannual child assessments are performed at programs and done in partnership with families.

The staff liaison must also ensure (1) an information exchange with other community organizations serving children's and families' needs and (2) facilitation and coordination of efficient, data-driven delivery of services to children and families, including referral procedures and before and after school child care for children attending school day and school year programs.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2025

§ 28 — SLIDING FEE SCALE

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Requires OEC to establish a sliding fee scale for families enrolled in Early Start CT

The act requires OEC to establish a sliding fee scale for families enrolled in an early care and education program under Early Start CT. The fee scale must be based on family income and consistent with the existing Care 4 Kids sliding fee scale.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2025

§ 29 — UNEXPENDED EARLY START CT FUNDS

Allows up to \$2 million in unexpended Early Start CT funds, beginning FY 25, to be used (1) to provide professional development for early care and education program providers, (2) to support early care and education programs in satisfying designated qualified staff requirements, or (3) for certain other purposes with the Office of Policy and Management's consent

The act allows up to \$2 million in unexpended Early Start CT funds for FY 25 and each fiscal year after to be available for:

1. providing professional development for early care and education program providers, and staff employed in these programs, as long as these programs receive financial assistance under Early Start CT for infant, toddler, and preschool slots; or
2. supporting early care and education programs in satisfying the designated qualified staff requirements of the act (see § 31), as long as these programs receive financial assistance under Early Start CT.

The act requires the OEC commissioner to determine how the unexpended funds are distributed.

Under the act, with the consent of the Office of Policy and Management secretary, any unexpended funds that OEC does not distribute may be used for the following:

1. assisting early care and education programs in meeting and maintaining accreditation requirements;
2. providing training in implementing preschool assessments and curricula, including training to enhance literacy teaching skills;
3. developing and implementing best practices for parents in supporting preschool and kindergarten student learning;
4. developing and implementing strategies for children to successfully transition to preschool and from preschool to kindergarten, including through parental engagement and whole-family supports that may be used through the two-generational initiative or other available resources; and
5. providing professional development.

Many of these designated uses of unexpended funds are similar to provisions that, prior to their repeal by the act, were applicable to unexpended funds under the grant program to provide spaces in accredited school readiness programs in current or former priority school districts (see § 41).

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2025

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§ 30 — EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION PROGRAM ACCREDITATION REQUIREMENTS

Generally requires any early care and education program receiving financial assistance under Early Start CT to be accredited or approved within three years of entering into an OEC contract

The act requires any program participating in Early Start CT to be accredited within three years of entering a contract with OEC. Under the act, any program not accredited must have an approved program plan within 12 months of entering into a contract with OEC. The office previously required accreditation only for sites they directly funded.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2025

§§ 31 & 41 — EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROGRAM STAFF REQUIREMENTS

Replaces staff qualification requirements and sets a schedule by which OEC-funded early childhood education program designated staff members must be designated qualified staff members meeting one of the criteria at the bachelor’s degree level

OEC-Funded Early Childhood Education Program Staffing Requirements

Prior law required state-funded early childhood education program staff members to meet increasingly advanced levels of educational attainment, which were phased in over several years from July 1, 2022, to July 1, 2029. Prior law set separate requirements for primary classroom teachers and remaining classroom teachers over four phases, each with its own set of minimum qualifications.

The act eliminates the following minimum staff qualification requirements for child care or school readiness programs that received state funds for spaces:

Staff Qualification Requirements Repealed by the Act

Date	Qualifications Repealed by the Act
Through June 30, 2025	At least 50% of staff with primary responsibility for a classroom must have at least one of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher certificate with early childhood education or special education endorsement • OEC early childhood teacher credential • Associate degree with early childhood education concentration from regionally accredited institution • Bachelor’s or associate degree with certain credits under certain conditions Remaining staff with primary responsibility for a classroom must have childhood development associate credential or equivalent from OEC-approved organization and at least 12 approved credits in early childhood education or child development
July 1, 2025, to June 30, 2029	At least 50% of staff with primary responsibility for a classroom must have one of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher certificate with early childhood education or special education endorsement

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Date	Qualifications Repealed by the Act
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OEC early childhood teacher credential • Bachelor’s degree with early childhood education concentration from regionally accredited institution • Bachelor’s or associate degree with certain credits under certain conditions <p>Remaining staff with primary responsibility for a classroom must have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Associate degree with concentration in early childhood education from regionally accredited institution or • OEC early childhood teaching credential
After June 30, 2029	<p>All staff with primary responsibility for a classroom must have one of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher certificate with early childhood education or special education endorsement • OEC early childhood teacher credential • Bachelor’s degree with early childhood education concentration from regionally accredited institution • Bachelor’s or associate degree with certain credits under certain conditions

The act replaces these staff qualification requirements with new requirements for primary classroom teachers at OEC-funded early childhood education programs that phase in from July 1, 2025, to July 1, 2030, and outlines the degrees or credentials required for these teachers to qualify as “designated qualified staff members.”

Designated Qualified Staff Members

A “designated qualified staff member” is an assigned staff member (i.e., the person assigned the primary responsibility for a classroom of children in an OEC-funded early care and education program) with at least one of the following:

1. a bachelor’s degree or higher with a concentration in early childhood education from a regionally accredited higher education institution;
2. a teaching certificate issued by the State Board of Education with an endorsement in early childhood education or early childhood special education;
3. at least 12 early childhood credits from a regionally accredited higher education institution and deemed to meet the bachelor’s degree requirements without a concentration in early childhood education by OEC;
4. a bachelor’s degree from a regionally accredited higher education institution without a concentration in early childhood education, but with at least 12 applicable early childhood credits OEC determines; or
5. permission from OEC if the designated staff member is enrolled in a higher education institution and engaged and making progress in an early childhood planned program of study leading to an early childhood bachelor’s degree.

Under the act, 25% of staff members with primary responsibility for a classroom at each OEC-funded early care and education program must be designated qualified staff members meeting one of the criteria at the bachelor’s

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degree level. It appears that this requirement increases to (1) 50% from July 1, 2027, to June 30, 2030; and (2) 60% on and after July 1, 2030.

If the OEC-funded early care and education program is a family child care home, the designated qualified staff member for the home must have achieved, or be working toward, an early childhood associate or bachelor's degree.

Under the act, these requirements apply to programs that accept state funds directly from OEC or indirectly through OEC subcontractors, for any combination of infant, toddler, preschool, and before and after school care programs, but does not include Care 4 Kids subsidies.

Staff Member Supervision

The act allows a bachelor's degree-designated qualified staff member to supervise an associate degree-designated qualified staff member at an off-site location. Under the act, the associate degree-designated qualified staff member must have at least one of the following:

1. an associate degree or higher with a concentration in early childhood education from a regionally accredited higher education institution;
2. at least 12 early childhood credits from a regionally accredited higher education institution and be deemed to meet the associate degree requirements without a concentration in early childhood education by OEC;
3. an associate degree from a regionally accredited higher education institution without a concentration in early childhood education, but with at least 12 applicable early childhood credits OEC determines; or
4. permission from OEC if the associate degree-designated staff member is enrolled in a higher education institution and engaged in an early childhood planned program of study leading to an early childhood associate degree.

Staff Member Designation

Under the act, when a bachelor's degree-designated qualified staff member is not assigned, an associate degree-designated qualified staff member with the qualifications described above may be deemed a designated qualified staff member if the person is under the supervision of an on-site bachelor's degree-designated qualified staff member. The act excludes from this provision family child care home providers that accept state funds. These providers must meet the designated qualified staff member qualifications.

OEC Early Childhood Teacher Credential

The act eliminates authority for OEC to issue early childhood teacher credentials to individuals with an associate or bachelor's degree with concentration in early childhood education from approved programs.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2025

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§§ 32 & 41 — CONTRACT-BASED PROGRAM FOR FEDERAL HEAD START AND EARLY HEAD START GRANTEEES

Replaces OEC's competitive grant program with a contract-based program for federal Head Start and Early Head Start grantees

The act replaces OEC's competitive state supplemental Head Start grant program for federal Head Start and Early Head Start grantees with the contract-based Early Start CT. The new program is substantially similar to the repealed program but does not include certain provisions such as the requirement for a committee to advise the OEC commissioner on use of funds for Head Start and Early Head Start. Under the act, nonprofit agencies or boards of education seeking contracts may apply to the new program on forms and at times the commissioner prescribes.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2025

§ 33 — OEC REGULATIONS, POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES

Requires OEC to implement policies and procedures needed to implement Early Start CT and other requirements under the act while adopting regulations

The act requires the OEC commissioner to implement policies and procedures needed to (1) administer the Early Start CT provisions of the act, (2) implement infant and toddler and school-age ratios and group size requirements, and (3) implement head teacher staffing requirements for programs that serve only school-age children. The commissioner may implement these policies and procedures while in the process of adopting them as regulations.

Under the act, any existing regulations on (1) infant and toddler and school-age ratios; (2) group size requirements; and (3) head teacher staffing requirements for programs serving only school-age children, generally applicable to child care centers and group child care homes, remain in effect until they are replaced by OEC's policies and procedures.

The act requires the OEC commissioner to post notice of her intent to adopt regulations on OEC's website and the eRegulations system within 20 days after she implements any policies or procedures, which are valid until final regulations are adopted.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon passage

§ 34 — ALLOCATION OF FUNDS TO RESCS

Allows the OEC commissioner to allocate funds to (1) RESCs to provide professional development services, technical assistance and evaluation, and program planning and implementation activities, and (2) other entities, including boards of education

The act authorizes the OEC commissioner, within available appropriations, to allocate funds to RESCs to provide professional development services, technical assistance and evaluation, and program planning and implementation activities; local and regional boards of education; child care centers; group and family child

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care homes; and other early childhood care and education entities, as she determines.

Under the act, any funds the commissioner allocates must be spent according to procedures and conditions she sets.

§§ 35-38 & 41 — FY 25 CONTRACT AND GRANT AMOUNTS FOR SPECIFIED EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS

Adjusts contract or grant amounts for FY 25 for certain early childhood programs that are repealed and replaced by the Early Start CT program on July 1, 2025

For FY 25 alone, the act creates a one-year transition funding method for the programs that are replaced by Early Start CT beginning in FY 26. It requires the OEC commissioner to pay a contract or grant using the same per-child or classroom rates that apply to the new Early Start CT financial assistance program created by the act (see § 26), for the following programs for FY 25:

1. contracts that provide state supplemental grants to municipalities, human resource development agencies, nonprofit corporations, or group or family child care homes for developing and operating child care homes or centers for disadvantaged children (previously these contracts were paid for a portion of the cost of the program or on a specified per-child rate);
2. grants for spaces in accredited school readiness programs in current or former priority school districts, which could include contracts with certain entities;
3. competitive grants for spaces in school readiness programs that are accredited or seeking accreditation in certain towns, which could include contracts with certain entities (previously grants were based on specified per-child costs); and
4. competitive grant programs for nonprofit agencies and local and regional boards of education that are Head Start grantees to expand programs and enhance their quality (previously grants were in a set amount plus an amount per child under the temporary family assistance program, but subject to an overall cap on the grant program).

For purposes of these payment provisions, the act requires OEC to (1) develop policies and procedures governing classroom sizes, payments, and required enrollment rates, and (2) use data-driven, outcomes-based contract provisions to facilitate and incentivize full enrollment.

The act eliminates the FY 25 cap on the per-child cost (i.e., \$10,500) of OEC's school readiness programs, and instead, for FY 25, applies the above grant amount requirements to school readiness programs. This cap is also repealed beginning with FY 26 and replaced with Early Start CT.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2024, except the repeal of the programs is effective July 1, 2025.

§ 39 — FAMILY CHILD CARE HOME LICENSE EXPANSION

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Allows the OEC commissioner to issue licenses for up to 20 family child care home facilities anywhere in the state; adjusts the expiration date for all of the licenses the OEC commissioner issued under the family child care home license expansion

Prior law allowed the OEC commissioner to issue family child care home licenses from FY 22 to FY 26 for one facility in seven specified municipalities to a person or group of people, in a partnership with an association, organization, corporation, institution, or public or private agency, to provide child care services in a commissioner-approved space outside of a family home. The act instead allows the commissioner to issue licenses for up to 20 facilities anywhere in the state. The act eliminates the license expiration date of June 30, 2026, and requires the licenses to be issued for four-year terms.

§ 40 — SMART START COMPETITIVE GRANT PROGRAM

Removes the cap on annual operating expense grants under the Connecticut Smart Start Program

Beginning FY 25, the act no longer prohibits a town from receiving more than \$300,000 in annual operating expense grants under the Connecticut Smart Start Competitive Grant Program, which provides grants for capital and operating expenses for local and regional boards of education to establish or expand preschool programs.