Senate

General Assembly

File No. 701

January Session, 2025

Substitute Senate Bill No. 1458

Senate, April 15, 2025

The Committee on Education reported through SEN. MCCRORY, D. of the 2nd Dist., Chairperson of the Committee on the part of the Senate, that the substitute bill ought to pass.

AN ACT CONCERNING CHANGES TO THE COMMISSIONER'S NETWORK OF SCHOOLS AND ALLIANCE DISTRICT PROGRAMS.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

Section 1. Subsection (a) of section 10-223h of the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective July 1, 2025*):

(a) **[**The**]** For the fiscal years ending June 30, 2013, to June 30, 2027, inclusive, the Commissioner of Education shall establish, within available appropriations, a commissioner's network of schools to improve student academic achievement in low-performing schools. The commissioner may select not more than twenty-five schools in any single school year that have been classified as a category four school or a category five school pursuant to section 10-223e to participate in the commissioner's network of schools, except the commissioner shall not select any additional school to participate in the commissioner's network of schools on or after July 1, 2025. The commissioner shall issue guidelines regarding the development of turnaround plans, and such

guidelines shall include, but not be limited to, annual deadlines for the submission or nonsubmission of a turnaround plan and annual deadlines for approval or rejection of turnaround plans. The commissioner shall give preference for selection in the commissioner's network of schools to such schools (1) that volunteer to participate in the commissioner's network of schools, provided the local or regional board of education for such school and the representatives of the exclusive bargaining unit for certified employees chosen pursuant to section 10-153b mutually agree to participate in the commissioner's network of schools, (2) in which an existing collective bargaining agreement between the local or regional board of education for such school and the representatives of the exclusive bargaining unit for certified employees chosen pursuant to section 10-153b will have expired for the school year in which a turnaround plan will be implemented, or (3) that are located in school districts that (A) have experience in school turnaround reform, or (B) previously received a school improvement grant pursuant to Section 1003(g) of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 20 USC 6301 et seq. **[**The commissioner may select not more than five schools in any single school year from a single school district to participate in the commissioner's network of schools.**]** Each school so selected shall begin implementation of a turnaround plan, as described in subsection (d) of this section. Each school so selected shall participate in the commissioner's network of schools for three school years, and may continue such participation for an additional year, not to exceed two additional years, upon approval from the State Board of Education in accordance with the provisions of subsection (h) of this section, except no school that is participating in the commissioner's network of schools on July 1, 2025, may continue such participation for an additional year or an additional two years. The commissioner shall provide funding, technical assistance and operational support to schools participating in the commissioner's network of schools and may provide financial support to teachers and administrators working at a school that is participating in the commissioner's network of schools. All costs attributable to developing and implementing a turnaround plan in excess of the ordinary operating

expenses for such school shall be paid by the State Board of Education.

Sec. 2. Subsection (h) of section 10-223h of the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective July 1, 2025*):

(h) Each school participating in the commissioner's network of schools shall participate for three school years, and may continue such participation for an additional year, not to exceed two additional years, upon approval from the State Board of Education, **[**. Before**]** except no school that is participating in the commissioner's network of schools on July 1, 2025, may continue such participation for an additional year or an additional two years. On and after July 1, 2025, before the end of the third year that a school is participating in the commissioner's network of schools, the commissioner shall conduct an evaluation **[**to determine whether such school is prepared to exit the commissioner's network of schools. In determining whether such school may exit the commissioner's network of schools, the commissioner shall consider whether the local or regional board of education has the capacity to ensure that such school will maintain or improve its student academic performance. If the commissioner determines that such school is ready to exit the commissioner's network of schools, the**]** of the school's participation in the commissioner's network of schools. The local or regional board of education for such school shall develop, in consultation with the commissioner, a plan, subject to the approval by the State Board of Education, for the transition of such school back to full control by the local or regional board of education. **[**If such school is not ready to exit the commissioner's network of schools and participates in the commissioner's network of schools for an additional year, the commissioner shall conduct an evaluation in accordance with the provisions of this subsection. Before the end of the fifth year that a school is participating in the commissioner's network of schools, the commissioner shall develop, in consultation with the local or regional board of education for such school, a plan, subject to the approval by the State Board of Education, for the transition of such school back to full control by the local or regional board of education.**]**

Sec. 3. Section 10-262u of the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective July 1, 2025*):

(a) As used in this section: **[**and section 10-262i:**]**

(1) **[**"Alliance district"**]** "Opportunity district" means a school district for a town that **[**(A)**]** is among the towns with the **[**thirty-three**]** fifteen lowest accountability index scores, as calculated by the Department of Education. **[**, or (B) was previously designated as an alliance district by the Commissioner of Education for the fiscal years ending June 30, 2013, to June 30, 2022, inclusive.**]**

(2) "Legacy alliance district" means a school district for a town that was designated as an alliance district by the Commissioner of Education for the fiscal years ending June 30, 2013, to June 30, 2025, inclusive.

[(2)**]** (3) "Accountability index" has the same meaning as provided in section 10-223e.

[(3)**]** (4) "Mastery test data of record" has the same meaning as provided in section 10-262f, as amended by this act.

[(4) "Educational reform district" means an alliance district that is among the ten lowest accountability index scores when all towns are ranked highest to lowest in accountability index scores.**]**

(b) (1) For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2013, the Commissioner of Education shall designate thirty school districts as alliance districts. Any school district designated as an alliance district shall be so designated for a period of five years. On or before June 30, 2016, the Department of Education shall determine if there are any additional alliance districts.

(2) For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2018, the commissioner shall designate thirty-three school districts as alliance districts. Any school district designated as an alliance district shall be so designated for a period of five years.

(3) For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2023, the commissioner shall

designate thirty-six school districts as alliance districts. Any school district designated as an alliance district shall be so designated for a period of **[**five**]** three years.

(4) For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2026, the commissioner shall designate fifteen school districts as opportunity districts. Any school district designated as an opportunity district shall be so designated for a period of two years.

(c) (1) For the fiscal year ending June 30, **[**2023, and each fiscal year thereafter, the Comptroller shall withhold from any town that (A) was designated as an alliance district pursuant to subdivision (2) of subsection (b) of this section any increase in funds received over the amount the town received for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2012, pursuant to subsection (a) of section 10-262i, and (B) was designated as an alliance district for the first time pursuant to subdivision (3) of subsection (b) of this section, any increase in funds received over the amount the town received for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2022**]** 2026, and each fiscal year thereafter, the Comptroller shall withhold from any town that was designated as an opportunity district pursuant to subdivision (4) of subsection (b) of this section any increase in funds received over the amount the town received for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2012, pursuant to subsection (a) of section 10-262i. The Comptroller shall transfer such funds to the Commissioner of Education.

(2) Upon receipt of an application pursuant to subsection (d) of this section or section 10-156gg, the Commissioner of Education may pay such funds to the town designated as an **[**alliance**]** opportunity district and such town shall pay all such funds to the local or regional board of education for such town on the condition that such funds shall be expended in accordance with (A) the improvement plan described in subsection (d) of this section, (B) the minority candidate certification, retention or residency year program pursuant to section 10-156gg, (C) the provisions of subsection (c) of section 10-262i, and (D) any guidelines developed by the State Board of Education for such funds. Such funds

shall be used to improve student achievement and recruit and retain minority teachers in such [alliance] opportunity district and to offset any other local education costs approved by the commissioner.

(d) The local or regional board of education for a town designated as an [alliance] opportunity district may apply to the Commissioner of Education, at such time and in such manner as the commissioner prescribes, to receive any increase in funds received over the amount the town received for the prior fiscal year pursuant to subsection (a) of section 10-262i. Applications pursuant to this subsection shall include objectives and performance targets and an improvement plan that are developed, in part, on the strategic use of student academic performance data. Such improvement plan may include, but not be limited to, the following: (1) A tiered system of interventions for the schools under the jurisdiction of such board based on the needs of such schools, (2) ways to strengthen the foundational programs in reading, through the intensive reading instruction program pursuant to section 10-14u, to ensure reading mastery in kindergarten to grade three, inclusive, with a focus on standards and instruction, proper use of data, intervention strategies, current information for teachers, parental engagement, and teacher professional development, (3) additional learning time, including extended school day or school year programming administered by school personnel or external partners, (4) a talent strategy that includes, but is not limited to, teacher and school leader recruitment and assignment, career ladder policies that draw upon guidelines for a teacher evaluation program adopted by the State Board of Education, pursuant to section 10-151b, and adopted by each local or regional board of education. Such talent strategy may include provisions that demonstrate increased ability to attract, retain, promote and bolster the performance of staff in accordance with performance evaluation findings and, in the case of new personnel, other indicators of effectiveness, (5) training for school leaders and other staff on new teacher evaluation models, (6) provisions for the cooperation and coordination with early childhood education providers to ensure alignment with district expectations for student entry into kindergarten, including funding for an existing local Head Start

program, (7) provisions for the cooperation and coordination with other governmental and community programs to ensure that students receive adequate support and wraparound services, including community school models, (8) provisions for implementing and furthering state-wide education standards adopted by the State Board of Education and all activities and initiatives associated with such standards, (9) strategies for attracting and recruiting minority teachers and administrators, (10) provisions for the enhancement of bilingual education programs, pursuant to section 10-17f, or other language acquisition services to multilingual learners, (11) entering into the model school district responsibilities agreement, described in section 10-223*l*, (12) leadership succession plans that provide training and learning opportunities for administrators and are designed to assist in the seamless transition of school and district personnel in and out of leadership positions in the school district and the continuous implementation of improvement plans developed under this subsection, (13) implementing the policy adopted pursuant to section 10-223m to improve completion rates of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid by students enrolled in grade twelve in a high school under the jurisdiction of such board or students enrolled in an adult education program maintained by such board pursuant to section 10-69, and, as applicable, the parent and guardians of such students, and (14) any additional categories or goals as determined by the commissioner. Such improvement plan shall demonstrate collaboration with key stakeholders, as identified by the commissioner, with the goal of achieving efficiencies and the alignment of intent and practice of current programs with conditional programs identified in this subsection. The commissioner may (A) require changes in any improvement plan submitted by a local or regional board of education before the commissioner approves an application under this subsection, and (B) permit a local or regional board of education, as part of such improvement plan, to use a portion of any funds received under this section for the purposes of paying tuition charged to such board pursuant to subdivision (1) of subsection (k) of section 10-264*l* or subsection (b) of section 10-264o. Each such local and regional board of education shall annually submit such improvement plan to the

department.

(e) The State Board of Education may develop guidelines and criteria for the administration of such funds under this section.

(f) The commissioner may withhold such funds if the local or regional board of education fails to comply with the provisions of this section. The commissioner may renew such funding if the local or regional board of education provides evidence that the school district of such board is achieving the objectives and performance targets approved by the commissioner stated in the improvement plan submitted under this section.

(g) Any local or regional board of education receiving funding under this section shall submit an annual expenditure report to the commissioner on such form and in such manner as requested by the commissioner. The commissioner shall determine if (1) the local or regional board of education shall repay any funds not expended in accordance with the approved application, or (2) such funding should be reduced in a subsequent fiscal year up to an amount equal to the amount that the commissioner determines is out of compliance with the provisions of this subsection.

(h) Any balance remaining for each local or regional board of education at the end of any fiscal year shall be carried forward for such local or regional board of education for the next fiscal year.

(i) The local or regional board of education of a school district for a town that is among the fifty towns with the lowest accountability index scores, as calculated by the Department of Education, but has not been designated as an opportunity district by the Commissioner of Education, may request technical assistance or other specialized interventions from the department for the provision of academic support services to students.

Sec. 4. Subdivision (2) of section 10-262f of the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective July 1,*

2025):

(2) "Base aid ratio" means for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2018, and each fiscal year thereafter, the sum of (A) one minus the town's wealth adjustment factor, and (B) the town's base aid ratio adjustment factor, if any, except that a town's base aid ratio shall not be less than (i) ten per cent for a town designated as an opportunity district or a legacy alliance district, as those terms are defined in section 10-262u, as amended by this act, or a priority school district, as described in section 10-266p, and (ii) one per cent for a town that is not designated as an opportunity district or legacy alliance district or a priority school district.

Sec. 5. Subsections (h) to (n), inclusive, of section 10-262h of the general statutes are repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective July 1, 2025*):

(h) For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2026, each town maintaining public schools according to law shall be entitled to an equalization aid grant as follows: (1) Any town whose fully funded grant is greater than its equalization aid grant amount for the previous fiscal year shall be entitled to an equalization aid grant in an amount equal to its fully funded grant; (2) any town whose fully funded grant is less than its equalization aid grant amount for the previous fiscal year shall be entitled to an equalization aid grant in an amount equal to its equalization aid grant amount for the previous fiscal year minus fourteen and twenty-nine-one-hundredths per cent of its grant adjustment; and (3) any town designated as an opportunity district or a legacy alliance district, as those terms are defined in section 10-262u, as amended by this act, shall be entitled to an equalization aid grant in an amount that is the greater of (A) the amount described in either subdivision (1) of this subsection or subdivision (2) of this subsection, as applicable, (B) its base grant amount, or (C) its equalization aid grant entitlement for the previous fiscal year.

(i) For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2027, each town maintaining public schools according to law shall be entitled to an equalization aid grant as follows: (1) Any town whose fully funded grant is greater than

its equalization aid grant amount for the previous fiscal year shall be entitled to an equalization aid grant in an amount equal to its fully funded grant; (2) any town whose fully funded grant is less than its equalization aid grant amount for the previous fiscal year shall be entitled to an equalization aid grant in an amount equal to its equalization aid grant amount for the previous fiscal year minus sixteen and sixty-seven-one-hundredths per cent of its grant adjustment; and (3) any town designated as an opportunity district or a legacy alliance district shall be entitled to an equalization aid grant in an amount that is the greater of (A) the amount described in either subdivision (1) of this subsection or subdivision (2) of this subsection, as applicable, (B) its base grant amount, or (C) its equalization aid grant entitlement for the previous fiscal year.

(j) For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2028, each town maintaining public schools according to law shall be entitled to an equalization aid grant as follows: (1) Any town whose fully funded grant is greater than its equalization aid grant amount for the previous fiscal year shall be entitled to an equalization aid grant in an amount equal to its fully funded grant; (2) any town whose fully funded grant is less than its equalization aid grant amount for the previous fiscal year shall be entitled to an equalization aid grant in an amount equal to its equalization aid grant amount for the previous fiscal year minus twenty per cent of its grant adjustment; and (3) any town designated as an opportunity district or a legacy alliance district shall be entitled to an equalization aid grant in an amount that is the greater of (A) the amount described in either subdivision (1) of this subsection or subdivision (2) of this subsection, as applicable, (B) its base grant amount, or (C) its equalization aid grant entitlement for the previous fiscal year.

(k) For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2029, each town maintaining public schools according to law shall be entitled to an equalization aid grant as follows: (1) Any town whose fully funded grant is greater than its equalization aid grant amount for the previous fiscal year shall be entitled to an equalization aid grant in an amount equal to its fully funded grant; (2) any town whose fully funded grant is less than its

equalization aid grant amount for the previous fiscal year shall be entitled to an equalization aid grant in an amount equal to its equalization aid grant amount for the previous fiscal year minus twenty-five per cent of its grant adjustment; and (3) any town designated as an opportunity district or a legacy alliance district shall be entitled to an equalization aid grant in an amount that is the greater of (A) the amount described in either subdivision (1) of this subsection or subdivision (2) of this subsection, as applicable, (B) its base grant amount, or (C) its equalization aid grant entitlement for the previous fiscal year.

(l) For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2030, each town maintaining public schools according to law shall be entitled to an equalization aid grant as follows: (1) Any town whose fully funded grant is greater than its equalization aid grant amount for the previous fiscal year shall be entitled to an equalization aid grant in an amount equal to its fully funded grant; (2) any town whose fully funded grant is less than its equalization aid grant amount for the previous fiscal year shall be entitled to an equalization aid grant in an amount equal to its equalization aid grant amount for the previous fiscal year minus thirty-three and thirty-three-one-hundredths per cent of its grant adjustment; and (3) any town designated as an opportunity district or a legacy alliance district shall be entitled to an equalization aid grant in an amount that is the greater of (A) the amount described in either subdivision (1) of this subsection or subdivision (2) of this subsection, as applicable, (B) its base grant amount, or (C) its equalization aid grant entitlement for the previous fiscal year.

(m) For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2031, each town maintaining public schools according to law shall be entitled to an equalization aid grant as follows: (1) Any town whose fully funded grant is greater than its equalization aid grant amount for the previous fiscal year shall be entitled to an equalization aid grant in an amount equal to its fully funded grant; (2) any town whose fully funded grant is less than its equalization aid grant amount for the previous fiscal year shall be entitled to an equalization aid grant in an amount equal to its

equalization aid grant amount for the previous fiscal year minus fifty per cent of its grant adjustment; and (3) any town designated as an opportunity district or a legacy alliance district shall be entitled to an equalization aid grant in an amount that is the greater of (A) the amount described in either subdivision (1) of this subsection or subdivision (2) of this subsection, as applicable, (B) its base grant amount, or (C) its equalization aid grant entitlement for the previous fiscal year.

(n) For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2032, and each fiscal year thereafter, each town maintaining public schools according to law shall be entitled to an equalization aid grant in an amount equal to its fully funded grant, except any town designated as an opportunity district or a legacy alliance district shall be entitled to an equalization aid grant in an amount that is the greater of (1) its fully funded grant, (2) its base grant amount, or (3) its equalization aid grant entitlement for the previous fiscal year.

Sec. 6. Subdivision (3) of subsection (d) of section 12-18b of the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective July 1, 2025*):

(3) Each **[**municipality**]** (A) town designated as an opportunity district or a legacy alliance district pursuant to section 10-262u, as amended by this act, or (B) municipality in which more than fifty per cent of the property is state-owned real property shall be classified as a tier one municipality.

Sec. 7. Section 10-4q of the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective July 1, 2025*):

The Commissioner of Education, with the assistance of the State Education Resource Center, established pursuant to section 10-357a, may provide grants to local and regional boards of education for school districts designated as **[**alliance**]** opportunity districts, pursuant to section 10-262u, as amended by this act. Such grants shall be for the creation and acquisition of new curricula, training in the use of such curricula and related supporting textbooks and other materials. Such

local and regional boards of education may use such grants only for curricula, training and related textbooks and materials that have been authorized by the commissioner. Such local and regional boards of education shall apply for grants pursuant to this section at such time and in such manner as the commissioner prescribes, and the commissioner shall determine the amount of the grant awards.

Sec. 8. Section 10-14y of the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective July 1, 2025*):

(a) The Center for Literacy Research and Reading Success, established pursuant to section 10-14gg, shall, within available appropriations, establish a reading readiness program that provides tiered supports in early literacy to each school district designated as an **[**alliance**]** opportunity district, pursuant to section 10-262u, as amended by this act. The center shall conduct an assessment of the reading readiness of students enrolled in kindergarten to grade three, inclusive, for each **[**alliance**]** opportunity district. Such reading readiness assessment shall consider any combination of the following: (1) Whether such **[**alliance**]** opportunity district has developed and is implementing a multiyear plan and allocated resources specifically for early literacy in kindergarten to grade three, inclusive, (2) whether teachers and administrators have received training regarding the science of teaching reading, and the extent to which teachers and administrators have completed the program of professional development in scientifically based reading research and instruction, pursuant to section 10-148b, (3) the level of access to external literacy coaches who have experience and expertise in the science of teaching reading, and (4) whether there is reading intervention staff embedded in the **[**alliance**]** opportunity district.

(b) The center shall identify the early literacy needs of each **[**alliance**]** opportunity district based on the results of the reading readiness assessment conducted pursuant to subsection (a) of this section, and provide tiered supports in early literacy as follows:

(1) Tier one universal supports shall be provided to each **[**alliance**]**

opportunity district, as defined in section 10-262u, as amended by this act, and include online professional development modules aligned with the reading instruction survey, as described in section 10-145r, and other literacy modules and programs available in the state;

(2) Tier two targeted supports shall include (A) a two-year program of literacy leadership training for certain teachers and administrators, (B) targeted professional development, in accordance with the provisions of section 10-148b, using the results of the reading instruction survey, as described in section 10-145r, and (C) external coaching support, which may utilize funding received pursuant to section 10-223h, as amended by this act, or 10-262u, as amended by this act; and

(3) Tier three intensive supports shall include multiyear support from the center and a commitment from the **[**alliance**]** opportunity district, that includes, but need not be limited to, (A) the use of funding received pursuant to section 10-262u, as amended by this act, to support an early literacy program for students enrolled in kindergarten to grade three, inclusive, (B) technical support in the drafting and submission of **[**alliance**]** opportunity district reading plans, as described in section 10-262u, as amended by this act, (C) identifying and engaging dedicated literacy coaches and reading interventionists, (D) targeted and intensive professional development, and (E) funds for assessment and instructional materials.

(c) Any tiered supports in early literacy provided under this section shall be aligned with any turnaround plan, developed pursuant to section 10-223h, as amended by this act, or **[**alliance**]** opportunity district plan, developed pursuant to section 10-262u, as amended by this act, as applicable.

This act shall take effect as follows and shall amend the following sections:		
Section 1	*July 1, 2025*	10-223h(a)
Sec. 2	*July 1, 2025*	10-223h(h)
Sec. 3	*July 1, 2025*	10-262u

Sec. 4	*July 1, 2025*	10-262f(2)
Sec. 5	*July 1, 2025*	10-262h(h) to (n)
Sec. 6	*July 1, 2025*	12-18b(d)(3)
Sec. 7	*July 1, 2025*	10-4q
Sec. 8	*July 1, 2025*	10-14y

Statement of Legislative Commissioners:
In Section 3(a), "section and section 10-262i:" was change to "section: **[**and section 10-262i:**]**" for accuracy.

ED *Joint Favorable Subst. -LCO*

The following Fiscal Impact Statement and Bill Analysis are prepared for the benefit of the members of the General Assembly, solely for purposes of information, summarization and explanation and do not represent the intent of the General Assembly or either chamber thereof for any purpose. In general, fiscal impacts are based upon a variety of informational sources, including the analyst's professional knowledge. Whenever applicable, agency data is consulted as part of the analysis, however final products do not necessarily reflect an assessment from any specific department.

OFA Fiscal Note

State Impact:

Agency Affected	Fund-Effect	FY 26 $	FY 27 $	FY 28 $
Education, Dept.	GF - Savings	See Below	See Below	9,869,398

Note: GF=General Fund

Municipal Impact:

Municipalities	Effect	FY 26 $	FY 27 $	FY 28 $
Various Local and Regional School Districts	See Below	See Below	See Below	See Below

Explanation

The bill phases out the Commissioner's Network of Schools program and reforms what is currently the Alliance District program. The bill's impacts are described by section below.

Sections 1 – 2 result in a savings to the State Department of Education (SDE) in FY 26 and FY 27, which reaches $9,869,398 annually starting in FY 28, and a corresponding revenue loss to various local and regional school districts. These sections phase out the Commissioner's Network of Schools program to elimination in FY 28. In FY 25, the grant's appropriation is approximately $9.9 million and schools in 13 towns receive the grant. The sections result in a corresponding revenue loss to the school districts that may have otherwise received the grant or an extension grant, which the bill also eliminates.

There will be a savings to SDE in FY 26 and FY 27, and a corresponding revenue loss to various school districts, as current

participants exit the program. The amount of the savings and revenue loss will equal the grants that had been provided to the exiting schools' districts.

Eliminating the Commissioner's Network of Schools will require SDE to significantly revise the federally approved Every Student succeeds Act (ESSA) Plan, which allows SDE to receive certain federal funding.

Section 3 has no fiscal impact to the state. Beginning in FY 26, it: (1) reduces the number of Alliance Districts from 36 to 15 and renames them Opportunity Districts;[1] (2) creates a new category of Legacy Alliance Districts which consists of former Alliance Districts that do not qualify as Opportunity Districts; and (3) allows the 50 lowest performing districts to request specialized interventions from SDE. This section also requires the redesignation of Opportunity Districts every two years, and designates a portion of each Opportunity District's ECS funds for certain efforts, as is currently done for Alliance Districts.

Legacy Alliance Districts will no longer be subject to certain oversight from SDE. This has no fiscal impact as it is not anticipated to alter SDE resources used to assist lower performing districts.

Sections 4 – 5 have no fiscal impact. They make conforming changes to ensure that Legacy Alliance Districts do not receive reductions in ECS funding as a result of the bill.

Section 6 makes conforming changes to the Tiered PILOT formula by replacing Alliance Districts with Opportunity Districts and Legacy Alliance Districts regarding tier status. This change does not result in a fiscal impact as there is no change between which municipalities would have otherwise been designated as tier 1.

Sections 7 – 8 result in a revenue loss to Legacy Alliance Districts and a corresponding revenue gain to Opportunity Districts starting in FY 26.

[1] It is assumed Opportunity Districts must have at least 1,000 students and will be the 15 lowest performing districts that are currently classified as Alliance Districts.

They limit eligibility for certain grants[2] to the 15 Opportunity Districts. The 21 Legacy Alliance Districts would not be eligible for these programs. This results in a revenue loss to Legacy Alliance Districts and a corresponding revenue gain to Opportunity Districts. There is no fiscal impact to the state, as the sections do not change the level of funding for these grants.

The Out Years

As described above, the full fiscal impact of the Commissioner's Network of Schools phase-out first occurs in FY 28. The annualized ongoing fiscal impact identified above would continue into the future.

[2] These are grants for: (1) new curricula, training in the use of the curricula, and related supporting textbooks and materials, and (2) a reading readiness program that provides tiered supports in early literacy.

OLR Bill Analysis

sSB 1458

AN ACT CONCERNING CHANGES TO THE COMMISSIONER'S NETWORK OF SCHOOLS AND ALLIANCE DISTRICT PROGRAMS.

SUMMARY

This bill sunsets the education commissioner's network of schools program by prohibiting the commissioner from (1) adding any more schools to the program after July 1, 2025, or (2) extending the time that already participating schools can stay in the program. Under the program, participating schools receive intensified State Board of Education (SBE) supervision and direction.

The bill also renames the alliance district program as the opportunity district program and reduces the number of participating school districts from 36 to 15, while still using the same method to select districts.

It also creates a new category of "legacy alliance districts" that includes any of the former alliance districts. For three types of grant-related laws (including a "hold harmless" provision on reduced education cost sharing (ECS) funds), the bill ensures that any district that was formerly an alliance district (whether an opportunity or legacy alliance district under the bill) maintains the same benefits it had as an alliance district.

For two other laws (grants for curricula, training, and related textbooks and reading readiness), the bill replaces alliance district with opportunity district, which reduces the number of eligible districts from 36 to 15.

The bill makes numerous conforming and technical changes.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2025

§§ 1 & 2 — SUNSETS THE COMMISSIONER'S NETWORK OF SCHOOLS PROGRAM

The bill sunsets the education commissioner's network of schools program through which currently she selects up to 25 low-achieving schools each school year to receive intensified SBE supervision and direction for three years with an option for an additional year or two.

The bill prohibits the education commissioner from (1) adding any more schools to the program after July 1, 2025, or (2) extending the time that schools already participating can stay in the program. The bill permits schools already in the program to finish their three-year terms, but does not allow, beginning July 1, 2025, any districts currently in the program to continue with a previously granted additional year or two.

Currently, the program sets steps the commissioner, school district turnaround committees, and local and regional boards of education must take to improve academic achievement. Each school's turnaround committee must create and implement a turnaround plan, based on a turnaround model it chooses. Current law requires the commissioner to give participating schools funding and technical and operational support.

Beginning July 1, 2025, the bill requires the commissioner to conduct an evaluation of a school's participation in the program before the end of its third year of participation. Under current law, the commissioner must conduct this evaluation to determine whether the school is prepared to exit the program.

The bill requires the board for the participating school to develop, in consultation with the commissioner and subject to SBE approval, a plan to transition the school back to full control by the local or regional board of education. Currently, the board develops this plan if the commissioner determines the school will exit the network.

§ 3 — REVISING AND RENAMING THE ALLIANCE DISTRICT PROGRAM AS THE OPPORTUNITY DISTRICT PROGRAM

The bill revises the alliance district program, renaming it the

opportunity district program and reducing the number of participating districts from 36 to 15. Under current law, an alliance district is a school district for a town with one of the 33 lowest accountability index (AI) scores, plus any previously designated alliance districts (total of 36) (see BACKGROUND). The bill also uses the AI to select the 15 districts with the lowest AI scores as opportunity districts.

The bill eliminates the definition of alliance districts. (It is unclear how this impacts a number of other laws using the definition that are not changed by the bill, such as the aspiring educators' diversity scholarship program for graduates of high schools in alliance districts (CGS § 10-156ii) and the alliance district grant for general improvements to school buildings (CGS § 10-265h).)

Under the bill, the designation as opportunity districts begins in FY 26 and lasts for two years. The bill ends the alliance district designation at the end of FY 25.

Improvement Plan and Withholding Funds

Under the alliance district program, each participating school district must submit an improvement plan to the State Department of Education (SDE) for approval before the comptroller releases the district's alliance funding (i.e. a portion of the annual ECS grant that these districts receive). The plan must detail how a district will use its alliance funding to improve student achievement. In addition to the plan, the law permits the alliance district funding to be spent according to SDE's minority candidate certification, retention, or residency year program and with any SBE guidelines (CGS § 10-262u). The bill applies these same requirements to the opportunity districts and no longer applies them to alliance districts.

Under the bill, the portion of the annual ECS grant that the comptroller withholds until plan approval is the increase in a district's ECS grant compared to what it received in FY 12. This is the same method used for the original alliance districts created in 2012 (but the most recent alliance district designation only affecting a few towns used

FY 22).

The bill also applies the current improvement plan components to the opportunity districts and no longer applies them to alliance districts. These components include, in part, (1) a tiered intervention system for the district's schools based on their needs; (2) ways to strengthen reading programs to ensure reading mastery in grades K-3; (3) additional learning time, including extended school day or year programs run by school personnel or external partners; and (4) a talent strategy that includes teacher and school leader recruitment and assignment and career ladder policies that draw on district-approved guidelines for a teacher evaluation.

Also carried over to the opportunity districts is the existing program's SDE interventions and oversight to help districts carry out their plans.

Educational Reform Districts Repealed

The bill also eliminates the term "educational reform district," which is a district that has one of the lowest 10 AI scores. (It is unclear how this impacts a number of other laws using the definition that are not changed by the bill, such as the wraparound services grant for educational reform districts (CGS § 10-265p).)

Districts With the 50 Lowest Accountability Index Scores

The bill also allows districts that are among the 50 with the lowest AI scores but have not been designated an opportunity district, to request technical assistance or other specialized interventions from SDE for help with providing academic support services to students.

§§ 4-6 — CONFORMING AND TECHNICAL CHANGES FOR ECS GRANTS AND GRANTS IN LIEU OF TAXES

By substituting opportunity districts and legacy alliance districts for alliance districts in the following provisions, the bill does not change which districts these provisions apply to. Taken together, opportunity districts and legacy alliance districts encompass all the current alliance districts.

ECS Grant (§§ 4 & 5)

The bill applies to opportunity districts and legacy alliance districts the following ECS grant provisions:

1. a "hold harmless" provision that guarantees alliance districts a grant amount that is at least as much as they received in the previous fiscal year and

2. the "base aid ratio" used to calculate ECS grants that sets a minimum floor of 10% for an alliance district's wealth factor, instead of 1% for other districts (districts with higher ratios receive higher per student grant amounts).

By law, the state ECS grant is calculated annually based on the number and demographics of students enrolled in a district (those eligible for free and reduced meals and English language learners are weighted more in the grant calculation) and the town's property wealth (towns with higher property wealth receive less per student than those with less property wealth).

Grants in Lieu of Taxes (§ 6)

The bill also substitutes opportunity districts and legacy alliance districts for alliance districts in the state grants in lieu of taxes to certain properties, when determining which towns will be considered a Tier I municipality (those towns with an equalized net grand list per capita of under $100,000) (CGS § 12-18b(d)). Tier I towns are eligible for a higher grant payment.

§§ 7 & 8 — REPLACES ALLIANCE DISTRICTS WITH OPPORTUNITY DISTRICTS FOR TWO PROGRAMS

In two programs, the bill replaces alliance districts with opportunity districts, which reduces the number of districts eligible to participate from 36 to 15.

The two programs are:

1. grants for new curricula, training on using the curricula, and

related supporting textbooks and materials (§ 7), and

2. the reading readiness program that provides tiered supports in early literacy (§ 8).

BACKGROUND

Accountability Index Scores

The "accountability index" 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. performance index) and, if appropriate, 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 institutions of higher education and postsecondary education programs, civics and arts education, and physical fitness (CGS § 10-223e(a)).

Related Bill

SB 1 (File 637), favorably reported by the Education Committee, repeals the commissioner's network of schools and the alliance district program among other changes.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Education Committee

Joint Favorable
Yea 42 Nay 0 (03/28/2025)