

# Latest Developments From The Connecticut General Assembly: The Education Committee Completes its Work

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## Education Law Notes

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By Mark Sommaruga

The General Assembly's **Education Committee** was quite active just before its March 30, 2015 deadline for approving bills. On **March 25, 2015**, the **Education Committee** voted favorably on and advanced out of committee the following additional proposed bills:

1. **S.B. No. 1097 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING STATE FUNDING FOR EDUCATION.** This bill would (a) provide that state grants for vocational-agricultural schools be made within available appropriations, (b) extend the prohibition against the supplanting by local and regional school districts of state vocational-agricultural school funding grants to the 2015-2016 fiscal year, and (c) allow the State Department of Education to grant local or regional boards of education additional sums from funds remaining in the appropriation for transportation services.
2. **S.B. No. 1098 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING TEACHER CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS FOR SHORTAGE AREAS, INTERSTATE AGREEMENTS FOR TEACHER CERTIFICATION RECIPROcity, MINORITY TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION AND CULTURAL COMPETENCY INSTRUCTION.** This bill would (a) permit the State Board of Education to issue a temporary ninety-day certificate in the endorsement areas of teacher shortage areas, (b) require the Commissioner of Education to enter teacher certification reciprocity agreements with other states, (c) make revisions to the teacher certification statutes relating to the certification requirements for out-of-state teachers, testing requirements, the endorsement in elementary education, the alternative route to certification program for school administrators and early childhood educators, (d) require the State Department of Education to study and develop strategies to increase minority teacher recruitment and retention, (e) expand the municipal aid for new educators grant program, and (f) include cultural competency instruction in teacher preparation programs and in-service training for educators.
3. **S.B. No. 1099 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A COMMISSION TO DEVELOP A VISION AND STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE CONNECTICUT EDUCATION SYSTEM.** This bill would establish a Planning Commission for Education for the purpose of developing and ensuring the implementation of a strategic master plan for public education in Connecticut.

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4. **S.B. No. 1101 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE OFFICE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD.** This bill would make various minor and technical revisions to the statutes relating to the newly established Office of Early Childhood.
5. **S.B. No. 1103 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING SCHOOL DISTRICTS OF INNOVATION.** This bill would establish a “school districts of innovation” program. Under this proposed bill, the Commissioner of Education would be able to waive certain statutory mandates for any local or regional board of education that develops “creative approaches to addressing issues and challenges related to the provision of education in the public schools, including, but not limited to, improving school climate and reducing school bullying.”
6. **H.B. No. 7018 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION.** This bill would define “alternative education” and require the State Department of Education to develop guidelines for the provision of alternative education. Such guidelines would include, but not be limited to, a description of the purpose and expectations of alternative education, criteria for who is eligible to receive alternative education, and criteria for how and when a student may enter or exit alternative education.
7. **H.B. No. 7019 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE MINIMUM BUDGET REQUIREMENT.** This bill would make several revisions to the minimum budget requirement [“MBR”], and thus would allow for greater reductions in the MBR due to reductions in enrollment, documented intra-district efficiencies, and regional collaboration/cooperative arrangements.
8. **H.B. No. 7020 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS AND INITIATIVES.** This bill would (a) require the State Department of Education to assist in the implementation of a kindergarten assessment tool, (b) authorize early childhood education credits earned at an out-of-state institution of higher education that is regionally accredited and accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children to count towards the staff qualifications requirements for the purposes of school readiness program staffing, (c) require preschool programs offered by magnet schools and charter schools to be accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, (d) require the Office of Early Childhood to provide funding to local and regional early childhood councils and (e) require the Office of Early Childhood to develop a plan regarding the implementation of the staff qualifications requirements for staff members of early childhood education programs.
9. **H.B. No. 7021 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAM EFFICACY.** This bill would require the Office of Higher Education to submit a report on the quality of teacher preparation programs leading to professional certification offered at institutions of higher education in the state and make revisions to the clinical, field or student teaching experience requirement for teacher preparation programs.
10. **H.B. No. 7023 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING MINOR REVISIONS TO THE EDUCATION STATUTES.** This Act would make several “minor” changes to the education statutes, including but not limited to (a) changes to the health screening requirements, (b) changes to the notice requirements to school districts when a child has been accepted or placed on a waiting list for an inter-district magnet school, (c) and

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creation of a grant program for summer learning programs.

Subsequently, on **March 27, 2015**, during its final meeting before the deadline for taking action on bills, the Education Committee voted favorably on and advanced out of committee the following proposed bills:

1. **S.B. No. 965 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING EDUCATION ISSUES.** This bill would require the State Department of Education to study issues relating to education in the state, with a report on this rather broad issue then to be filed by May 26, 2015.
2. **Substitute for S.B. No. 972 (RAISED) AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PROGRAM REVIEW AND INVESTIGATIONS COMMITTEE CONCERNING SCHOOL PARAPROFESSIONAL TRAINING.** This bill would require school districts to provide annual training to paraprofessionals.
3. **S.B. No. 1053 (RAISED) AN ACT PROHIBITING OUT-OF-SCHOOL SUSPENSIONS AND EXPULSIONS FOR STUDENTS IN PRESCHOOL AND GRADES KINDERGARTEN TO TWO.** As the title suggests, this bill would effectively prohibit school districts from issuing out-of-school suspensions and expulsions for students enrolled in a preschool program or grades kindergarten to two, inclusive, with the one exception being for mandatory expulsions for weapon and drug-related offenses.
4. **S.B. No. 1095 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING STUDENTS ASSESSMENTS.** This bill would require the State Department of Education to conduct a study of the state-wide mastery examination and its relation to student learning. This bill also tweaks the definition of “mastery examination” as it applies to 11<sup>th</sup> graders.
5. **S.B. No. 1096 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING CHARTER SCHOOLS.** As amended, this bill would amend the statutory requirements concerning the applications, reports and background checks to be completed by charter schools. Provisions that would have effectively placed a moratorium on new charter schools and subjected charter school management organizations to the FOIA were removed from the bill.
6. **S.B. No. 1100 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING THE ELIMINATION OF THE REPORTING AND COLLECTION OF CERTAIN STUDENT AND TEACHER DATA.** This bill would eliminate the reporting and collection of certain student and teacher information for purposes of the school and district profile report and the public school information system.
7. **S.B. No. 1102 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS FOR BILINGUAL EDUCATORS.** This bill seeks to increase the number of bilingual education teachers in the state by providing greater flexibility in the certification requirements for such teachers.
8. **H.B. No. 6835 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS.** This bill would require school districts to provide a program of bilingual education when there are six or more eligible students enrolled in any school; currently, the threshold is twenty students. This bill would also increase the time a student may spend in a program of bilingual education from thirty months to sixty months and

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expand the measures used to evaluate the effectiveness of bilingual education and English as a second language programs. This bill would also require the State Department of Education to study the feasibility of regional educational service centers providing assistance to school districts for the provision of bilingual education programs.

9. **H.B. No. 7016 (RAISED) AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE MORE COMMISSION SPECIAL EDUCATION SELECT WORKING GROUP.** Among other things, the bill would (a) make changes in the requirements for credit hours concerning special education for teacher certification, (b) require the addition of a school paraprofessional at a Planning and Placement Team meeting at the parent's request, (c) provide for a new, more user-friendly Individualized Education Program ("IEP") form, and (d) create an IEP Advisory Council. This bill would also require each regional educational service center to develop a regional model for the provision of special education services related to transportation, training and therapeutic services to be used for the provision of such services to all school districts served by the regional educational service center.
10. **H.B. No. 7017 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING STUDENT DATA PRIVACY.** This bill seeks to protect the privacy of student information by (among other things) imposing requirements on school districts with regard to their agreements with contractors.
11. **H.B. No. 7022 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING AUTHORIZATION OF STATE GRANT COMMITMENTS FOR SCHOOL BUILDING PROJECTS AND CHANGES TO THE STATUTES CONCERNING SCHOOL BUILDING PROJECTS.** In addition to the authorization of grants for specific building projects, this bill would require the Department of Administrative Services to a) develop a standard checklist for school buildings construction projects (including testing for PCBs and asbestos), and b) establish a school building project clearinghouse for the collection and distribution of school building project designs, plans and specifications that have been approved by the Department.
12. **H.B. No. 7024 (RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING MEASURES FOR CALCULATING SCHOOL AND DISTRICT PERFORMANCE AND WAIVERS OF FEDERAL LAW SOUGHT BY THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION.** This bill would revise how the State Department of Education calculates school and district performance and require the Commissioner of Education to receive approval from the General Assembly's Education Committee before the State seeks a waiver from the federal government of the provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act.

The 2015 session of the Connecticut General Assembly is scheduled to adjourn on June 3, 2015; we will see which of the above bills are passed by both houses of the General Assembly prior to adjournment and then sent to the Governor's desk for signature. Stay tuned.

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**Tags:** Individualized Education Program (IEP), No Child Left Behind Act