In its 2024 regular and special sessions, the General Assembly made a number of changes to the statutes that affect public education in Connecticut. This summary provides a brief overview of some of the more significant changes. Unless otherwise noted, these statutory changes are effective July 1, 2024 or upon passage. Links to the new legislation are provided in the electronic version of this publication.

STATUTORY CHANGES AFFECTING STUDENTS

Suspension

An in-school suspension is defined as an exclusion from regular classroom activity but not exclusion from school, provided such exclusion shall not extend beyond the end of the school year in which the suspension was imposed. Section 13 of Public Act 24-45 reduces the maximum number of consecutive school days for an in-school suspension, from ten school days to five school days.

Standard for Early Grades Out-of-School Suspension

Under prior law, a student in preschool to grade two could be suspended out of school when the student's conduct on school grounds was "of a violent or sexual nature that endangers persons." Section 14 of Public Act 24-45 revises this standard such that a student in preschool to grade two may be suspended out of school only when the student's conduct on school grounds is "behavior that causes physical harm." Further, the Act requires that a student in preschool to grade two who receives an out-of-school suspension also receive services upon the student's return to school. Such services must be trauma-informed, developmentally appropriate, and align with any behavioral intervention plan, Individualized Education Program ("IEP"), or Section 504 plan the student may have. The Act also requires that the administration consider whether to convene a Planning and Placement Team ("PPT") meeting to conduct an evaluation to determine if the student may require special education or related services. Finally, the Act reduces the maximum length of an out-of-school suspension for students in preschool to grade two from ten school days to five school days.

Expulsion Hearing Notice

Pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes § 10-233d, students cannot be expelled without a formal expulsion hearing, except in the case of emergency. Notice of the expulsion hearing must be provided to the student's parent or guardian at least five business days prior to the expulsion hearing. Section 12 of Public Act 24-93 amends the statute to specify that the five business days not include the day of the hearing.

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Parental Notification of Student Behavior Causing Disruption or Harm and Behavior Intervention Meeting

Beginning in the 2022-2023 school year, any teacher of record in a classroom could request a behavior intervention meeting with the school's crisis intervention team for any student whose behavior caused (1) a serious disruption to other students' instruction, (2) self-harm, or (3) physical harm to the teacher, another student, or staff in the teacher's classroom. Section 11 of Public Act 24-93 amends Connecticut General Statutes § 10-236c to create two new parental notification requirements regarding such student behavior.

First, the Act requires the school principal or other administrator to notify the parent or guardian of a student whose behavior has caused (1) a serious disruption to the instruction of other students, (2) self-harm, or (3) physical harm to another student, teacher, or other school employee, not later than twenty-four hours after such behavior occurred. This notification must inform the parent or guardian that the classroom teacher may request a behavior intervention meeting with the school's crisis intervention team, as permitted by law. As appropriate, administrators may combine this new notification requirement with the obligation set forth in Connecticut General Statutes § 10-233e, which has long required boards of education to provide parents and guardians of students excluded from the classroom pursuant to removal, suspension, or expulsion, notice of such exclusion within twenty-four hours.

The second new parental notification requirement is triggered when a behavior intervention meeting is requested by the classroom teacher in whose classroom the behavior occurred. In such instance, the Act requires that the school's crisis intervention team provide the parent or guardian with (1) notice that such meeting shall take place, and (2) a written summary of the meeting, including, but not limited to, resources and supports identified by the team to address the student's social, emotional and instructional needs. This summary must be provided to the parent or guardian no later than seven days after such meeting and in the parent or guardian's dominant language.

Graduation Requirements

Sections 9 and 10 of Public Act 24-45 make various changes to the high school graduation requirements found in Connecticut General Statutes § 10-221a.

Mastery-Based Diploma Assessment

Beginning with the graduating class of 2027, Section 9 of the Act eliminates the option for boards of education to require a one-credit mastery-based diploma assessment in order to graduate from high school.

Personal Financial Management and Financial Literacy

Under existing law, beginning with the graduating class of 2027, students are required to complete a one-half credit course in personal financial management and financial literacy. This requirement may count towards the nine credits required for the humanities or as an elective credit. Section 9 of the Act now also permits credit from the personal financial management and financial literacy requirement to count towards students' nine science, technology, engineering and mathematics credit requirements.

Community Service

Under existing law, boards of education may offer one-half credit in community service which, if satisfactorily completed under certain conditions, qualifies for high school graduation credit. Section 9 of the Act removes the prohibition on partisan political activities qualifying as community service. The Act also removes the requirement that the State Board of Education ("SBE") provide students who complete at least fifty hours of community service with a community service recognition award.

Physical Education

Under existing law, students are required to complete one credit of physical education and wellness unless they present a certificate from a physician or advanced practice registered nurse certifying that, in the practitioner's opinion, participation in physical education is medically contraindicated by the student's physical condition. Section 9 of the Act permits students to provide such certification from a physician assistant, as well.

FAFSA

Section 9 of the Act delays by two years, until the graduating class of 2027, the requirement that each student complete a Free Application for Federal Student Aid ("FAFSA") or complete a waiver for such requirement in order to graduate. Section 10 of the Act exempts from this requirement students who (1) are enrolled in an incorporated or endowed high school or academy and (2) hold an F-1 visa.

Credit Recovery Program

Section 25 of Public Act 24-45 requires boards of education that include a credit recovery program as part of their alternative education program to also permit students enrolled in a traditional school program offered by the board, and who are at risk of not graduating, to enroll in the credit recovery program while still enrolled in the traditional school program.

Student Success Plans

Under existing law, boards of education must create a student success plan for each public school student beginning in the sixth grade. Sections 9, 11, and 12 of Public Act 24-45 now require student success plans to consider enrollment opportunities in the Connecticut Technical Education and Career System ("CTECS").

School Climate Surveys and Climate Improvement Plans

Last year, the General Assembly made significant changes to the statutory provisions related to bullying and school climate. Notably, the 2023 law (1) requires school districts to implement a new Connecticut school climate policy and bullying complaint form by July 1, 2025; (2) redefines previous terms and includes new terms associated with the school climate policy; (3) updates the roles of school climate personnel; and (4) establishes a new annual training requirement. Public Act 24-45 makes minor changes to the 2023 law.

Sections 16 and 17 of the Act require the Social and Emotional Learning and School Climate Advisory Collaborative (the "Collaborative") to develop (1) school climate survey standards, including but not limited to standards for the collection of data on diversity, equity and inclusion and for the reduction in disparities in data collection between school districts; and (2) a model school climate improvement plan.

Section 18 of the Act again revises the 2023 definition of "school climate survey" to clarify that a "school climate survey" must either (1) meet the school climate survey standards developed by the Collaborative or (2) be the state-wide school climate survey developed by the Collaborative.

Under the 2023 law, beginning with the 2025-2026 school year, the school climate specialist is required to develop a school climate improvement plan based on the results of their school's climate survey. Section 19 of the Act allows, but does not require, the school climate improvement plan to incorporate the model school climate improvement plan developed by the Collaborative.

State Director of School Climate Improvement

Pursuant to Section 20 of Public Act 24-45, the Connecticut State Department of Education ("CSDE") must appoint a Director of School Climate Improvement ("Director"), within available appropriations. The Director's duties include (1) assisting boards of education with implementing various anti-bullying requirements and the Connecticut school climate policy; (2) providing information and assistance to boards of education, students, and parents or guardians on the uniform bullying complaint form; (3) assisting school climate coordinators in the development of a continuum of strategies to prevent, identify, and respond to challenging behavior; and (4) developing and providing technical assistance and recommendations, in collaboration with the Collaborative, to boards of education on trainings for school employees for purposes of school climate improvement. The Director is also tasked with (1) assisting the Collaborative to develop and implement tools and best practices related to school climate and culture, including the development of a model school climate survey and a model school climate improvement plan; and (2) developing strategies, in collaboration with the Collaborative, to improve the delivery of services concerning social and emotional learning, skills building, and mental health support. No later than January 1, 2026, and annually thereafter, the Director shall submit a report to the General Assembly on recommendations for best practices and improvement of school climate improvement strategies.

Ban on Required Parent Participation in School Activities as a Condition of Student Enrollment

The Connecticut State Constitution guarantees free public elementary and secondary schools in the state and directs the General Assembly to implement this principle by appropriate legislation. Section 7 of Public Act 24-93 now prohibits boards of education from conditioning student enrollment in their schools on parent or guardian participation in school activities, such as through volunteering.

State-Wide Program to Support Advanced Placement Students

Section 4 of Public Act 24-78 requires the CSDE 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. The Act instructs the CSDE to consult with boards of education and institutions of higher education in conducting its study. It also requires that the CSDE review current in-state programs and identify and analyze programs in other states. By January 1, 2026, the CSDE must submit a report that provides recommendations for the establishment, and criteria for the implementation, of such program.

State Seal of Biliteracy

Prior law directed the SBE to establish criteria for boards of education to award the Connecticut State Seal of Biliteracy to high school students who achieve a high level of proficiency in English and one or more foreign languages. Section 5 of Public Act 24-78 now directs the CSDE, rather than the SBE, to establish such criteria and expands eligible schools to include the governing board of any school that awards diplomas. 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.

Disconnected Youth

Section 21 of Public Act 24-45 requires that the Connecticut Preschool Through Twenty and Workforce Information Network ("P20 WIN") develop a plan to establish a state-wide data intermediary that is responsible for (1) providing technical support, (2) creating data sharing agreements, and (3) building and maintaining the infrastructure necessary

to share data between nonprofit organizations serving disconnected youth. No later than January 1, 2025, P20 WIN must submit such plan to the General Assembly.

Section 22 of the Act requires that, no later than January 1, 2025, and annually thereafter, the executive board of P20 WIN submit an annual report on disconnected youth to the General Assembly.

As used in the plan and the annual report, "disconnected youth" means an individual who is fourteen to twenty-six years of age and who is (A) an at-risk student (defined as a student enrolled in high school and in danger of not graduating), or (B) not enrolled in high school, and (i) has not obtained a high school diploma or its equivalent; (ii) has obtained a high school diploma or its equivalent but is unemployed and not enrolled in an adult education program, institution of higher education or otherwise pursuing postsecondary education, or workforce training or certification program, including an apprenticeship program; or (iii) is incarcerated.

The Office of Victim Services Sexual Assault Resource Document

Existing law requires the Office of Victim Services, in consultation with the Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence, to compile information on services and resources available to victims of domestic violence and provide such information to the CSDE. Each board of education must provide this information when a school district employee is alerted by a student or their parent or guardian that they feel unsafe because of domestic violence.

Section 3 of Public Act 24-127 requires that, in addition to domestic violence, the resource include information on services and resources available to victims of sexual assault and that boards of education provide this resource to students or their parent/guardian(s) who express feeling unsafe because of sexual assault.

Aspiring Educators Diversity Scholarship Program

Current law requires the CSDE to administer an aspiring educators diversity scholarship program for diverse students who (1) graduate from public high schools in certain school districts and (2) are enrolled in a teacher preparation program at a four-year institution of higher education.

Section 50 of Public Act 24-41 revises the scholarship's criteria by making it available to diverse students who graduate from public high schools in alliance districts, rather than public high schools in priority school districts. An alliance district is a school district that is among the towns with the thirty-three lowest accountability index scores as calculated by the CSDE or was previously designated as an alliance district for fiscal years ending June 30, 2013 to June 30, 2022.

STATUTORY CHANGES AFFECTING EMPLOYMENT

Paid Sick Leave

Under current law, certain employers with at least fifty employees are required to provide their "service workers," as defined in the law, with up to forty hours of paid sick leave annually, in accordance with statutory requirements. Effective January 1, 2025, Public Act 24-8 significantly expands and revises Connecticut's paid sick leave law. This summary addresses important provisions of the new law, but please note that the Act also addresses other topics including carryover, replacement coverage, payout, discipline, sick leave banks, and breaks in service.

Broader Coverage of Employers and Employees

Pursuant to Sections 1 through 6 of Public Act 24-8, Connecticut's paid sick leave law continues to apply to an employer, defined as "any person, firm, business, educational institution, limited liability company or other entity," with limited exceptions and with gradual coverage for smaller employers in the state.

Currently, the paid sick leave law applies to defined categories of "service workers." Effective January 1, 2025, the law will expand to cover nearly all of an employer's employees. In addition, under the revised law, day and temporary workers will also be covered. Only seasonal employees working one-hundred-twenty days or less in a year and certain employees of construction-related unions do not qualify as employees under the law.

Leave Usage

Section 3 of Public Act 24-8 addresses when an employee must be allowed to use paid sick leave that is provided in accordance with the Act, as follows:

1) for (a) the employee's own illness, injury or health condition; (b) the medical diagnosis, care or treatment of an employee's mental or physical illness, injury or health condition; (c) preventative medical care for an employee's mental or physical health; or (d) a mental health wellness day during which an employee attends to the employee's emotional and psychological well-being in lieu of attending a regularly scheduled shift;
2) for (a) the employee's family member's illness, injury, or health condition; (b) the medical diagnosis, care, or treatment of such family member's mental or physical illness, injury, or health condition; or (c) preventative medical care for such family member's mental or physical health;
3) for closure by order of a public official, due to a public health emergency, of an employer's place of business, or a covered family member's school or place of care;
4) for a determination by certain entities that the employee or the employee's family member poses a risk to the health of others due to such employee's or family member's exposure to a communicable illness, whether or not the employee or family member contracted the communicable illness; and
5) where an employee or an employee's family member is a victim of family violence or sexual assault, provided such employee is not the perpetrator or alleged perpetrator of such family violence or sexual assault, for (a) medical care or psychological or other counseling, (b) obtaining services from a victim services organization, (c) relocating due to such family violence or sexual assault, or (d) participating in any civil or criminal proceedings related to or resulting from such family violence or sexual assault.

Broader Range of Family Members for Whom an Employee May Use Leave

Sections 1 and 3 of Public Act 24-8 expand the types of family members for whom employees may take paid sick days. Under the current law, service workers may use paid sick days to care for themselves or their child or spouse. Under the revised law, employees are permitted to use paid sick leave to care for additional family members, defined by the statute to mean a spouse, child (including an adult child), parent, grandparent, grandchild, or sibling of an employee or an individual related to the employee by blood or affinity whose close association to the employee is equivalent to those family relationships.

Leave Accrual

For employees newly covered under the paid sick law, Section 2 of Public Act 24-8 provides that the accrual of paid sick leave will begin January 1, 2025, January 1, 2026, or January 1, 2027, depending on the employer's initial coverage under the law. Employees hired after these dates will begin their accrual on the first date of their employment.

Under the revised law, paid sick leave shall accrue (1) at a rate of one hour of paid sick leave for every thirty hours (rather than forty hours, under current law) worked by the employee, (2) in one-hour increments, (3) up to a maximum of forty hours per year. Under the revised law, employees may begin to take leave on their one-hundred-twentieth calendar day of work.

When the same employer transfers an employee to a separate division, such as a different collective bargaining unit, employees maintain and may use their accrued paid sick leave. Employees exempt from overtime work are presumed to work forty hours per week for leave accrual purposes, except each such employee whose normal work week is less than forty hours shall accrue paid sick leave based upon the hours worked in such normal work week.

Documentation

Under the revised law, employers may not require an employee to provide documentation that paid sick leave provided in accordance with the Act is taken for a permitted purpose.

Notice

Under the revised law, each employer must provide employees, at the time of hiring, notice of the entitlement to paid sick leave, the amount of paid sick leave provided, and the terms under which paid sick leave may be used. Such notice must also indicate that retaliation for requesting or using paid sick leave is prohibited and that employees have a right to file a complaint with the Labor Commissioner for any violation. Such notice requirements may be met by (1) displaying a poster, in English and Spanish, in a conspicuous place accessible to employees, and (2) providing written notice to employees by January 1, 2025 or at the time of hire, whichever is later. The revised law requires the Labor Commissioner to create a model poster and written notice and make them available to employers on the Department of Labor's website.

Employers must also include, on employee pay stubs, an employee's accrued paid sick time and the amount of sick time an employee has used during the calendar year. Employers must keep such records for a period of three years.

Deemed Compliance

An employer that offers any other paid leave, or combination of leave, that may be used for the same purposes and under the same conditions as those described in the revised law shall be deemed in compliance with the new requirements.

FMLA for Noncertified School Board Employees

Under federal law, public school employees qualify for unpaid leave benefits under the federal Family and Medical Leave Act ("FMLA") if they have (1) been employed by the board of education for at least twelve months and (2) worked for such employer at least 1,250 hours in the previous twelve months. Effective October 1, 2024, Section 18 of Public Act 24-41 requires that boards of education provide benefits equal to those provided by the federal FMLA to noncertified employees (not just paraeducators in an educational setting, as under current law) who have been employed by the board for at least twelve months and worked at least 950 (rather than 1,250) hours for such board in the previous twelve months. Similarly, the Act reduces the work hours requirement, from 1,250 to 950 hours in the previous twelve months, for noncertified employees to request leave to serve as an organ or bone marrow donor.

Changes to Mandated Reporter Statute

Connecticut General Statutes § 17a-101 designates certain professionals (e.g., school employees, health professionals, and coaches) as mandated reporters of suspected child abuse and neglect. Such individuals must report to the Department of Children and Families ("DCF") or law enforcement within prescribed timeframes when, in the ordinary course of their employment or profession, they have reasonable cause to suspect or believe that a child (1) has been abused or neglected; (2) has had nonaccidental physical injury, or injury which is at variance with the history given of such injury, inflicted upon such child; or (3) is at imminent risk of physical harm.

By law, a mandated reporter's suspicion or belief does not require certainty or probable cause and may be based on factors including, but not limited to, observations, allegations, facts or statements by a child, victim, or third party.

Preliminary Inquiries by Mandated Reporters

Section 40 of Public Act 24-41 revises the statute to provide that nothing in the law precludes mandated reporters from conducting a preliminary inquiry to determine if reasonable cause exists prior to making a report.

Existing law (1) requires boards of education to permit and give priority to any investigation of suspected abuse, neglect, or sexual assault conducted by DCF or a local law enforcement agency, and (2) directs each board of education to conduct its own investigation upon notice from the relevant agency that the board of education's investigation will not interfere with that of the agency. Section 48 of the Act clarifies that any preliminary inquiry, as described above, is not considered an investigation conducted by a board of education.

Under existing law, DCF must develop a training program and refresher training for mandated reporters on accurately and promptly identifying and reporting suspected child abuse and neglect. Section 49 of the Act requires DCF, no later than October 1, 2024, to update the training and refresher training programs regarding (1) the proper manner in which to conduct a preliminary inquiry and (2) DCF's Careline and investigations by DCF, local law enforcement, and boards of education.

Reporting Suspected Sexual Assault by a School Employee

Under existing law, any school employee who has reasonable cause to suspect or believe that any person (regardless of age) who is being educated by the CTECS or a board of education, other than as a part of an adult education program, is a victim of sexual assault, and the alleged perpetrator is a school employee, must report such suspected sexual assault. Private school employees are already mandated reporters under existing law. Section 40 of Public Act 24-41 now explicitly requires school employees to report suspected sexual assault by a school employee of a nonpublic school student.

Immunity from Liability

Existing law grants immunity from civil or criminal liability to persons, institutions, and agencies that, in good faith, report suspected child abuse or neglect or alleged sexual assault of a student to DCF or law enforcement. Section 41 of Public Act 24-41 extends that protection to persons, institutions, and agencies that, in good faith, do not make such a report.

Failure to Report

Under prior law, the DCF Commissioner was required to investigate delayed reports by mandated reporters. Section 43 of Public Act 24-41 revises the law to require the Commissioner to assess (not investigate) a mandated reporter's failure to make reports within the time period prescribed by law. Such assessment into a mandated

reporter's failure to report within the time prescribed by law must be conducted in accordance with a policy to be developed by DCF. As required under existing law, this policy shall include when referrals must be made to law enforcement and when DCF shall require mandated reporters who have failed to make reports to participate in an educational and training program.

Exemption of Certain Law Enforcement Records from Disclosure under FOIA

Under existing law, the Freedom of Information Act exempts from disclosure law enforcement agency records not otherwise available to the public that were compiled in connection with detecting or investigating a crime, if the disclosure of such records would not be in the public interest because it would result in the disclosure of the identity of informants or witnesses not otherwise known, provided certain conditions are met. Section 1 of Public Act 24-56 expands this exemption to also protect the identity of mandated reporters of child abuse and neglect, not otherwise known.

In-Service Training

Section 2 of Public Act 24-45 clarifies that the manner and frequency of the in-service training requirements in Connecticut General Statutes § 10-220a shall be determined by the board of education's professional development and evaluation committee, but that the training must be provided at least once every five years. Further, the Act amends the in-service training requirements to eliminate training requirements related to (1) the identification and prevention of and response to bullying, (2) culturally responsive pedagogy and practice, and (3) the principles and practices of social-emotional learning and restorative practices. However, boards of education are still required to provide such training pursuant to other statutes.

School Nurse Orientation

Under existing law, beginning with the 2024-2025 school year and continuing each school year thereafter, boards of education are required to annually approve and provide professional development programs or activities for all school nurses and nurse practitioners. As part of such programs and activities, existing law requires that new school nurses and nurse practitioners receive training and instruction in the implementation of IEPs and Section 504 plans. Such training must be provided and completed within thirty days of being appointed by or entering into a contract with a board of education. Section 15 of Public Act 24-93 adds a requirement that, within six months of being appointed by or entering into a contract with a board, new school nurses and nurse practitioners also receive an orientation to school health services, to be developed by an association representing school nurses in Connecticut.

Nurse Licensure Compact

Public Act 24-83 enters Connecticut into the Nurse Licensure Compact, which establishes a process for nurses to obtain a multistate license or a single-state license in their home state, and authorizes nurses to practice as a registered nurse, licensed practical nurse, or vocational nurse in other states. Under the Act, a "home state" means the "state that is the nurse's primary state of residence." The Nurse Licensure Compact establishes certain eligibility criteria for nurses obtaining or maintaining their multistate license in their home state.

Telehealth

Under Connecticut law, certain health care providers are permitted to practice telehealth in Connecticut under certain conditions and within their profession's scope of practice and standard of care. Section 1 of Public Act 24-110 expands the list of authorized telehealth providers to include any health care provider or pharmacist licensed in Connecticut.

As to out-of-state providers, the Act repeals a provision permanently allowing out-of-state behavioral or mental health service providers to practice telehealth in Connecticut under certain conditions. Instead, an out-of-state provider may practice telehealth in Connecticut until June 30, 2025, if the provider:

1) is appropriately licensed, certified, or registered in another U.S. state or territory or the District of Columbia as a physician, naturopath, registered nurse, advanced practice registered nurse, physician assistant, psychologist, marital and family therapist, clinical social worker, master social worker, alcohol and drug counselor, professional counselor, dietician-nutritionist, nurse-midwife, behavior analyst, or music or art therapist;
2) provides mental or behavioral health care within such person's scope of practice and in accordance with the standard of care applicable to the profession;
3) has professional liability insurance in an amount at least equal to that required for Connecticut health providers;
4) registers with the Department of Public Health ("DPH") before providing telehealth to patients in Connecticut; and
5) applies and completes the application process for a Connecticut license, certificate, or registration within specified timeframes.

The Act also requires any Connecticut entity or provider who engages or contracts with an out-of-state telehealth provider who is not also credentialed in Connecticut to verify that the provider has registered with DPH as described above. In turn, DPH must (1) verify the credentials of such telehealth provider in the state in which such provider is licensed, certified, or registered; (2) ensure that such telehealth provider is in good standing; and (3) confirm that such telehealth provider maintains professional liability insurance in an amount equal to or greater than that required for similarly licensed, certified, or registered providers in the state.

Existing provisions regarding the manner of providing telehealth and telehealth delivery remain intact. In addition, the revised law addresses healthcare provider's obligations and other issues related to health insurance coverage and payment for uninsured and underinsured patients.

Emergency Epinephrine Administration Training

State law currently permits a paraeducator to administer medication, including medication administered with a cartridge injector, to a specific student with a medically diagnosed allergic condition that may require prompt treatment in order to protect the student against serious harm or death, provided various conditions are met. Such administration of medication must be in accordance with board policies and procedures for the administration of medication in the absence of the school nurse, with parent/guardian written authorization, pursuant to a written order of a qualified medical professional, and upon approval and under the general supervision of the school nurse and school medical advisor, if any. Section 6 of Public Act 24-93 amends Connecticut General Statutes § 10-212a to require that paraeducators and other qualified school employees authorized to administer epinephrine in such circumstances

complete annual training on emergency first aid to students who experience allergic reactions, which training the CSDE is already required to make available to boards of education.

ARC Programs

Existing law authorizes the approval of Alternative Route to Certification ("ARC") programs for "school support staff," defined as behavior analysts, assistant behavioral analysts, athletic coaches, and paraeducators employed by a board of education. Section 7 of Public Act 24-41 amends the law to remove the requirement that ARC programs only accept participants who hold a bachelor's degree and instead allows the CSDE to approve programs that accept individuals who hold such degrees, or such programs can partner with an accredited institution of higher education to provide a dual degree-plus-certification program for participants who hold an associate degree.

In approving such programs, the CSDE must give priority to programs that provide flexibility for participants to continue to work in their positions as school support staff while pursuing an initial educator certificate, except when such participants are completing their one-year residency requirement.

Further, existing law identifies categories of individuals from alternate professions who may participate in an ARC program. Section 8 of Public Act 24-41 expands the definition of "person from an alternate profession" to include a person who holds at least a bachelor's degree and has completed at least five years of work experience requiring consistent exercise of discretion and independent judgment in the field related to the relevant endorsement area.

Employment History Reviews

Pursuant to Connecticut General Statutes § 10-222c, boards of education must conduct employment history reviews before offering employment to an applicant for a position, including any position that is contracted for, if such applicant would have direct student contact. The statute lays out specific requirements for such employment history reviews and requires boards of education to send applicants' previous employers a form developed by the CSDE seeking information required by statute. Section 46 of Public Act 24-41 provides that applicants' previous employers are no longer required to disclose information about a substantiated allegation of abuse or neglect or sexual misconduct if the substantiation was reversed as a result of an appeal to DCF.

Paraeducator Health Insurance Programs

Section 124 of Public Act 24-81 revises the paraeducator health insurance programs that were established by the General Assembly in 2023.

Under existing law, for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024, the Comptroller was required to establish a program to provide a subsidy to each paraeducator who is employed by a board of education and opens a Health Savings Account ("HSA"), provided the paraeducator applies for the subsidy. The Act extends the subsidy program to include the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025, and expands the program to provide subsidies to paraeducators who are eligible for Medicare and enroll in a High Deductible Health Plan ("HDHP"). The Act also changes the subsidy amount from a percentage of the initial investment made to open the account to a percentage of the deductible for the paraeducator's health plan, minus the amount of any employer contributions to an HSA or health reimbursement account.

Further, the Act requires the Comptroller, for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025, to set up a program providing subsidies to boards of education that provide health insurance coverage, other than an HDHP, to paraeducators and their dependents. The subsidy must be used to offset the employee's share of the health insurance premium.

Changes Term to "Paraeducator"

Sections 20-38 of Public Act 24-41 change the terms "school paraprofessional," "paraprofessional," and "paraprofessional teacher aide" to "paraeducator" in a number of education-related statutes.

STATUTORY CHANGES AFFECTING EDUCATOR CERTIFICATION

Initial Educator Certification

Sections 1 and 6 of Public Act 24-41 simplify the requirements to obtain an initial educator certification. The Act directs the SBE, upon receipt of a proper application and other requirements, to issue an initial educator certificate to any person with a bachelor's degree or advanced degree from an accredited higher education institution who:

1) has successfully completed an SBE-approved educator preparation program,
2) has successfully completed an ARC program pursuant to state law (without needing to satisfy the requirements of a ninety-day certificate or a resident teacher certificate, as previously required), or
3) is an educator from another state and meets the requirements set forth in Connecticut law.

Pursuant to Section 6, the SBE has the authority to waive these requirements and issue an initial certificate to any person who presents a combination of education and experience that the SBE determines to be the equivalent of the education and experience described above.

Initial Certification Valid for Ten Years

Section 1 of Public Act 24-41 makes an initial educator certification valid for ten years, rather than three years as under prior law. This change applies to any initial educator certificate issued on or after July 1, 2025, and any certificate that has not expired by July 1, 2025, the latter of which shall be extended to be valid for a period of ten years from the date of issuance.

Under existing law, the Commissioner of Education may extend initial certifications for an additional year at a superintendent's or local assessment team's request. The Act prohibits the Commissioner from granting an extension more than three times to any person.

Repealing Provisional Educator Certification

Under existing law, Connecticut has three levels of teacher certification: initial, provisional, and professional. Section 1 of Public Act 24-41 repeals the provisional certificate as of July 1, 2025. At that time, a person who holds a provisional educator certificate and is not eligible for a professional certificate shall be eligible for an initial certificate.

Section 1 of the Act also changes the requirements for a professional certification. On and after July 1, 2025, upon proper application, the SBE must issue a professional educator certificate to any candidate who:

1) has completed at least fifty school months (five years) of successful teaching for one or more boards of education or approved nonpublic schools in Connecticut while holding an initial educator or provisional educator certificate;

2) has satisfactorily completed the teacher education and mentoring ("TEAM") program, as required under state law; and
3) either (a) holds a master's degree or higher in an appropriate subject matter area or (b) completes an alternate pathway to professional licensure jointly approved by the SBE and the Educator Preparation and Certification Board. The SBE may waive this requirement for good cause.

Broadening Grades Covered by Certain Teaching Endorsements

Section 2 of Public Act 24-41 broadens the grades covered by certain teaching endorsements.

Under current law, certain elementary endorsements are valid for kindergarten through grade six based on various factors. The Act retroactively allows an educator endorsement, issued prior to July 1, 2025, to teach elementary grades one to six or grades kindergarten to six to be valid for grades prekindergarten to six. Similarly, any new elementary endorsements issued on and after July 1, 2025, shall also be valid for grades prekindergarten through six.

The Act also makes the following endorsements for grades seven to twelve valid for grades four to twelve, regardless of when the endorsements were issued: biology, business, chemistry, earth science, English, French, German, general science, history and social studies, Italian, Latin and classical humanities, Mandarin Chinese, mathematics, Portuguese, physics, Russian, Spanish, and any other world language.

Under Section 4 of the Act, any person who holds an initial, provisional, or professional educator certificate whose endorsement has been revised according to the changes described above will not be required to apply for a revised endorsement, and such educator will be permitted to provide instruction under the revised endorsement. Beginning July 1, 2026, the SBE will assign the revised endorsement upon the issuance or reissuance of a professional educator certificate when issued or reissued.

Subject Area Assessments and Cross Endorsements

Under Section 5 of Public Act 24-41, on and after July 1, 2024, any person who holds an educator certificate and scores a satisfactory evaluation on the appropriate SBE-approved subject area assessment can be issued a cross endorsement in the relevant certification endorsement area. This simplified process does not apply to the endorsement areas of special education, teaching English to speakers of other languages, bilingual, remedial reading and remedial language arts, or school library media specialist.

edTPA

Section 15 of Public Act 24-41 prohibits the SBE from using the preservice performance assessment, edTPA, to deny an application for an initial educator certificate. The Act also prohibits the SBE from requiring a Connecticut institution of higher education's teacher preparation program from using edTPA as a (a) preservice performance assessment for the teacher preparation program and (b) program completion requirement.

In addition, the Act prohibits a Connecticut institution of higher education from using the results of edTPA to deny a candidate successful completion of its teacher preparation program, although such institutions can use edTPA results as a diagnostic tool to provide remedial instruction while the candidate is enrolled in the program.

Technical High School and Trade Occupations Educator Certifications

Sections 16 and 17 of Public Act 24-41 create statutory authority for two new occupational initial educator certifications, similar to certifications that already exist in state regulations. One of the certifications permits the holder to teach an "occupational subject" (which includes, but is not limited to, automobile servicing, carpentry, plumbing, culinary arts, electronics, cosmetology, and public safety) in CTECS. The other certification allows a holder to teach trade and industrial occupations (which includes, but is not limited to, food service, automotive servicing, machine tool and operation, building maintenance and repairs, welding, appliance repair, and public safety) in a comprehensive high school trade and industrial program in grades six to twelve, but not at CTECS. The Act also offers a way for applicants to receive an interim educator certificate and allows for extensions of such interim certificates, in certain circumstances.

Various Regulations Repealed

Section 51 of Public Act 24-41 repeals a number of regulations related to educator preparation programs and certifications, as of July 1, 2026.

Notably, the Act repeals Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies § 10-145d-400a(a)-(d), the Code of Professional Responsibility for Teachers. The Act does not repeal the Code of Professional Responsibilities for School Administrators.

In addition, under Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies § 10-145d-420(f), a Superintendent may make a request to the Commissioner of Education for a waiver for employing a substitute teacher without a bachelor's degree. Upon determination of good cause, the Commissioner or designee may grant such waiver. The Act repeals this waiver process.

Creation of the Connecticut Educator Preparation and Certification Board

Section 10 of Public Act 24-41 creates the Connecticut Educator Preparation and Certification Board ("CEPCB") and tasks it with modernizing and aligning educator preparation and certification to attract and retain effective and diverse professionals to work in Connecticut public schools. To do so, the CEPCB is charged with developing standards and proposals for regulations or legislation relating to teacher preparation and certification, which must meet a number of requirements set forth in the Act.

CEPCB and SBE Consider and Approve or Reject Each Other's Proposals

Under Section 11 of the Act, the CEPCB and SBE are each given the authority to develop standards and proposals ("Proposals") for regulations and legislation relating to educator preparation and certification. Each entity is required to submit its Proposals to the other for approval or rejection within sixty days. If approved, the Proposal shall be implemented. If the approved Proposal is for regulations, the SBE shall adopt such regulations, in accordance with applicable law. If the approved Proposal is for legislation, it shall be submitted to the Education Committee for consideration.

CEPCB Duties

Sections 12 through 14 of the Act set forth the duties of the CEPCB.

Section 12 of the Act sets forth various topics about which the CEPCB must develop Proposals for regulations and legislation by July 1, 2025.

Section 13 of the Act requires the CEPCB to review educator preparation and certification regulations and statutes for obsolete or conflicting positions; review the state's approach to assessing whether educator certification candidates demonstrate minimum content knowledge for their endorsement areas; and recommend whether alternative approaches should be offered for candidates to demonstrate such knowledge. In addition, the CEPCB is required to review certification endorsement areas; explore alternative pathways for cross endorsements; and consider whether ARC program providers should have authority to establish candidate admission criteria for their programs. The CEPCB is required to submit its findings and recommendations to the SBE and Education Committee.

Section 14 of the Act requires the CEPCB to develop review criteria standards for new or continuing educator preparation programs and ARC programs by July 1, 2026.

Beginning July 1, 2026, Section 12 of the Act also requires the CEPCB annually to collect and review (1) state-specific data on educator vacancies, shortage areas, and the educator preparation program dashboard and (2) data on national policy developments on educator preparation certification, and employment. The CEPCB must also evaluate whether changes are needed to the current educator preparation and certification frameworks and develop proposals for regulations and legislation to strengthen the prior systems.

STATUTORY CHANGES AFFECTING TEACHING AND CURRICULUM

CSDE Literacy Research and Reading Success Resources

In 2021, the General Assembly established the Office of Dyslexia and Reading Disabilities ("Office") within the CSDE. Section 1 of Public Act 24-78 expands the requirement that the Office verify the compliance of education preparation programs to include intermediate administrator and supervisor programs. It also requires the Office to verify compliance of applicants for educator certificates relating to additional areas of instruction and training, including scientifically based reading research and instruction, structured literacy and training. Section 3 of the Act requires the CSDE, not later than July 1, 2025, to develop compliance measures and audit procedures to determine the compliance of the educator preparation programs in the provision of instruction on scientifically based reading research and instruction.

In 2021, the General Assembly also required the CSDE to establish the Center for Literacy Research and Reading Success ("Center"). Section 2 of the Act revises the responsibilities of the Center to make available to the faculty of teacher preparation programs (1) resources and research supporting scientifically based reading research and instruction and (2) the state's K-3 Literacy Strategy developed by the Center. This language replaces the prior requirement 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. The Act also eliminates the requirement for the Center to report on teacher preparation programs' progress in including these models or programs.

Partnerships Between High Schools and Community-Technical Colleges

Section 8 of Public Act 24-93 requires regional community-technical colleges to consult with administrators and counselors at public high schools located within their state region. The purpose of such consultation is to establish a collaborative partnership between schools and colleges, which may include, but is not limited to: (1) collaborative counseling programs for students interested in specific careers, (2) the evaluation and alignment of curricula, and (3) offering support or educational programming to improve student outcomes.

Model Digital Citizenship Curriculum

Not later than January 1, 2025, Section 145 of Public Act 24-151 requires that the CSDE, in collaboration with the Commission for Educational Technology, develop a model digital citizenship curriculum that boards of education may utilize for kindergarten to twelfth grade. The model digital citizenship curriculum shall (1) be rigorous, age appropriate, and aligned with SBE-approved curriculum guidelines; (2) include content and instruction to develop digital citizenship skills and dispositions within online spaces with the media and technology across all content areas to cultivate positive student relationships and school climate; and (3) include topics that are aligned with CSDE's model curriculum for civics and citizenship.

Model Student Work Release Policy

In 2022, the General Assembly required the Chief Workforce Officer, in consultation with the Commissioner of Education, the executive director of the CTECS, and the Labor Commissioner, to develop, by July 1, 2023, a model student work release policy. Beginning with the 2024-2025 school year and each school year thereafter, boards of education must adopt this model work release policy. Section 26 of Public Act 24-45 now requires that the Chief Workforce Officer update the model student work release policy in consultation with the Commissioner of Education.

STATUTORY CHANGES AFFECTING SPECIAL EDUCATION

Notice Requirements Before PPTs

Under current law, boards of education must give a parent, guardian, pupil or surrogate parent at least five days' notice before any PPT meeting. Current law further provides that a parent, guardian, pupil or surrogate parent has the right, at the PPT, to:

1) be present at and participate in all portions of the meeting where an educational program for the student is developed, reviewed, or revised;
2) have advisors of the person's own choosing, the paraeducator assigned to the student, the birth-to-three coordinator, if any, and a language interpreter present, if there is an apparent need or upon request; and
3) have each recommendation made in the student's birth-to-three individualized transition plan, if any,

   addressed by the PPT during such meeting at which an educational program for such child or pupil is developed.

Section 23 of Public Act 24-41 requires the five-day notice of a PPT meeting to include the rights enumerated above.

Transition Services and Programs for Students Receiving Special Education Services

Sections 12 through 16 of Public Act 24-78 make various changes to the laws concerning transition services and programs. Section 12 of the Act replaces the statutory definition of transition services with the federal definition, which is more detailed than the prior state definition.

Federal law, and now Connecticut state law, define "transition services" as:

> A coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that (1) is designed to be with a results-oriented process, that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child's movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation; (2) is based on the individual child's needs, taking into account the child's strengths, preferences, and interests; and includes (i) instruction; (ii) related services; (iii) community experiences; (iv) the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives; and (v) if appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and provision of a functional vocational evaluation.

Under prior law, CSDE's Transition Services Coordinator was required to perform unannounced site visits of transition programs. Section 12 of the Act removes the requirement that site visits be unannounced, but still permits the Coordinator or CSDE to perform unannounced visits when necessary.

Section 14 of the Act transfers, from the State Education Resource Center to CSDE's transition services coordinator, responsibility for developing and maintaining an easily accessible online listing of transition resources, services, and programs.

CTECS and Transition Services

Existing law requires CTECS to provide an appropriate educational program for students requiring special education. Section 23 of Public Act 24-78 now explicitly requires CTECS to provide and fund transition programs. The Act also requires CTECS, rather than the local education agency, to convene a PPT meeting for home-schooled students requiring special education before they enroll in a CTECS school.

Excess Cost Grant Calculations

Existing law allows boards of education to apply for a special education "excess cost grant," which reimburses boards of education for the costs of special education services that exceed four-and-one-half times the average cost of educating a student in the district during the prior fiscal year. Section 17 of Public Act 24-93 requires that excess cost grant calculations for boards of education include all expenditures incurred pursuant to a contract between the board of education and a private provider of special education services, a private school, agency, or institution during the school year in which the services are provided. The Act clarifies that this provision applies even where such provider is approved by the Commissioner of Education during the school year in which a board of education is seeking reimbursement.

STATUTORY CHANGES AFFECTING EARLY CHILDHOOD

Early Childhood Teacher and Teacher Assistant Wage Supplement Payment Program

Section 4 of Public Act 24-91 requires that the Office of Early Childhood ("OEC") establish and administer a wage supplement payment program, which will provide a one-time payment to eligible early childhood teachers and teacher assistants on a first-come first-served basis. Payments must be at least $1,800 and eligible applicants must receive the same payment amount. To be considered an eligible applicant, early childhood teachers and teacher assistants, as defined under the legislation, must be in a state-funded school readiness program or a state-funded child care program. To the extent permitted by federal law, payments are not considered income or assets for determining eligibility for state-administered public assistance programs.

By October 1, 2025, the OEC Commissioner must submit a report to various committees of the General Assembly. The Commissioner's report shall include, but is not limited to (1) the number of early childhood teachers and teacher assistants that submitted applications, (2) the number of applicants who were approved for a wage supplement payment, (3) the amounts of the payments made to eligible early childhood teachers and eligible teacher assistants, (4) the total amount disbursed under the program, and (5) a recommendation regarding whether the program should be expanded or extended.

Designated Staff Members and Designed Qualified Staff Members

Section 31 of Public Act 24-78 requires that, effective July 1, 2025, early care and education programs that accept funds directly from the OEC, or indirectly through OEC subcontractors, must have a certain percentage of "designated qualified staff." Under the Act, "designated staff member" means the person assigned the primary responsibility for a classroom of children and "designated qualified staff member" means a designated staff member who has a bachelor's degree or higher with a concentration in early childhood education or certain other qualifications outlined in the Act. From July 1, 2024, to June, 30, 2027, twenty-five percent of designated staff members must be designated qualified staff members. That number then increases to fifty percent through June 30, 2030, and sixty percent as of July 1, 2030.

Early Start CT

Sections 24-30 of Public Act 24-78, effective July 1, 2025, establish Early Start CT.

Sections 24 and 25 of the Act require OEC to operate and administer Early Start CT to (1) provide state funding to early care and education programs throughout the state and (2) coordinate and facilitate the efficient delivery of such early care and education programs for eligible children.

Under the Act, OEC has numerous program-related responsibilities, such as facilitating the racial, ethnic and socioeconomic diversity of children, families, and staff in early care and education programs; providing opportunities for parents to choose among affordable and accredited early care and education programs; and preventing or minimizing the potential for development delays in children prior to age five. Further, Section 28 of the Act requires OEC to establish a sliding fee scale based on family income for families that are enrolled in an early care and education program under Early Start CT that is consistent with the existing Care 4 Kids sliding fee scale. Section 30 of the Act requires that all programs participating in Early Start CT be accredited within three years of entering a contract with OEC.

Section 26 of the Act provides that, as a part of Early Start CT, OEC may enter into contracts with municipalities, boards of educations, Regional Educational Services Centers ("RESCs"), Head Start programs, and other organizations to provide them financial assistance for the purpose of operating early care and education programs that focus on providing early childhood services based on economic, social or environmental conditions, including in regions with insufficient access to child care. The Act sets forth several requirements regarding eligibility to receive funds and the use of such funds.

Under Section 27 of the Act, a town or school district may establish a local governance partner and two or more towns or school districts may establish a regional governance partner to assist in the provision of early care and education in a community under Early Start CT. The law includes specifically outlined requirements and responsibilities for a local or regional governance partner, including conducting a data-driven needs assessment for its community and employing a staff liaison to aid and support the governance partner.

New Competitive Grant Program

Effective July 1, 2025, Section 32 of Public Act 24-78 requires the OEC Commissioner to establish, as a part of Early Start CT, a state-funded competitive grant program for boards of education, which are federal Head Start recipients, to improve and increase access to and participation in Early Head Start and Head Start Programs.

Allocations of Funds to RESCs and Boards of Education

Under Section 34 of Public Act 24-78, the OEC Commissioner may allocate funds to (1) RESCs for the provision of, among other things, professional development services, technical assistance and evaluation and program planning and implementation activities; and (2) boards of education. These funds must be spent in accordance with procedures and conditions the OEC Commissioner sets.

STATUTORY CHANGES AFFECTING OPERATIONS

HVAC Inspection and Evaluation

Under Connecticut law, each board of education must complete a uniform heating, ventilation and air conditioning ("HVAC") system inspection and evaluation for each school building under its jurisdiction. Section 7 of Public Act 24-74 extends the deadline for the uniform inspection of school building HVAC systems, which must now be completed by June 30, 2031, rather than January 1, 2025. However, the law establishes a staggered schedule for such inspections and evaluations. Beginning July 1, 2026, and each year until June 30, 2031, each board of education must conduct a uniform inspection of at least twenty percent of the school buildings under its jurisdiction, until each school building has been inspected. Thereafter, each school must undergo complete inspection every five years.

The new legislation permits the Department of Administrative Services ("DAS"), upon request by a board of education, to grant a waiver of up to one year from the five-year deadline and twenty percent inspection requirements. Such waiver may be granted if DAS finds that (1) there is an insufficient number of certified testing, adjusting, and balancing technicians, certified industrial hygienists, or mechanical engineers to perform such inspection and evaluation; or (2) where a board of education has scheduled such inspection and evaluation for a date in the subsequent year.

Connecticut law also allows boards of education to apply for grants to reimburse part of the costs of eligible expenses incurred in installing, replacing, or upgrading HVAC systems or related improvements. The law prohibits the DAS

Commissioner from awarding HVAC or indoor air quality improvement grants to applicants who have not complied with relevant statutory inspection and evaluation requirements. Section 8 of Public Act 24-74 delays the start of this prohibition by two years, to July 1, 2026.

Indoor Air Quality Grants

Expansion of Grant Eligibility

Pursuant to state law, DAS must administer a HVAC system grant program to reimburse boards of education or RESCs for costs associated with installing, replacing, and upgrading such systems. Boards of education and RESCs may apply for these grants for any project that began on or after March 1, 2020, and was completed by July 1, 2022, or for projects that commenced on or after July 1, 2022.

Section 169 of Public Act 24-151 extends grant eligibility to incorporated or endowed high schools or academies and state charter schools. These entities may similarly apply for grants and are evaluated by the same eligibility criteria.

Reconsideration of Rejected Applications

Section 169 of Public Act 24-151 requires that DAS, for the fiscal years ending June 30, 2025 and June 30, 2026, reconsider any application for an indoor air quality grant that was submitted by a board of education or RESC prior to July 1, 2024 and denied. The board of education or RESC will not be required to submit a new application unless initial application was denied because it was incomplete or required revisions. DAS must provide technical assistance during this reconsideration period.

Child Sexual Abuse and Assault Survey

Existing law requires DPH to administer the Connecticut School Health Survey to students in grades nine to twelve. On and after July 1, 2026, Section 1 of Public Act 24-118 requires that the sexual abuse and assault awareness prevention survey for administrators that was created as part of the state-wide sexual abuse and assault awareness and prevention program be distributed alongside the Connecticut School Health Survey. The sexual abuse and assault awareness survey shall be distributed to and completed by school administrators and the results shall be submitted to DPH at the same time as the student survey.

Replacement of Term "Child Pornography" with "Child Sexual Abuse Material"

Sections 2 through 10 of Public Act 24-118 replace the term "child pornography" with "child sexual abuse material" in various criminal, penal code, and public nuisance statutes. Among other things, these statutes define and criminalize the possession, importation, and transmission of such material.

School Resource Officer Report

Under existing law, for each investigation or behavioral intervention of challenging behavior or conflict that escalates to violence or constitutes a crime, a School Resource Officer ("SRO") must submit a report to the chief of police of the local law enforcement agency no later than five school days after conducting such investigation or behavioral intervention. Section 15 of Public Act 24-45 clarifies that if such chief of police is not certified by the Police Officer Standards and Training Council, the SRO shall instead submit the report to the superintendent of schools for the school district in which the investigation or behavioral intervention occurred.

Youth Service Bureau

Existing law allows one or more municipalities, or a private youth-service organization that a municipality designates as its agent, to establish a youth service bureau. Section 24 of Public Act 24-45 provides that youth service bureaus may also be established by a private youth-serving organization designated to act as the agent of a board of education.

Section 23 of the Act requires that a board of education, upon request of the youth service bureau that provides services for the board, enter into a Memorandum of Understanding ("MOU") with the youth service bureau outlining the circumstances under which student education records may be shared by the board with the youth service bureau. Such MOU must require that boards of education provide, and the youth service bureau receive and maintain, student education records in accordance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 ("FERPA").

Reserve Funds

Under prior law, a town board of finance, board of selectmen, or other appropriating authority for a school district was authorized to deposit unexpended education funds into a nonlapsing account, provided that (1) such deposited amount did not exceed two per cent of the budgeted appropriation for education for the prior fiscal year, and (2) expenditures were authorized by the local board of education and made only for educational purposes. Section 7 of Public Act 24-45 now authorizes a local board of education, rather than the town, to make deposits of such unexpended education funds into a nonlapsing account, provided the same conditions are met.

Prior law also authorized regional boards of education to create a reserve fund for capital and nonrecurring expenditures. Section 8 of Public Act 24-45 now permits regional boards of education to create a reserve fund for educational expenditures more generally, rather than capital and nonrecurring expenditures.

Deadline for Submitting Audit Data Revisions to CSDE

Existing law requires that school superintendents make returns of the school district's receipts, expenditures, and statistics to the Commissioner of Education by September 1 of each year. Currently, revisions to a board of education's returns and the certification of the return by an independent public accountant are due on December 31 of each year. Section 16 of Public Act 24-93 delays this deadline by one month, to January 31. The Act also delays the date the CSDE must annually publish a report on return data from February 15 to March 15 of each year.

Racial Imbalance Law

Under existing law, when the SBE determines that a public school is racially imbalanced, the SBE is required to provide written notice to the board of education having jurisdiction over such school. Such board of education must then prepare and submit a plan to the SBE addressing how it will correct the racial imbalance. Sections 3, 4, and 5 of Public Act 24-93 amend existing law, postponing the SBE's written notice of any finding of racial imbalance to boards of education until July 1, 2025. The Act also suspends the requirement that boards of education prepare and submit a plan to the SBE until July 1, 2025. Finally, the Act prohibits the SBE from taking any action on any plan received on or after July 1, 2024, until July 1, 2025.

CSDE Distribution of Paraeducator Professional Development Funding

Section 123 of Public Act 24-81 directs the CSDE, by September 1, 2024, to distribute to boards of education the amount of funding allocated to the CSDE from the American Rescue Plan Act for paraeducator professional

development for the fiscal year ending June 1, 2023. The CSDE must distribute the funds proportionately based on the number of paraeducators employed by each board of education.

Ban on Delegating Authority to Schedule Thanksgiving Day High School Football Games

Section 131 of Public Act 24-151 revises Connecticut General Statutes § 10-220(a) to prohibit boards of education from delegating the authority to schedule interscholastic football games on Thanksgiving Day to any nonprofit organization or other entity that is responsible for governing interscholastic athletics in Connecticut. The Act further prohibits boards of education from adopting a policy or prohibition against the scheduling of an interscholastic football game on Thanksgiving Day.

Smart Start Competitive Grant Program

Under prior law, a town was prohibited from receiving more than $300,000 in annual operating expense grants under the Connecticut Smart Start Competitive Grant Program, which provides grants to boards of education for capital and operating expenses related to establishing or expanding a preschool program. Section 40 of Public Act 24-78 removes this cap beginning in the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025.

Open Choice Program Grant

Currently, school districts participating in the Open Choice Program as receiving districts receive a per-student state grant, which is determined by the number of Open Choice students, as compared to total enrollment, attending the district's schools. Section 2 of Public Act 24-93 amends state law to require, beginning in the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025, that boards of education receiving students through the Open Choice Program include their projected Open Choice Program grant amounts in their annual budget and in their projected revenue statement.

Medicaid Coverage for School-Based Health Services

Section 61 of Public Act 24-81 requires the Commissioner of the Department of Social Services ("DSS") to seek federal approval to amend the Medicaid state plan to expand Medicaid coverage for health services provided by or on behalf of a local education agency ("LEA") to any student enrolled in Medicaid. To the extent permissible by federal law, the LEA shall be authorized by the DSS Commissioner to submit Medicaid claims for each student who is eligible for Medicaid and is receiving Medicaid-covered school-based services unless such student's parent or legal guardian opts out of authorizing the LEA from billing Medicaid for services provided for the student. The DSS Commissioner shall issue written guidance to boards of education regarding health care services eligible for Medicaid reimbursement.

Section 62 of the Act requires the DSS Commissioner to amend, subject to federal approval, the Medicaid state plan to cover health care services in school nurses' offices for eligible students enrolled in Medicaid.

Title IX Compliance Toolkit

Last year, the General Assembly required the Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity and Opportunity to convene and lead a working group to identify or develop a Title IX compliance toolkit for boards of education, students, and parents and guardians. Sections 11 and 12 of Public Act 24-126 extend the deadline for the working group to submit the toolkit to the General Assembly, from July 1, 2024 to January 1, 2025. The Act also delays the date by which CSDE must distribute the toolkit to boards of education, from October 1, 2024 to April 1, 2025.

SHIPMAN

STATUTORY CHANGES AFFECTING SCHOOL BUILDING PROJECTS

School Building Project Priority List Requirements

Connecticut General Statutes § 10-283 provides that school districts are eligible to apply for and receive school building project grants, in accordance with state law.

Project Report

Existing law requires DAS to annually submit a list of eligible school building projects, with the amount of the estimated grants for such projects, to the legislature, Governor, and Office of Policy and Management by December 15 of each year. Previously, the listing had to be organized by particular categories set forth in the law. Sections 152 and 153 of Public Act 24-151 remove the requirement that the list be categorized.

Existing law also requires that the list address various issues including: an enrollment projection and the capacity of the school seeking the grant; substantiation of the estimated total project costs; readiness to begin construction; board of education efforts to redistrict, reconfigure, merge or close schools under its jurisdiction; enrollment and capacity information for all schools within the board's jurisdiction for the prior five years; enrollment projections and capacity information for all schools under the board's jurisdiction for the succeeding eight years; and the state's education priorities relating to reducing racial and economic isolation for the school district. The Act revises these requirements to also include information about (1) who conducted the enrollment projections and the cost of conducting the enrollment projections; and (2) an estimate and itemization of each project's ineligible costs.

Projects Redirected for Public Use

Existing law establishes a ten- or twenty-year amortization period (depending on the grant amount) for school building project grants and generally requires boards of education to repay the unamortized balance of the grant they received if they abandon, sell, lease, demolish, or redirect the project's use during such period to anything other than a public school use. Section 152 of Public Act 24-151 now allows boards of education to redirect the project to a public school or other public use during the amortization period without triggering the repayment requirement (and without needing to seek forgiveness of the balance if they redirect the project for public use).

Local Authorization

Existing law prohibits DAS from adding a project to the priority list unless the applicant, before applying, has either secured funding authorization for the local share of project costs or has scheduled and prepared a referendum for which results will be submitted by November 15 in the application year. Beginning with applications submitted on and after July 1, 2026, Section 152 of Public Act 24-151 requires that the local share include an additional ten percent contingency in accordance with guidance developed by DAS.

Project Review

Previously, state law permitted the DAS Commissioner to disapprove a grant application if, among other things, it did not comply with the State Fire Marshal's or DPH's requirements. Section 154 of Public Act 24-151 now allows the Commissioner to disapprove an application if it does not include an attestation from the local fire marshal or local health department that the school building project plans comply with these requirements. In addition, on and after July 1, 2025, the Commissioner may reject an application that does not include a solar feasibility assessment set forth in the Act.

Solar Feasibility Assessment

Beginning July 1, 2025, Section 176 of Public Act 24-151 requires that, prior to submitting any applications for grants for a school building project, a board of education must complete a solar feasibility assessment for the school building, unless the building already utilizes solar energy. The assessment must provide the board of education with information concerning the feasibility of installing solar photovoltaic systems on the premises of the school building. The information required to be in the assessment is outlined in the Act.

Reimbursement Rate Increases for Certain Early Childhood Projects

Prior law provided a five percent reimbursement rate increase for new or expanded elementary school building projects that include space for a school readiness program. Section 155 of Public Act 24-151 revises the provision's applicability to any such projects that include space for an early childhood care and education program providing services for children from birth to age five, and it increases the bonus rate to fifteen percentage points for the portion of the building used primarily for this purpose. As under existing law, recipient districts must maintain the program for at least ten years. In addition, the Act establishes a new fifteen percentage point bonus for a building or facility to be used exclusively by a board of education for an early childhood care and education program providing services for children from birth to age five. The recipient district must maintain the program for at least twenty years.

Section 156 of Public Act 24-151 also increases, from ten to fifteen percentage points, the reimbursement rate bonus for elementary school projects necessary to (1) offer full-day kindergarten or preschool in priority school districts or priority schools or (2) reduce class sizes under the Early Reading Success program.

For all of the reimbursement rate increases, the Act specifies that a recipient district's overall reimbursement rate cannot exceed one hundred percent.

Inclusive Municipality Designation

Existing law makes boards of education for an "inclusive municipality," as determined by the Housing Commissioner, eligible for a five-percentage point increase to their state grant reimbursement rate for school building projects. Section 157 of Public Act 24-151 requires boards of education seeking this bonus rate to submit to DAS a written determination by the Housing Commissioner that the municipality in which the project will occur qualifies for the designation. The board must submit the determination prior to December 1 in the year it submits a school building project grant, and the determination must have been issued within that year.

To qualify as an inclusive municipality, a municipality must have a total population of more than 6,000 and have less than ten percent of its housing units be affordable, as determined by the Housing Commissioner. The municipality must also (1) have adopted and maintain zoning regulations that meet specified statutory requirements, and (2) have constructed new affordable units meeting certain requirements within the three years immediately preceding the grant application.

Project Audits

Existing law requires towns and regional school districts to submit a notice of project completion for a school building project after issuance of the certificate of occupancy for the project. Section 32 of June Special Session, Public Act 24-1 shortens, from within three years to within one year after this issuance, the deadline by which towns and regional districts must submit the notice. By law, DAS must deem the project completed and conduct the audit if the town or district does not submit the notice by the required deadline.

Under prior law, if DAS did not complete an audit within five years after receiving a notice of project completion, then it was required to conduct a limited scope audit (e.g., a review of, among other things, total reported expenditures, any off-site improvements, and adherence to authorized space specifications). Section 162 of Public Act 25-151 now requires DAS to conduct the limited scope audit within two years after making the final project payment.

Contracting Requirements

Section 32 of June Special Session, Public Act 24-1 makes numerous revisions to the contracting requirements for public school building projects.

Cooperative Purchasing Contracts

Existing law generally requires that orders and contracts for school building projects receiving state assistance be awarded to the lowest responsible qualified bidder only after a public invitation to bid. Under the Act, qualified bidders include cooperative purchasing contracts offered through a RESC or council of government.

Under existing law, separate requirements apply for consultant and construction management services awards, discussed below.

Consultant and Construction Management Services Award Process

Prior law required that contracts for school building project architectural services be awarded from a pool of no more than four of the most responsible qualified proposers after a public selection process. Now, the Act requires that the award be from a pool of at least three of the most responsible qualified proposers and makes conforming changes. Among other things, the awarding authority must determine at least three of the most responsible qualified proposers after the qualification process (rather than the four most responsible qualified proposers) and award the contract to one of these proposers. This change also applies to contracts for (1) construction management services and (2) other consultant services, including services rendered by an owner's representatives, construction administrators, program managers, environmental professionals, planners, and financial specialists. The Act requires that DAS approval of orders or contracts for consultant services be in writing or through written electronic communication for the costs to be eligible for state funding.

Guaranteed Maximum Price

Under existing law, the construction manager's contract must include a Guaranteed Maximum Price ("GMP") for construction costs. This price must be determined no later than ninety days after selecting trade subcontractor bids. Section 32 of the Act prohibits construction from beginning before the GMP is determined. Prior law allowed site preparation and demolition work to occur before the GMP was determined.

Construction Manager Reporting and Document Retention

Section 32 of the Act requires that construction manager contracts include a requirement to retain all documents and receipts for two years following the date DAS completes the project audit. It also requires construction managers to submit to the town or regional board of education (1) quarterly reports regarding ineligible project costs to date and (2) a final report on total ineligible costs. Construction managers must submit this final report upon submitting the notice of project completion and before DAS audits the project. Additionally, the Act requires construction managers to meet quarterly with the town or regional board of education to review any change orders for eligibility as a project progresses.

Grants to Endowed Academies

Existing law allows incorporated or endowed high schools or academies, as defined by state law, to be eligible for school building project grants. Section 158 of Public Act 24-151 eliminates the requirement that, to be eligible for such grant, the high school or endowed academy's governing board must meet certain composition requirements. As under existing law, such high schools or academies must still provide school facilities to the towns designating them as their high schools for at least ten years after the last grant payment.

Energy Funds and School Construction Grants

Existing law provides that, in the case of calculating grants for school building projects, any "other state funds" received for a school building project must be subtracted from the total project cost prior to computation of the grant. Section 160 of Public Act 24-151 revises the law to exclude from such "other state funds" certain energy-related grants or benefits, meaning they need not be subtracted from total project costs when ensuring compliance with this requirement.

Single-User Toilet and Bathing Rooms

Existing law outlines various approval requirements that DAS must use when approving a school building project plan or site. Beginning July 1, 2025, Section 167 of Public Act 24-151 will prohibit DAS from approving new construction of a school building that does not provide for single-user toilets and bathing rooms that are identified as being available for use by all students and school district personnel.

School Construction Project Exemptions, Waivers and Modifications

Sections 177 through 209 of Public Act 24-151 exempt school construction projects in twenty-five towns and one regional school district from certain statutory and regulatory requirements. The twenty-five towns and regional school districts include: Ansonia, Danbury, Darien, Derby, East Hartford, Ellington, Enfield, Farmington, Greenwich, Groton, Manchester, Meriden, Middletown, Milford, New Britain, New London, Regional School District 4, Simsbury, Sherman, Stamford, Thompson, Tolland, Torrington, Trumbull, Waterbury, and Windsor.

These exemptions, among other things, allow the towns and regional school district to (1) qualify for state reimbursement grants, (2) receive higher reimbursement percentages for grants, or (3) have their project reauthorized as a result of the change in scope or cost. Generally, the projects must meet all other eligibility requirements for school construction projects.

School Building Committee Membership

Existing law requires that any school building committee established by a town or regional school district to undertake a school building project include at least one member who has experience in the construction industry. Section 168 of Public Act 24-151 adds a requirement that the school building committee also include the chairperson of the board of education, or the chairperson's designee, for the school district.

MISCELLANEOUS STATUTORY CHANGES AFFECTING SCHOOLS

School Playground Design Requirements

Section 18 of Public Act 24-93 mandates that boards of education require that any playgrounds designed on or after July 1, 2025 conform with the principles of universal design, defined as "a concept of designing spaces with the goal of maximizing usability and access, without the need for adaptation or specialized design." At a minimum, such new playgrounds must include (1) spaces that appeal to various senses and allow multiple forms of play, (2) terrain designed to encourage unstructured play, (3) multiple ways to access play spaces and equipment that allow for varying levels of ability, and (4) sensory-engaging materials and use of trees and other plantings.

School Bus Seatbelt Program

From July 1, 2011 through December 31, 2017, the Department of Motor Vehicles ("DMV") operated a school bus seatbelt pilot program that provided funding to support the purchase of school buses equipped with three-point lap and shoulder seat safety belts. Section 40 of Public Act 24-20 reestablishes this program and makes the program permanent.

Beginning October 1, 2025, a local or regional school district may submit an application to the DMV that includes a proposed agreement between the district and a private school bus company that requires the company to provide the district with between one and fifty school buses equipped with three-point lap and shoulder safety belts. The agreement shall also include a request by the company for a fifty-percent sales tax refund for buses purchased on or after October 1, 2025. The agreement must be contingent upon approval of the application and the payment of the sales tax refund by the DMV.

Under the Act, the program is generally the same as it was from 2011 to 2017, except that the DMV, in consultation with the CSDE, is now required to annually inform school districts about the program and how to apply.

Illegally Passing a School Bus

Public Act 24-107 makes several changes to the law that prohibits drivers from passing a school bus that has its red signal lights flashing.

Under prior law, when driving on a highway with separate roadways, a driver did not need to stop for a school bus displaying its red signal lights, if the bus was on a different roadway. Section 1 of the Act replaces this exception to allow drivers on public roads with at least two lanes for traffic separated by a safety island or physical barrier not to stop for a school bus that is on the opposite side of such island or barrier.

Under prior law, municipalities and boards of education could install, operate, and maintain monitoring systems within their school buses to record cars that illegally pass them when they are displaying their red flashing lights. Sections 2 and 3 of the Act prohibit municipalities and boards of education from commencing the operation of such a system on or after July 1, 2024, if they are not already operating such a system. The Act also requires municipalities and boards of education who are already operating such a system prior to July 1, 2024, to cease operation of such system no later than July 1, 2026.

Under Section 4 of the Act, municipalities may vote to adopt an ordinance to authorize the use of a municipal school bus violation enforcement system under certain conditions set forth in the Act. If a municipality adopts such an

ordinance, school buses with an operational monitoring system are required to display a warning sign to that effect on the bus itself.

School Bus Idling Requirements

Section 38 of Public Act 24-20 requires the DMV Commissioner, by September 1, 2024, to review and amend or revise as necessary, all current regulations, policies, procedures and guidance provided by the DMV to the owners or operators of school buses regarding operating and inspecting school buses to ensure their compliance with the state's anti-idling laws and Department of Energy and Environmental Protection ("DEEP") air quality regulations related to idling. The state anti-idling laws and DEEP regulations prohibit a school bus from idling for more than three minutes during its daily vehicle inspection.

The Act also requires the DMV Commissioner to provide guidance to school bus owners and operators on which aspects of the daily vehicle inspection can be performed with the engine off. The Commissioner must publish the guidance on the DMV website by September 1, 2024.

Advisory Council for Teacher Professional Standards

Section 9 of Public Act 24-41 makes several changes to the duties of the Connecticut Advisory Council for Teacher Professional Standards. Under the Act, the Council shall advise and provide an annual report to the CSDE and the Education Committee, rather than the Governor, SBE, and Education Committee. Under the existing and revised law, the Council is tasked with advising on teacher recruitment, retention, professional development, assessment, evaluation, and discipline. The Act adds the following topics to the purview of the Council's advice: equitable distribution of teachers, diversity of the teaching workforce, special education, testing and assessment of students, school safety, and social-emotional learning.

The Council is also now required to (1) share perspectives on the impact of proposed policies and initiatives on classroom practice with the Commissioner of Education and Education Committee and (2) provide suggestions and feedback on guidance to be sent to school districts related to implementing these policies and initiatives with the Commissioner.

The Act also eliminates requirements that the Council (1) advise on teacher preparation and certification and (2) review and comment on regulations and other standards on approving teacher preparation programs and teacher certification, presumably because these areas will now fall within the purview of the newly created CEPCB.

Education Mandate Review Advisory Council

Sections 1 and 30 of Public Act 24-45 repeal a working group established in 2023 and, in turn, establish the Education Mandate Review Advisory Council. The Council is responsible for providing annual reports to the General Assembly, which may include, but are not limited to (1) a review of board of education mandates in Connecticut statutes and regulations to identify burdensome mandates and mandates that, in effect, limit or restrict student instruction or services and (2) any recommendations regarding the repeal of or amendment to these statutes and regulations. The Council shall consist of ten legislative appointees, with initial appointments required not later than August 1, 2024. Not later than January 1, 2025, and annually thereafter, the Council shall develop and submit an annual report on its review of the implementation and cost of statutory and regulatory board of education mandates. The Council's annual report shall include, but is not limited to (1) a review of all existing education mandates required by state law, (2)

the costs incurred by boards of education from implementing such education mandates, and (3) how the education mandates are being implemented by boards of education.

Bullying and Hate Speech Task Force

Special Act 24-9 establishes a task force to study the effects of hate speech and bullying on children. The Act provides that the study shall include, among other things, an analysis of the effects of hate speech and bullying on the mental health, physical health, and academic achievement of children, and an analysis of the setting and environments in which children are most likely to encounter such bullying or hate speech.

The Act also requires the task force to develop recommendations for strategies to prevent, reduce, and address the effects of bullying and hate speech in communities and schools throughout the state. The task force must submit a report on its findings and recommendations to the General Assembly no later than January 1, 2025.

Workers' Compensation for Students of Regional Agricultural Science and Technology Centers Task Force

Special Act 24-16 establishes a task force to study workers' compensation coverage for students of regional agricultural science and technology education centers who are enrolled in (1) a public work-study as defined and approved by the Commissioner of Education and the Labor Commissioner or a Connecticut Career Certification Program, or (2) an internship, as defined by Connecticut General Statutes § 31-23. The study shall include an examination of the current policies and practices regarding workers' compensation coverage for such students and potential changes to the law concerning such coverage. The task force must submit a report on its findings and recommendations to the General Assembly no later than January 1, 2025.

CTECS Conforming Changes

Sections 17 through 22 of Public Act 24-78 make various changes, including many technical changes, to conform the law to the establishment of CTECS as an independent state agency.

Section 20 of the Act 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. Section 21 of the Act requires, rather than allows, CTECS to offer part-time, evening, and extracurricular programs in vocational, technical, technological, and postsecondary education and training.

Section 22 of the Act requires that students admitted to a CTECS postsecondary education program without a high school diploma have completed the school year in which they turn twenty-two (rather than be age twenty-one or older).

Artificial Intelligence Education Tool Pilot Program and Professional Development

For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025, Section 143 of Public Act 24-151 directs the CSDE to administer an Artificial Intelligence ("AI") education tool pilot program, which will assist selected boards of education in implementing an AI tool. The AI tool will be selected by the Commissioner of Education, who must award grants to assist selected boards of education in implementing the AI education tool to be used by educators and students for classroom instruction and student learning.

The Commissioner shall select five boards of education to participate in the pilot program. The boards must include at least one rural school district, one suburban school district, and one urban school district, and reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of the state. Jointly, the Commissioner and the participating boards of education shall select a grade level, between grades seven through twelve, in which the AI education tool will be implemented.

Under Section 144 of the Act, for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025, the CSDE must provide professional development for educators employed by boards of education participating in the pilot program. Such professional development shall include, but is not limited to training on (1) properly and safely using the selected AI tool as part of classroom instruction; (2) how the selected AI tool may benefit (a) educators in classroom instruction and (b) student learning, academic achievement, and workforce development; and (3) the laws governing AI use and the protection of student data and privacy, including FERPA.

The Act defines "artificial intelligence" as "any technology, including, but not limited to, machine learning that uses data to train an algorithm or predictive model for the purpose of enabling a computer system or service to autonomously perform any task, including, but not limited to, visual perception, language processing or speech recognition, that is normally associated with human intelligence or perception."

Connecticut-Grown for Connecticut Kids Week

Under prior law, the CSDE was responsible for arranging interactions between students and farmers during Connecticut-Grown for Connecticut Kids Week. Section 11 of Public Act 24-78 limits CSDE's responsibility to only require that it provide technical assistance and support for schools to arrange such interaction, including field trips to farms and in-school presentations by farmers.

Education Cost Sharing Grant Estimates

Pursuant to Section 10 of Public Act 24-93, by December 31, 2024, and each December 31 thereafter, the CSDE must calculate and notify each town of its estimated education cost sharing grant amount, which the town may receive in the next fiscal year. In making this determination, the CSDE shall use data collected from the current fiscal year.

Including Nonparent Caretaker Relatives and Legal Guardians in the Family Resource Center

Pursuant to state law, the CSDE and DSS must coordinate a family resource center program to provide comprehensive child care services, remedial educational and literacy services, families-in-training programs and supportive services to parents, some of whom are recipients of temporary family assistance. In addition, DCF must establish community-based, multiservice parent education and support centers. Under Sections 15 and 16 of Public Act 24-39, and effective October 1, 2024, family resource center programs and parent education and support centers must also provide services to and resources for nonparent caretaker relatives and legal guardians.

Wholesome School Meals

Under Connecticut law, the CSDE is required to administer a wholesome school meals pilot program to award grants to alliance districts for the purpose of embedding professional chefs to assist school meal programs in various areas defined by statute. Section 5 of Public Act 24-74 delays the start of the wholesome school meals pilot program from the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025 to the fiscal year ending June 30, 2027. It also delays the CSDE's report on the program until January 1, 2028. The revised law also permits, rather than requires, the CSDE to award up to five grants of $150,000 for the program.

Public School Assessment Audit

Section 1 of Public Act 24-93 requires the CSDE, in consultation with national assessment experts and boards of education, to conduct a comprehensive audit of student assessments. The audit shall include, but is not limited to (1) guidance to boards of education for conducting an inventory of assessments administered at the classroom, school, and school district levels; (2) the development of a professional learning program for teachers concerning assessment literacy; and (3) an evaluation of the assessments inventoried by boards of education with the goals of eliminating redundant assessments, discouraging classroom activities focused solely on test preparation, reducing testing time, and maximizing assessments that provide actionable information for classroom teachers. By January 31, 2026, the CSDE must submit a report on the audit to the Education Committee, which may include legislative proposals. Section 20 of the Act repeals provisions passed last year that required the Commissioner of Education to conduct an audit of state and local testing requirements and administration.

Working Groups on High School Graduation Requirements, Grading Policies, and Accountability Index

Section 27 of Public Act 24-45 provides that the Executive Director of the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education, or a designee, may convene a working group to conduct a review of and make recommendations regarding high school graduation requirements for the purpose of identifying those requirements that have the effect of limiting or restricting the provision of instruction or service to students. The Act outlines the members of the working group, which must submit a report and recommendations to the General Assembly by January 1, 2026.

Section 28 of the Act permits the president of the Connecticut Education Association and the president of the American Federation of Teachers-Connecticut, or their respective designees, to jointly convene a working group to conduct a review of (1) high school grading policies in use by boards of education, (2) the accountability index, as statutorily defined, and (3) the information and data selected by the CSDE in the calculation of accountability index scores for school districts. The Act outlines the members of the working group. The working group must submit a report on its review of high school grading policies, the accountability index, and the calculation of the accountability index to the General Assembly by January 1, 2026.

Large Organic Materials Generators

Last year, the General Assembly required, beginning January 1, 2025, any public educational facility that generates an average projected volume of twenty-six tons or more per year of source-separated organic materials to separate the organic material from other solid waste and recycle the material. Section 6 of Public Act 24-45 delays this requirement for public and nonpublic school building or educational facilities with students in grades kindergarten through twelve, or any combination thereof, until July 1, 2026, and limits it to buildings and facilities located within twenty miles of an authorized source-separated organic materials composting facility.

Sheff Magnet School Requirements

Sections 9 and 10 of Public Act 24-78 reinstate, until June 30, 2025, the requirement that the Commissioner of Education consider whether a *Sheff* magnet school meets the reduced-isolation standards required under *Sheff v. O'Neill* to award grants to the school. The requirement had expired on June 30, 2021. 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.

Revisions to Magnet School and Vo-Ag Center Funding Programs, Creation of New Choice Program Grant

Sections 112 through 121 of Public Act 24-81 make significant changes to the education funding grant programs for interdistrict magnet schools and regional agricultural science and technology centers ("vo-ag centers"). Among other things, the Act eliminates, for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025, the existing interdistrict magnet school and vo-ag center grants and replaces them with new grants under the choice program.

National School Lunch Program

For the fiscal year ending June 30, 2024, Section 242 of Public Act 24-81 makes the CSDE financially responsible for the portion of the cost to boards of education of reduced priced meals under the National School Lunch Program and School Breakfast Program for those students not enrolled in a school that qualifies for the maximum federal reimbursement for all school meals served under the federal Community Eligibility Provision. The Community Eligibility Provision is the federal meal reimbursement program administered by the United States Department of Agriculture.

Plan to Convert State Board of Education into an Advisory Board

Under existing law, the SBE serves as the department head of the CSDE. Section 121 of Public Act 24-81 instructs the Commissioner of Education to develop a plan to (1) convert the SBE into an advisory board within the CSDE, and (2) empower the Commissioner to become the department head of the CSDE. The Commissioner shall submit such plan and any recommendations thereto to the General Assembly by January 1, 2026.