

Series: 2007-2008  
Circular Letter: C-18

TO: Superintendents of Schools

FROM: Mark K. McQuillan, Commissioner of Education

DATE: June 18, 2008

SUBJECT: Highlights of the 2008 Regular Session of the Connecticut General Assembly

The Connecticut General Assembly has now completed its 2008 Regular Session.\* This session was unusual in that the legislature did not make any changes to the budget for FY 09, the second year of the biennial budget. Unfortunately, this means that \$19.7M for the Early Reading Success (ERS) grant program for priority school districts was not appropriated, though the competitive ERS grant continues to be funded in FY 09 at the same levels as in FY 08.

Nevertheless, even though this was a short, three-month regular session and there were no budget changes, the General Assembly enacted a number of education-related bills. The most important of those bills are highlighted below.

As you review this information, please keep in mind that this document provides very brief summaries of some of the contents of each public act. If you are interested in a particular act, you should read its text. The links to the text of each act are accessible electronically if you hold "control" and click on the act title in this document. Once we have reviewed all of the legislation enacted this year, we will be posting the education-related public and special acts on the Department of Education's website (<http://www.sde.ct.gov>), on the "Legal Affairs" webpage under "Legislation: Education Bills: 2008."

As in the past, we will provide you this summer with a more detailed and comprehensive summary of all of the 2008 education legislation. Please remember that the **Back-to-School Meeting** for superintendents has been scheduled for **August 19, 2008.**

We hope that this is helpful. If you have questions about budget issues, please contact the Department's Chief Financial Officer, Brian Mahoney, at [brian.mahoney@ct.gov](mailto:brian.mahoney@ct.gov) or (860) 713-6464. All other questions should be directed to Katherine Nicoletti, Esq., at [katherine.nicoletti@ct.gov](mailto:katherine.nicoletti@ct.gov) or (860) 713-6520.

\*(Note: On June 11 the General Assembly convened two special sessions, but did not pass any education-related legislation. While the legislature has not yet ended those special sessions, it is unlikely that legislation concerning education will be enacted in those sessions.)

## **2008 HIGHLIGHTS**

### **AN ACT CONCERNING VARIOUS EDUCATION GRANTS AND CHANGES TO THE STATUTES CONCERNING MAGNET SCHOOLS, VOCATIONAL AGRICULTURE CENTERS AND THE CERTIFICATION OF BILINGUAL EDUCATION TEACHERS.**

(P.A. 08-170)(signed by the Governor on June 12, 2008)

- **Minimum budget requirement (MBR):** Amends the MBR for certain regional school districts and, starting in FY 10, raises the minimum proportion of any annual increase in education cost sharing (ECS) grant that a town must allocate to education spending.
- **School readiness:** Provides a new formula for distributing grants to priority school districts and increases the maximum per child amount paid by the state by 4% to \$8,346. In addition to the appropriation for competitive school readiness grants, the Department of Education may allocate up to 2% of the school readiness appropriation for these competitive grants.
- **Sheff:**
  1. Allows the Commissioner of Education to provide grants (A) for children in the Hartford **OPEN Choice** program to participate in preschool programs and (B) for academic support for children in OPEN Choice programs that assist the state in meeting the goals of the 2008 stipulation and order for Milo Sheff, et al v. William A. O'Neill, et al. (hereafter "Sheff goals").
  2. To assist the state in establishing new **interdistrict magnet schools** to meet the Sheff goals, (A) expands the types of entities that may establish and operate such schools, (B) makes these new entities eligible for magnet school operating grants and transportation grants for these schools and (C) provides grants for start-up costs for the development of new magnet school programs.
  3. To assist the state in meeting the Sheff goals, permits the state to provide grants for (A) start-up costs associated with new **charter schools** and (B) the **transportation** of Hartford students out-of-district to the state's technical high schools and regional agricultural science and technology education centers. (Note: There are additional provisions concerning the implementation of Sheff goals in P.A. 08-169, below.)
- **Bilingual education:** Extends for an additional year, i.e., until July 1, 2009, the certification requirements that have been in place for bilingual educators since July 1, 2005.
- **Computer-assisted writing, instruction and testing grant program:** Allows students in grades 6 to 12, inclusive, and not just those in grades 9 and 10, to

participate in Department of Education-funded programs for the use of technology in providing such writing, instruction and testing.

- **Interdistrict magnet schools:** Clarifies the parental choice option for the enrollment in magnet schools of students from non-participating districts and specifies for FY 09 the minimum amount of tuition that is to be charged to a board of education by a regional educational service center that operates an interdistrict magnet school.
- **Regional vocational agriculture centers:** Renames these centers as “regional agricultural science and technology education centers” and expands the enrollment opportunities that school districts that do not operate such centers must offer to students who want to attend a center in another district. (Note: P.A. 08-152 makes the same changes.)

**AN ACT CONCERNING AUTHORIZATION OF STATE GRANT COMMITMENTS FOR SCHOOL BUILDING PROJECTS, CHANGES TO THE STATUTES RELATING TO SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION, REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND MAGNET SCHOOLS, PROVIDING FUNDING FOR START-UP COSTS FOR MAGNET SCHOOLS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PLAN FOR THE TEACHING OF CHILDREN WITH AUTISM.** (P.A. 08-169)(*signed by the Governor on June 12, 2008*)

- **School construction grant commitments:** Authorizes the Commissioner of Education to enter into grant commitments for identified school construction projects, including previously authorized projects that have changed substantially in scope or costs.
- **School construction statutes:** Makes changes to several school construction provisions, including, but not limited to, establishing (1) a deadline for the submission of change orders to the Department of Education and (2) a process by which school districts must award orders and contracts for architectural and construction management services.
- **Regional school districts:** Amends provisions concerning the addition or withdrawal of grades from a regional school district.
- **Sheff:** To assist the state in establishing new interdistrict **magnet schools** to meet the Sheff goals, (1) expands the types of entities that are eligible to get school construction grants for interdistrict magnet schools, (2) amends several school construction grant procedures for magnet schools to meet the Sheff goals and (3) authorizes, subject to Bond Commission approval, \$3 M for grants for capital start-up costs related to the development of these new schools. (Note: There are additional provisions concerning the implementation of Sheff goals in P.A. 08-170, above.)
- **Autism:** Requires the Commissioners of Education, Higher Education and Developmental Services and the President of Southern Connecticut State University

to define autism and developmental disabilities and to develop recommendations by February 1, 2009, for a comprehensive state-wide plan to incorporate methods of teaching children with autism and other developmental disabilities into teacher preparation programs, teacher certification requirements, in-service training for educators and training provided to school paraprofessionals. (Note: S.A. 08-5 also contains these provisions.)

**AN ACT CONCERNING SCHOOL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT.** (P.A. 08-160)(*signed by the Governor on June 12, 2008*)

- **In-school suspension:**

1. Extends the **implementation date** of the in-school suspension law enacted in P.A. 07-66 to July 1, 2009, and provides that in-school suspensions may be served in any school building under the jurisdiction of the board of education.
2. Requires the Commissioner of Education to issues **guidelines** to aid boards of education in making the determination as to whether a suspension should be in-school or out-of-school.

- **Bullying in schools:**

1. Amends the requirements for what must be in board of education **bullying policies** to include, but not be limited to (A) requiring teachers and other school staff to notify school administrators in writing if they witness acts of bullying or receive student reports of bullying and (B) requiring schools to report the number of verified acts of bullying annually to the Department of Education.
2. Amends the definition of “**bullying.**”
3. Requires (A) boards of education to provide in-service training programs for **educators** to include **information on the prevention of bullying**, except in certain circumstances, and (B) teacher preparation programs to encourage students to complete coursework that includes bullying and suicide prevention.

**AN ACT CONCERNING HIGH SCHOOL CREDIT FOR PRIVATE WORLD LANGUAGE COURSES AND FOR OTHER SUBJECT AREAS.** (P.A. 08-138)(*signed by the Governor on June 5, 2008*)

- Allows boards of education to grant a student credit toward meeting high school graduation requirements if the student:
  1. Completes a world language course offered privately through a nonprofit provider and achieves a passing grade on an examination prescribed by the Commissioner of Education; or

2. Achieves a passing grade on a subject-area proficiency examination approved by the Commissioner regardless of the amount of time the student spent in a public school classroom learning the subject matter.
- Note: No funds have been appropriated to the Department of Education for the Commissioner to prescribe or approve these examinations.

**AN ACT CONCERNING THE BEST PROGRAM.** (P.A. 08-107)(*signed by the Governor on June 2, 2008*)

- **Eliminates** (1) the Department of Education's Beginning Educator Support and Training (BEST) program as of July 1, 2009, and (2) the video component required as part of the BEST assessment beginning July 1, 2008.
- Establishes a 21-member **task force** to develop a plan to replace the BEST program with a **mentor assistance program** starting with the 2009-2010 school year.

**AN ACT CONCERNING MINOR CHANGES TO THE EDUCATION STATUTES.** (P.A. 08-153)(*signed by the Governor on June 12, 2008*)

- **Democracy programs:** Formerly, elementary schools had to include in fourth or fifth grade a program on democracy in which students engage in a participatory manner. This act allows that requirement to be met by including such a program in the third grade, as well as the fourth or fifth grade.
- **School district accountability:**
  1. Permits the State Board of Education to require (A) **boards of education to undergo training** to improve their operational efficiency and effectiveness and to submit a plan as to how their effectiveness will be monitored and (B) require **training and technical assistance for parents** (formerly it was just for certain school staff members) as accountability actions the State Board may take to improve student performance to remove a school or district from the list of schools or districts designated as low achieving.
  2. Identifies which accountability actions taken by the State Board of Education are subject to the **Teacher Negotiation Act**.
- **Curriculum committees:** Requires boards of education to establish school district curriculum committees.
- **Early childhood education:** Authorizes the State Board of Education to issue a temporary ninety-day certificate in the certification endorsement area of early childhood education to individuals who complete an alternate route to certification in this field and meet other conditions.