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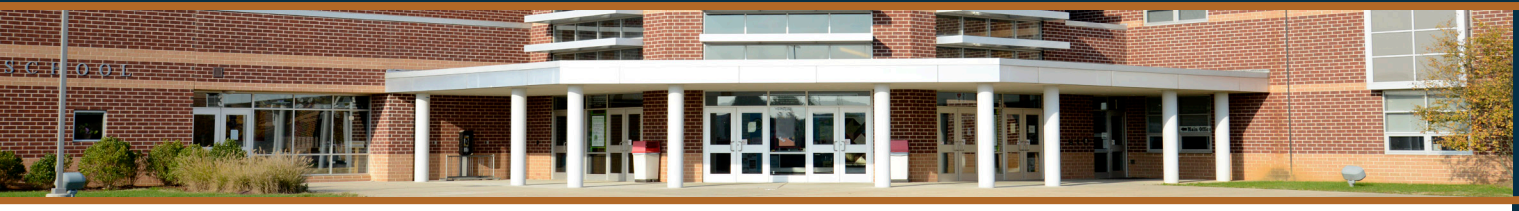
Education Legislation Summary



2014 SESSION
CONNECTICUT GENERAL ASSEMBLY

In its 2014 session, the General Assembly made a number of changes to the statutes that affect Connecticut school districts. This summary is intended to give you a brief overview of some of the more significant changes that were made this year in the area of education. You can obtain a copy of any of these 2014 Public Acts on the Connecticut General Assembly website at ftp://ftp.cga.ct.gov/2014/act/PA/pdf.

STATUTORY CHANGES AFFECTING STUDENTS:

Student Expulsion and Expunging of Records

Public Act 14-229 makes certain changes to the expulsion statutes, which changes are effective July 1, 2014. Prior law gave local or regional boards of education the authority to shorten or waive the expulsion period for a student expelled for the first time who had never been suspended. Under the revised law, a local or regional board of education is now prohibited from shortening or waiving the expulsion period for such mandatory expulsions based on possession of a firearm or deadly weapon.

Additionally, Public Act 14-229 amends current statutory provisions regarding the authority of a board to expunge notice of expulsion from a student's cumulative file. Previously, a board was not permitted to expunge notice of student expulsion for any offense based upon possession of a firearm or deadly weapon. Public Act 14-229 now permits boards to expunge such notice of expulsion when such a weapons offense occurs prior to grade nine. The new law also clarifies that, where the board has shortened or waived the expulsion period, notice of the student's expulsion may be expunged by a local or regional board of education at the time the student completes a board-specified program and satisfies any other board-specified conditions if the board of education determines that such action is warranted.

Finally, as amended by Public Act 14-229, the statute now also provides that a board may expunge a notice of expulsion from the student's cumulative record if the student demonstrates to the board that his/her conduct and behavior in the years following the expulsion warrants such action. The statute does not specify how a board of education would come to consider such matters, and presumably the parents can simply ask. However, the amendments to the statute do clarify that, in considering whether to expunge notice of expulsion before high school graduation, a board may receive and consider evidence of any subsequent disciplinary problems that have led to removal from a classroom, suspension or expulsion of such student.

Administration and Storage of Epinephrine

Public Act 14-176 makes a number of changes to Connecticut General Statute § 10-212a regarding the storage and use of emergency epinephrine in cartridge injectors (i.e. epipens) at school. Prior law permitted schools to administer epinephrine to a student only when the school had received prior written consent from a parent and written authorization from a qualified

medical professional. Effective July 1, 2014, schools are now required to maintain epipens for the purpose of providing emergency first aid to a student who experiences an allergic reaction even if the student does not have a prior written authorization for the administration of epinephrine. Under the revised law, a student's parent or guardian may submit a written directive to the school nurse (and school medical advisor, if any) to prohibit the administration of epinephrine to such student.

Moreover, the revised law now requires boards of education to designate and train "qualified school employees" to administer epinephrine in emergency circumstances to students having an allergic reaction who do not have the required written authorization for such medication (unless of course they are subject to a written directive prohibiting the administration of epinephrine). A "qualified school employee" is defined as a principal, teacher, licensed athletic trainer, licensed physical or occupational therapist employed by a school district, coach or school paraprofessional. School districts must assure that there will at least one such qualified school employee on the grounds of the school during regular school hours in the absence of a school nurse. Under the statute as amended, a qualified school employee may only administer an epipen when a school nurse is not available, and only if such employee has had the required annual training. The State Department of Education ("SDE"), in consultation with the Department of Public Health ("DPH"), must develop such annual training program in consultation with the School Nurse Advisory Council, no later than December 31, 2014. This training program, when developed, shall be made available to local and regional boards of education.

The revised law continues to require that a school district have written policies and procedures for the administration of any medicine, which policies should now be revised to include procedures for the administration and storage of emergency epinephrine for students who lack prior written authorization for such medication. Public Act 14-176 maintains the requirement that the school nurse must approve such policies and procedures, but notes that approval by a medical advisor is required only if the school has one, as school districts are not required to have a school medical advisor pursuant to General Statutes § 10-205.

Finally, pursuant to Public Act 14-176, the SDE must adopt regulations, in consultation with DPH, regarding the conditions and procedures for the storage and administration of epinephrine consistent with the provisions of this new law.

Excused Absences for Children of Service Members

Public Act 14-198 provides that, effective with the 2014-2015 school year, a child age five to eighteen, enrolled in a public or private school, and whose parent or legal guardian is an active duty member of the armed forces (1) who has been called for duty, or (2) who is on leave from or has immediately returned from deployment, must be granted ten (10) days of excused absences in any school year to visit with such child's parent or legal guardian. The law grants boards of education discretion to grant additional excused absences in connection with such visits. However, under the new law, the student and parent (or legal guardian) remain responsible for obtaining the student's assignments prior to any excused absence, and for ensuring that such assignments are completed by the student before his or her return to school.

Teen Dating Violence, Bullying and Safe School Climate Plans

This year, the General Assembly amended the bullying laws in several respects. Among the most significant changes, the scope of the bullying statute has been expanded beyond bullying to include "teen dating violence." Public Act 14-234 provides that, effective October 1, 2014, safe school climate plans must now address the existence of teen dating violence as well as bullying in schools. Teen dating violence is defined as "any act of physical, emotional or sexual abuse, including stalking, harassment and threatening that occurs between two students who are currently in or who have recently been in a dating relationship." Specifically, safe school climate plans must now include a prevention strategy for school employees

to deal with teen dating violence. Training by the State Department of Education on bullying must now also include prevention, identification and response to teen dating violence. However, the complaint and investigation process regarding bullying was not expanded to include claims of teen dating violence (though school administrators will want to investigate any such claims as relate to school).

The General Assembly made a number of other changes to the bullying statute, all effective July 1, 2014. First, Public Act 14-172 clarifies that the required annual notification to students and parents (or guardians) of the process by which students may make anonymous reports of bullying must now be given at the beginning of each school year. Public Act 14-172 also expressly requires that when commencing an investigation concerning alleged bullying conduct, school officials must be sure to provide "prompt" notice to the parents of the victim and the parents of the student alleged to have committed acts of bullying that an investigation has commenced.

Public Act 14-172 also clarifies that the required meeting with the parents of the bullying victim and the parents of the perpetrator should be separate and distinct, rather than a joint meeting. The law further provides that at the meeting with the parents (or guardians) of the student found to have committed the verified act of bullying, school officials are required to discuss specific interventions undertaken by the school to prevent further acts of bullying. In addition, at the required meeting with the victim's parents, the law now expressly requires that school officials inform the parents of the policies and procedures in place to prevent further acts of bullying.

Public Act 14-172 also expands the list of examples of activities that can be part of a "prevention and intervention strategy" as set forth in General Statutes § 10-222g. As revised, this new statute identifies that a prevention and intervention strategy may also include "culturally competent, school-based curriculum focusing on social-emotional learning, self-awareness and self-regulation," and it clarifies that "interventions with the bullied child" as referenced in the list of what may be in the district's "prevention and intervention strategy" includes "referrals to a school counselor, psychologist or other appropriate social or mental health service and periodic follow-up by the safe school climate specialist with the bullied child." The statute was also expressly amended to permit funding for the school-based bullying intervention and school climate improvement strategies to originate from public, private, federal or philanthropic sources.

Additionally, under Public Act 14-172, the newly-created Office of Early Childhood (see also Public Act 14-29, below), in collaboration with the SDE, is authorized to create a competitive grant for up to three alliance school districts for the development and implementation of a strategy to promote the social and emotional well-being and health of preschool children from age three to children in third grade. The focus of such grant must be on instructional tools and family engagement and the funds for such grant may originate from public, private, federal or philanthropic sources, with up to 5% of the grant funds to be used to pay administrative costs.

Public Act 14-232 also made changes to the existing bullying statute to give the SDE more direct authority over the approval of safe school climate plans. Existing law required boards to submit safe school climate plans to the SDE no later than January 1, 2012 and there was no legislatively required process for approval or review of such plans by the SDE. Under this new law, any local or regional board of education that has not yet had its safe school climate plan reviewed and approved by the SDE must submit a safe school climate plan to the SDE not later than September 1, 2014 for its review and approval. The SDE then has thirty (30) calendar days to approve or reject such plan. If the SDE rejects a plan, it must provide notice of such rejection and the reasons for such rejection to the local or regional board of education, which in turn, must redevelop and resubmit a safe school climate plan to the SDE not later than thirty (30) calendar days after receipt of notice of rejection. The new law then provides the SDE with another (30) thirty days to approve or reject the resubmitted plan. If the plan is rejected a second time, the district has an additional thirty (30) days to adopt a model plan developed or recommended by the SDE.

Once the safe school climate plan is approved by the SDE, the local or regional board of education must make the safe school climate plan available on the board's and each individual school's website and ensure that such plan is included in the school district's publication of the rules, procedures and standards of conduct for schools and in all student handbooks. Additionally, all approved safe school climate plans will be posted on the SDE's website, along with a list of the school districts that have an approved safe school climate plan and a list of the school districts whose safe school climate plans have been rejected and are in the process of resubmitting their plans for approval by the SDE.

Finally, in accordance with Public Act 14-232, the school climate assessment instruments that the SDE must disseminate in collaboration with the Connecticut Association of Schools must now include surveys containing "uniform grade-level appropriate questions that collect information about students' perspectives and opinions about the school climate at the school," and district procedures must permit students to complete and submit such assessment and survey anonymously.

Study of Student Safety Hotline

Public Act 14-232 also requires that the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection ("DESPP") study the feasibility of establishing a student safety hotline. The study must include an analysis of (1) the feasibility of establishing a student safety hotline that receives anonymous phone calls and text messages relating school safety concerns of students in grades kindergarten to twelve and provides assistance and referrals for such students, (2) the relevant referral areas and appropriate entities and agencies to receive the referrals, (3) training for operators of such student safety hotline, (4) existing student safety hotlines in other states, (5) legal issues that might be associated with the administration of such student safety hotline, (6) any other relevant topics or issues associated with such student safety hotline. The results of such study must be submitted to the state legislature's Education Committee no later than January 1, 2015.

Mandated Reporting

Pursuant to Connecticut law, certain reporters, including school employees such as nurses, occupational therapists, psychologists, social workers, teachers, principals, guidance counselors, paraprofessionals, speech and language pathologists, physical therapists, must notify the Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities ("OPAPD") of any instance in which the reporter has reasonable cause to suspect or believe that any person with an intellectual disability has been abused or neglected. Such reporters must make an oral report to OPAPD as soon as possible within 72 hours (in cases where the allegation results in death an oral report must be made within 24 hours). The reporter must also submit a written report to OPAPD within five days of the oral report. Public Act 14-165 expands these current provisions to require reporters to also notify OPAPD in the event the reporter has reasonable cause to suspect or believe that any person who receives services from the DSS Division of Autism Spectrum Disorder Services has been abused or neglected. This new law goes into effect October 1, 2014.

Youth Athletics and Concussions

Public Act 14-66 makes significant changes to the statutes relating to student concussions, effective July 1, 2014. First, General Statutes § 10-149b now describes concussions as "a type of brain injury." Along with some clerical changes to the law, the law now provides that the refresher course approved or developed by the SDE in consultation with the Commissioner of Public Health must include, for football coaches, current best practices regarding coaching the sport of football, including, but not limited to, frequency of games and full contact practices and scrimmages, as such best practices are identified by the governing authority for intramural and interscholastic athletics.

An important change to the law concerns a new required notification to parents that their child was removed from play due to suspected concussion. Effective July 1, 2014, whenever a coach removes

a student athlete from participating in any intramural or interscholastic athletic activity because of signs, symptoms or behaviors consistent with a concussion following an observed or suspected blow to the head or body or a diagnosis of a concussion, a "qualified school employee" as defined in the law, (principal, teacher, licensed athletic trainer, licensed physical or occupational therapist employed by a school district, coach or school paraprofessional), must notify the student athlete's parent or legal guardian. This notification must be provided not later than 24 hours after the removal, but the school employee should make a reasonable effort to provide immediate notification to the parent or legal guardian.

Looking ahead, on or before January 1, 2015, the SDE, in consultation with the Commissioner of Public Health and partnering organizations listed in the law, must develop or approve a concussion education plan for use by local or regional boards of education. Each local or regional board of education must implement the plan by utilizing written materials, online training or videos, or in person training that must address the following: (1) the recognition of signs or symptoms of concussion, (2) the means of obtaining proper medical treatment for a person suspected of sustaining a concussion, (3) the nature and risks of concussions, including the danger of continuing to engage in athletic activity after sustaining a concussion, (4) the proper procedures for allowing a student athlete who has sustained a concussion to return to athletic activity, and (5) current best practices in the prevention and treatment of a concussion. Boards of education will be required to implement the concussion education plan by July 1, 2015.

Notably, starting with the 2015-2016 school year, before a student may participate in any intramural or interscholastic athletic activity, the student athlete and the parent or legal guardian of such student athlete must review the concussion education plan implemented by the school district, either through review of written materials, or attendance at online or in-person training. Absent receipt of such training by both the student athlete and the student athlete's parent or legal guardian, the student athlete may not participate in any intramural or interscholastic athletic activity.

Public Act 14-66 also adds another prerequisite for participation in intramural or interscholastic athletic activities. Prior to a student's participation in any intramural or interscholastic activity, the parent or legal guardian must sign and return an informed consent form, attesting to the fact that the parent or legal guardian has received the consent form and authorizing the student athlete to participate in the athletic activity. The informed consent form will be developed by the SDE on or before January 1, 2015, in consultation with the DPH and other stakeholders identified in the statutes.

Another important change to the law includes gathering information regarding concussions. For the school year commencing July 1, 2014, and annually thereafter, local or regional boards of education must collect and report all occurrences of concussions to the State Board of Education. Beginning July 1, 2015, the SDE must send a concussion report to the DPH and not later than October 1, 2015, and annually thereafter, the Commissioner of Public Health must report to the joint standing committees of the General Assembly relating to children and public health. Finally, the law provides for the development of a new task force to study occurrences of concussions in youth athletics and to make recommendations for possible legislative initiatives to address concussions.

Sudden Cardiac Arrest Prevention

Starting on July 1, 2015 and for each school year thereafter, Public Act 14-93 requires the SDE, in consultation with the DPH, the governing authority for intramural and interscholastic athletics, and other organizations listed in the statute, to develop or approve a sudden cardiac arrest awareness education program for use by local and regional boards of education. No later than July 1, 2015, the SDE must also develop and approve an informed consent form regarding sudden cardiac arrest for distribution to the parents and legal guardians of students involved in intramural or interscholastic athletics. For the purpose of the statute, "intramural or interscholastic activities" is broadly defined to include any activity sponsored by a school or board of education, or by an organization sanctioned by the board involving any athletic contest,

practice, scrimmage, competition, demonstration, display or club activity.

Also commencing with the 2015-2016 school year, and for each school year thereafter, any person holding a coaching permit and who is a coach of intramural or interscholastic athletics must provide the informed consent form to parents and guardians of students participating in such athletic activities, and must also annually review the sudden cardiac awareness education program prior to the coach commencing his/her coaching assignment for the season. These requirements do not relieve coaches of their existing responsibilities under current law, regulations or collective bargaining agreements. Notably, the statute also provides that the SDE may revoke the coaching permit of any coach failing to take the steps required above. However, the new law also provides that intramural and interscholastic athletic coaches shall be immune from suit and liability for any actions or omissions pursuant to the new law, unless the actions or omissions of the coach constitute wilful misconduct, gross negligence or recklessness.

Children Committed to the Department of Children and Families

Effective October 1, 2014, Public Act 14-99 amends General Statutes § 17a-65 to require the superintendent of any district providing education to a child or youth committed to the custody of the Department of Children and Families ("DCF") to provide a description of the child's educational status and academic progress to (1) DCF, (2) a foster parent of such child or youth, and (3) the attorney for such child or youth. The information provided must be substantially similar to the description provided to the parent or legal guardian of a child or youth who is not committed to the custody of DCF and shall include, but not be limited to, information regarding the child or youth's current levels of educational performance, including absenteeism and grade level performance, test results, report cards, individual success plans and discipline reports. In addition, DCF must review the educational records of any child or youth admitted to any facility or school program run or contracted for by DCF upon the child's entry into the program to determine if the child or youth may be eligible for special education under state law.

Electronic Cigarettes and Vapor Products

Public Act 14-76 requires proper proof of age before selling an electronic nicotine delivery system or vapor product (such as an electronic cigarette) to any person. The act also makes it illegal for any person to sell, give or deliver to any minor (under eighteen years of age) an electronic nicotine delivery system or vapor product, unless the minor is accepting or making delivery in his/her capacity as an employee. In addition, the new statute makes it illegal for such underage person to purchase such a system or product, misrepresent his or her age to do so, or possess the system or product in a public place. Violations may result in fines, which incrementally increase with subsequent offenses. The act defines electronic nicotine delivery system as "an electronic device that may be used to simulate smoking in the delivery of nicotine or other substance to a person inhaling from the device, and includes, but is not limited to, an electronic cigarette, electronic cigar, electronic cigarillo, electronic pipe or electronic hookah and any related devices and any cartridge or other component of such device."

PUBLIC ACTS AFFECTING SCHOOL DISTRICT OPERATION:

Uniform Regional School Calendar

Public Act 14-38 pushes back by a year the date by which school boards must adopt the uniform regional school calendar that RESCs have developed for each of their catchment areas. Now, adoption of the uniform regional school calendar is optional for the 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 school years. However, beginning July 1, 2016, and each school year thereafter, each local or regional board of education will be required to adopt and follow the uniform regional school calendar, provided further however that a local or regional board of education may delay implementation of the uniform regional school calendar until the school year

commencing July 1, 2017, if such board of education has an existing employee contract that makes implementation of the uniform regional school calendar impossible.

Changes to School Security Law's Definition of Retired Police Officer

Public Act 14-212 expands the definition of "retired police officer" for the purposes of employment of armed security personnel by a local or regional board of education. Pursuant to changes effectuated on July 1, 2013, the hiring of armed security personnel other than sworn police officers or retired police officers was prohibited. Effective July 1, 2014, the definition of "retired police officer" pursuant to General Statutes § 10-244a now includes, in addition to a sworn member of an organized local police department or a sworn member of the Division of State Police within the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection, "a sworn federal law enforcement agent who retired or separated in good standing from such federal law enforcement service and who meets or exceeds the standards of the Police Officer Standards and Training Council for certification in this state, or . . . a sworn officer of an organized police department in another state who was certified under standards that meet or exceed the standards of the Police Officer Standards and Training Council for certification in this state and who retired or separated in good standing from such department."

School Building Projects

Public Act 14-90 amends General Statutes § 10-284 to relax the restrictions for compliance with the school safety infrastructure standards developed by the School Safety Infrastructure Council. The Commissioner of Administrative Services may now waive any of the provisions of the school safety infrastructure standards, if the Commissioner determines that the applicant has made a good faith effort to address the standards in its application, and that compliance with the standards would be infeasible, unreasonable or excessively expensive.

In addition, the Commissioner of Administrative Services may now require any town or regional board of education applying for a grant for a school building project to conduct a safety assessment of the school building project to measure compliance with the school safety infrastructure standards. The local or regional board of education may use an assessment tool designated by the Commissioner or an alternative assessment tool that provides a comparable safety and security assessment of the project, as determined by the Commissioner.

Disclosure of DCF Records Regarding Employees and Mandated Reporters

Public Act 14-186 makes several changes to the existing child welfare statutes, which changes become effective October 1, 2014. Specifically, when the Department of Children and Families ("DCF") places an individual employed by a school (or other public or private institution providing care for children) on the child abuse and neglect registry, DCF is now expressly required to disclose records without the consent of such individual to the superintendent of the public school district or executive director or other head of the public or private school. The new statute also provides that DCF can release the name of a person reporting abuse to the police for the purpose of investigating an allegation that such person falsely filed a report of abuse or neglect, or an allegation that a mandated reporter failed to report suspected child abuse in neglect in accordance with state law.

Additionally, Public Act 14-186 expands the list of mandated reporters set forth in Section 17a-101(b) to include a number of additional reporters, including any person eighteen years of age or older who: 1) holds or is issued a coaching permit by the State Board of Education and is a coach of intramural or interscholastic athletics; or 2) is employed either as a coach or director of youth athletics or a coach or director of a youth sports organization, league or team. The law previously included only coaches who were employed by a local or regional board of education.

Finally, the amendments to the law require that DCF notify the superintendent of a local or regional board of education of the results of its investigation of alleged

abuse or neglect by a school employee not later than five working days after DCF completes its investigation of alleged abuse or neglect of a child by a school employee. Prior to the amendments, such notice was only required when DCF had reasonable cause to believe that a child had been abused or neglected by a school employee who had been entrusted with the care of a child and held an SDE-issued certification, permit or authorization, or when DCF recommended that the employee be placed on the DCF child abuse and neglect registry. Moreover, the requirement that a superintendent must suspend employees against whom abuse or neglect is substantiated is now limited to situations when the Commissioner of Children and Families recommends such school employee be placed on the child abuse and neglect registry.

Notice to the Superintendent of Registered Sexual Offender

Public Act 14-213 expands the requirement in General Statutes § 54-258 that the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection notify the superintendent of schools for the school district into which a registered sexual offender will be released, and to provide the superintendent with the information from the registry that is generally available to the public. Now such notification must be provided whenever a registrant changes addresses. Such notification must now also be provided to the chief executive officer of the municipality.

Sexual Assault Awareness

Public Act 14-196 provides that not later than July 1, 2015, the Department of Children and Families ("DCF"), in collaboration with the Department of Education and Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services, Inc. or a similar entity, must identify or develop a statewide sexual abuse and assault awareness and prevention program for use by local and regional boards of education. Each local and regional board of education must implement such sexual abuse and assault awareness and prevention program by October 1, 2015. The program must include:

- Training for teachers regarding the prevention, identification of, and response to child sexual abuse and assault, and resources to further student, teacher and parental awareness regarding child sex abuse and assault and the prevention of such abuse and assault;
- Age-appropriate educational materials designed for children in grades kindergarten to twelve that may include, but not be limited to skills to recognize child sexual abuse and assault, boundary violations and unwanted forms of touching and contact, ways offenders groom or desensitize victims and strategies to promote disclosure, reduce self-blame and mobilize bystanders; and
- A uniform child sexual abuse and assault response policy and reporting procedure.

No student may be required to participate in the program and a parent may exempt his/her child in whole or in part from the sexual abuse and awareness program by notifying the local or regional board of education in writing. If a student is exempted, the local or regional board of education must provide the student with an opportunity for study or academic work during the period of time in which the student would be otherwise participating in the program.

MISCELLANEOUS STATUTORY CHANGES

Office of Early Childhood

Effective immediately, in accordance with Public Act 14-39, an Office of Early Childhood is established under the direction of the Commissioner of Early Childhood, who will be appointed by the Governor. The Office of Early Childhood will be within the Department of Education for administrative purposes. The Office shall be responsible for the following:

- Delivery of services to young children and their families to ensure optimal health, safety and

learning for each young child;

- Developing and implementing the early childhood information system;
- Developing and reporting on the early childhood accountability plan;
- Implementing a communications strategy for outreach to families, service providers and policy makers;
- By September 1, 2014, beginning a statewide longitudinal evaluation of the school readiness program examining educational progress of children from prekindergarten to grade four, inclusive;
- Developing, coordinating and supporting public and private partnerships to aid early childhood initiatives;
- Developing and implementing a statewide developmentally appropriate kindergarten assessment tool that measures a child's level of preparedness for kindergarten, but shall not be used as a measurement tool for program accountability;
- Creating a unified set of reporting requirements for the purpose of collecting the data elements necessary to perform quality assessments and longitudinal analysis;
- Comparing and analyzing data collected pursuant to reporting requirements with the data collected in the statewide public school information system for population-level analysis of children and families;
- Continually monitoring and evaluating all early care and education and child development programs and services, focusing on program outcomes in satisfying the health, safety, developmental and educational needs of all children, while retaining distinct separation between quality improvement services and child day care licensing services;
- Coordinating home visitation services across programs for young children;
- Providing information and technical assistance to persons seeking early care and education and child development programs and services;
- Assisting state agencies and municipalities in obtaining available federal funding for early care and education and child development programs and services;
- Providing technical assistance to providers of early care and education programs and services to obtain licensing and improve program quality;
- Establishing a quality rating and improvement system developed by the office that covers home-based, center-based and school-based early child care and learning;
- Maintaining an accreditation facilitation initiative to assist early childhood care and education program and service providers in achieving national standards and program improvement;
- Consulting with the Early Childhood Cabinet and the Head Start advisory committee;
- Ensuring a coordinated and comprehensive statewide system of professional development for providers and staff of early care and education and child development programs and services;
- Providing families with opportunities for choice in services including quality child care and community-based, family-centered services;
- Integrating early childhood care and education and special education services;
- Promoting universal access to early childhood care and education;
- Ensuring nonduplication of monitoring and evaluation;

- Performing any other activities that will assist in the provision of early care and education and child development programs and services;

- Developing early learning and development standards to be used by early care and education providers; and

- Developing and implementing a performance-based evaluation system to evaluate licensed child day care centers.

Under Section 4 of Public Act 14-29, the Office of Early Childhood is authorized to enter into Memoranda of Agreement with, and accept donations from, nonprofit and philanthropic organizations.

Early Childhood Information System

Under Section 7 of Public Act 14-39, the newly created Office of Early Childhood must develop and implement an early childhood information system to facilitate and encourage the sharing of data between and among early childhood service providers by tracking (1) the health, safety and school readiness of all young children receiving early care and education services from any local or regional board of education, school readiness program or any program receiving public funding, (2) the characteristics of the existing and potential workforce serving such children, (3) the characteristics of such programs serving such children, and (4) data collected, if any, from the preschool experience survey.

Local and regional boards of education, school readiness programs, or any child day care center licensed by the Department of Public Health or the Office of Early Childhood must ensure that all children and all staff in school under the jurisdiction of such board, program or center are entered into the early childhood information system.

Early Childhood Accountability Plan

In addition to the above requirements, not later than December 31, 2015, the Office of Early Childhood must develop, in consultation with the Early Childhood Cabinet, an early childhood accountability plan. The plan must (1) identify and define appropriate population indicators and program and system performance measures of the health, safety and readiness of children to enter kindergarten, and early school success of children, and shall identify any new or improved data for such purposes, and (2) include aggregate information on the characteristics of children and programs tracked by the early childhood information system, including, but not limited to, family income, whether the families of such children receive assistance through temporary assistance for needy families, or a similar program, and the communities in which such children reside using a performance measurement accountability framework.

Not later than July 1, 2015, the Office of Early Childhood must also develop report cards containing the indicators and performance measures identified in the early childhood accountability plan. Finally, by January 15, 2016, the Office of Early Childhood must (1) submit the early childhood accountability plan, and (2) annually report on the results of such plan and report cards to the joint standing committees of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to education and appropriations.

Enrollment in Kindergarten

Section 9 of Public Act 14-39 further requires that by June 30, 2015, the Office of Early Childhood must develop, in consultation with the Department of Education, a plan for changing the date that a child must reach five years of age to be eligible to enroll in kindergarten under General Statutes § 10-15c from January 1st of any school year to October 1st of any school year. In addition, the Office of Early Childhood, in consultation with the Department of Education, must develop a plan to create space in school readiness programs and public and private prekindergarten programs for those children who reach five years of age after October 1st of any school year and are not eligible to enroll in kindergarten for such school year.

Competitive Grant Program

Section 13 of Public Act 14-39 expands the scope

of the competitive grant program established for the purpose of providing spaces in accredited school readiness programs. Now, school readiness programs seeking accreditation may also apply for the grant. In addition, students residing in a town designated as an alliance district, whose school district is not a priority school district, are now eligible for such spaces.

Per Child Cost of the School Readiness Program

Pursuant to Section 14 of Public Act 14-39, for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2015 and each fiscal year thereafter, the per child cost of the Office of Early Childhood school readiness program offered by a school readiness provider shall not exceed eight thousand six hundred seventy dollars. For the school year commencing July 1, 2015, and each school year thereafter, the Office of Early Childhood shall not provide funding to any school readiness provider that is a local or regional board of education that does not collect preschool experience data using the preschool experience survey and make such data available for inclusion in the public school information system.

Plan to Provide Spaces to All Eligible Children

Section 84 of Public Act 14-39 requires that the Commissioner of Early Childhood must develop a plan to provide spaces to all eligible children in an accredited school readiness program or a school readiness program seeking accreditation to be submitted to the Governor before January 1, 2015.

Preschool Experience Survey

Pursuant to Public Act 14-39, Section 86, on or before March 1, 2015, the Commissioner of Early Childhood, in consultation with the Department of Education, must develop a preschool experience survey that may be included in kindergarten registration materials provided by local or regional boards of education to parents or guardians of children enrolling in kindergarten. The local or regional board of education shall use such survey to collect information regarding (1) whether the child enrolling in kindergarten has participated in a preschool program, and (2) if the child has not participated in a preschool program, the reasons why such child did not participate in a preschool program, including, but not limited to, financial difficulty, lack of transportation, parental choice regarding enrollment, limitations related to the hours of operation of available preschool programs and any other barriers to participation in a preschool program. A local or regional board of education shall not require any parent or guardian of such child to complete such survey as a condition of such child's enrollment in kindergarten.

Technical High School Career Readiness

Special Act 14-19 requires that the technical high school system, in collaboration with the Labor Department, the State Department of Education, the Board of Regents for Higher Education, and industry and business representatives, develop a plan not later than January 1, 2015, to utilize the manufacturing centers at the technical high schools after regular school hours and on weekends for (1) career-readiness programs for students of Connecticut high schools or institutions of higher education or adults seeking to reenter the workforce, and (2) offering instruction approved by the Labor Department that is responsible for apprenticeship training to teach the skills necessary for a person to succeed in a manufacturing apprenticeship program.

State Education Resource Center

Public Act 14-212 clarifies the status of the State Education Resource Center (SERC), describing it as a political subdivision of the state, i.e. a public educational authority acting on behalf of the State of Connecticut governed by a board of directors appointed pursuant to the statute. The described purpose of the State Education Resource Center is to assist the State Board of Education in the provision of programs and activities that will promote educational equity and excellence. The activities of the State Education Resource Center are to include, but not be limited to: (1) training, technical assistance and professional development for local

and regional boards of education, school leaders, teachers, families and community partners in the form of seminars, publications, site visits, online content and other appropriate means, (2) maintaining a State Education Resource Center library, (3) publication of technical materials, (4) research and evaluation, (5) writing, managing, administering and coordinating grants for the purposes described above, and (6) any other directly related activities. The center may also support programs and activities concerning early childhood education, in collaboration with the Office of Early Childhood, improving school and district academic performance, and closing achievement gaps between socio-economic subgroups, and other related programs and activities.

Dyslexia and Special Education

In addition to its requirements related to Early Childhood Education, Public Act 14-39 also makes changes that affect students with dyslexia. Specifically, under Section 1 of this act, not later than January 1, 2015, the Department of Education must add "SLD-Dyslexia" under "Specific Learning Disabilities" in the "Primary Disability" section of the individualized education program form used by planning and placement teams for the provision of special education and related services to children requiring special education and related services. Section 2 of this same act further requires that on or after July 1, 2015, teacher preparation programs leading to professional certification must also now include the instruction on the detection and recognition of, and evidence-based interventions for, students with dyslexia.

Informing Parents of the Right to Withhold from Kindergarten Enrollment

Under current law, school officials must provide a notification of rights to parents upon the formal identification of any child as a child requiring special education and at each planning and placement team meeting for such child. Under Section 3 of Public Act 14-39, this notification of rights must now inform parents, guardians and surrogate parent of their right to withhold from enrolling such child in kindergarten. This change to the law became effective upon passage.

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