

Series: 2004-2005

Circular Letter: C-12

TO: Superintendents of Schools

FROM: Dr. Betty J. Sternberg, Commissioner of Education

DATE: June 20, 2005

SUBJECT: Highlights of the 2005 Regular Session of the Connecticut General Assembly

The Connecticut General Assembly has now adjourned its 2005 Regular Session and is expected to be meeting soon in a special session to take up issues such as bond authorizations and the school construction priority list.

To give you an idea of the General Assembly's activities concerning education over the past few months, below is a list of the most important education bills that were passed during the regular session and some examples of the contents of each bill. Please note that the Governor has not yet signed many of these bills and that some of them have not yet been assigned public act numbers. Additionally, we are in the process of getting the new legislation on the Department of Education's website under "Education Bills: 2005" at <http://www.state.ct.us/sde/legal/index.htm> and hope to have this finished shortly.

Once the General Assembly completes the special session, we will provide you with a more detailed and comprehensive summary of all of the 2005 legislation. Please remember that the **Back-to-School Meeting** for superintendents has been scheduled for **August 23, 2005**.

## **2005 HIGHLIGHTS**

For 2005-06 **general fund appropriations (including surpluses) for education grants** will increase by \$125 million, a 6.4 percent increase. In addition to increases for education cost sharing (ECS), special education, priority school districts, school readiness, charter schools and interdistrict magnet schools, there are several new grant initiatives. These initiatives are described below under "An Act Concerning Expenditures for the Programs and Services of the Department of Education." Grant caps will continue for the transportation, excess cost-student based (except for students eligible for 100% state funding), adult education, health services and regional educational service center (RESC) lease grants. However, most of these grant appropriations are increased for 2005-06. A summary of the Department's budget is available at: <http://www.state.ct.us/sde/dgm/report1/BUD05-07.htm>.

**An Act Concerning Expenditures for the Programs and Services of the Department of Education** (HB 6989, as amended) makes statutory changes to implement the Department of Education's budget for the upcoming biennium including the establishment of new grant programs to:

- Pilot the use of **technology** in providing computer assisted writing, instruction and testing in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grades;
- Assist **districts in need of improvement** by providing grants for the creation and acquisition of new curricula, training in the use of the curricula, and related supporting textbooks and other materials;
- Provide grants to boards of education, towns and not-for-profit organizations for **after-school programs**; and
- Provide for new and unique methods of educating **young adults entering adult education**.

Additionally, this bill:

- Enhances the state's **school readiness** program by (A) establishing an Early Childhood Education Cabinet to advise the Commissioner of Education, evaluate the school readiness program, develop budget requests, and promote consistency of quality and comprehensiveness of early childhood services; (B) expanding the competitive school readiness grant program to more towns with the lowest ECS wealth rankings; (C) increasing the cap on the per child cost of the school readiness component; (D) raising the qualifications of staff employed in school readiness programs; and (E) requiring the Commissioner of Education, within available appropriations, to develop and implement a statewide kindergarten assessment tool to measure a child's preparedness for kindergarten;
- Specifies that the budgeted appropriation for education in any town receiving an increase in **ECS** funds shall not be less than the amount appropriated for education for the prior year plus the increase in funds;
- Establishes a task force to study **interdistrict magnet school expenditures, funding and governance** and report to the General Assembly by January 1, 2006; and
- Provides that **state testing** of students is to be administered in March or April, rather than only in April.

**An Act Concerning Food Allergies and the Prevention of Life-Threatening Incidents in Schools** (P.A. 05-104; signed by the Governor June 7, 2005) requires (1) the Department of Education, in conjunction with the Department of Public Health and not later than January 1, 2006, to develop and make available to each local and regional board of education guidelines for the management of students with life-threatening food allergies and (2) each board of education to implement a plan based on the guidelines not later than July 1, 2006.

**An Act Concerning Pesticides at Schools and Day Care Facilities** (sSB 916, as amended) prohibits the application of lawn care pesticides on the grounds of any public or private preschool or elementary school on and after January 1, 2006, except under specified conditions.

**An Act Concerning Minor Revisions to the Education Statutes** (sHB 6948, as amended) specifies that assistive devices used to increase, maintain or improve the functional capabilities of students with disabilities are, like books and equipment, (1) to be loaned by school districts to students free of charge and (2) subject to such rules and regulations as to their care and use as a board of education prescribes. This bill also amends the provisions concerning the notification that is to be given to superintendents when the Commissioner of Children and Families, based upon the results of an investigation, has reasonable cause to believe that a child has been abused by a school employee who holds a certificate, permit or authorization issued by the State Board of Education.

**An Act Concerning Certification Requirements for Bilingual Educators** (sHB 6678, as amended) changes dual certification requirements for new bilingual education teachers for the period from July 1, 2005, to July 1, 2008, in order to increase the numbers of bilingual education teachers while at the same time maintaining high standards. The act also clarifies that the transition support services provided to students who have spent 30 months in a bilingual education program and who do not meet the English mastery standard at the end of that time period may not include a program of bilingual education.

Please note that on June 14, 2005, the Governor vetoed **An Act Concerning School Nutrition** (P.A. 05-117). We do not expect that the General Assembly will override this veto. If this bill had been enacted, it would have provided (1) that boards of education had to require each school to include in the regular school day for each student enrolled in full-day kindergarten and grades one to five, inclusive, an opportunity to engage in **physical exercise for a minimum of twenty minutes a day**, in addition to any physical education requirements, (2) that boards of education were permitted to establish **School Wellness Committees** to monitor and implement nutrition and physical activity policies and (3) specific rules for the sale of **beverages and foods** to students in schools.

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