

Series: 2001-2002

Circular Letter: C-1

TO: Superintendents of Schools
FROM: Theodore S. Sergi, Commissioner of Education
DATE: July 6, 2001
SUBJECT: Legislative Highlights

The Connecticut General Assembly recently completed this year's regular and special legislative sessions and passed a number of proposals affecting education and the operation of school districts. While we have not yet had an opportunity to prepare a comprehensive document describing all of this legislation, we thought it would be helpful to you at this time to have a brief overview of the most significant initiatives affecting local and regional boards of education. A more complete summary will be available by the August back-to-school meeting sponsored by this department and the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents.

(Please note that the Governor has not signed the bills described in this letter, except as indicated. However, we expect he will be signing all of them.)

BASIC SKILLS FOR GRADUATION

"An Act Concerning High School Graduation and the Connecticut Academic Performance Test," P.A. 01-166

- On or before September 1, 2002, each local and regional board of education must specify the **basic skills necessary for graduation** for classes graduating in 2006, and thereafter, and include a process to assess a student's level of competency in such skills. The assessment criteria are to include, but not exclusively be based on, the results of the Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT) (see page 4).

MASTERY TEST EXEMPTIONS

"An Act Concerning Mastery Test Exemptions," P.A. 01-205

- The General Assembly reduced from 30 months to 10 months the **bilingual and English as a second language (ESL)** enrollment period during which bilingual and ESL students are exempt from having to take the Connecticut Mastery Tests (CMTs) and CAPT.
- **Special education** students can be exempted from the CMTs and CAPT only in rare instances.

EDUCATORS

“An Act Concerning Revisions to the Education Statutes,” P.A. 01-173

- The State Board of Education must periodically submit the following databases to the State Police Bureau of Identification for **state criminal history records checks**: (1) all applicants for an initial issuance of a certificate, authorization or permit, and (2) all persons who hold certificates, authorizations or permits issued by the State Board of Education.
- School districts must require each person hired to submit to state and national criminal history records **checks within 30 days of employment** (a change from 90 days).
- School districts must make a **documented good faith effort to contact previous employers** as part of the hiring process.
- Educators with secondary academic endorsements must now, like educators with elementary and middle grades endorsements, include in their continuing education units at least **15 hours of training in the use of computers in the classroom** during each five-year period. However, all of these educators are exempted from this requirement if they are able to demonstrate technology competency, in a manner determined by their local or regional boards of education, based on state-wide standards for teacher competency in the use of technology for instructional purposes.

PSYCHOTROPIC DRUGS

“An Act Concerning Recommendations for and Refusals of the Use of Psychotropic Drugs by Children and Utilization Review Determinations Related to Mental and Nervous Conditions,” P.A. 01-124 (Signed June 28, 2001)

- Local and regional boards of education are to adopt and implement policies prohibiting any school personnel from recommending the **use of psychotropic drugs** for any child. Only school medical staff may recommend that a child be evaluated by an appropriate medical practitioner, and school personnel may consult with such a practitioner with the consent of the parent or guardian of such child.

GRANTS AND NEW INITIATIVES

“An Act Concerning Expenditures for the Programs and Services of the Department of Education,” Emergency Certified Bill 7502 (Signed July 2, 2001)

“An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2003, and Making Appropriations Therefor,” Emergency Certified Bill 7501 (Signed June 29, 2001)

“An Act Concerning Authorization Of State Grant Commitments For School Building Projects,” S.A. 01-12

- The appropriation for the Education Cost Sharing (**ECS**) formula has been increased by \$70.7M for FY 2001-02 and by an additional \$56.5M for FY 2002-03 with the following changes to the ECS formula:

1. **Each town whose ECS grant is capped under the ECS formula** will receive a proportional share of \$25 million for FY 2001-02 and of \$50 million in FY 2002-03. Each town's share is based on the difference between its capped grant and its "target aid" (the amount its grant, excluding any density supplements, would be without the cap). The provisions eliminating the ECS cap starting in FY 2003-04 have not been changed;
 2. For FY 2001-02, **all towns** must receive a minimum grant increase of 1.68% over their FY 2000-01 grant; and
 3. The current ECS **foundation** of \$5,891 remains at that level through FY 2002-03.
- **For FY 2002-03**, and each fiscal year thereafter, the local contribution in the **special education excess cost** (LEA placements) grant will be reduced from five times the school district's average per pupil education costs for the prior fiscal year to four and one-half times such costs.
 - The Department of Education has \$500,000 to establish a **competitive safe learning grant program** for school districts to develop school environments where children learn in safety without fear of physical or verbal harm or intimidation. The program is to be a public and private partnership.
 - The **priority list of school construction projects** has been approved.
 - The funding for several grants paid to **priority school districts** has been consolidated under a single appropriation. This will not impact the distribution of aid for each of those grant programs.

I hope that this information has been helpful to you. If you have any questions, Department of Education staff members are ready and willing to assist you. In most cases, you will know from past experience with whom to consult. For instance, please contact Robert Brewer, Director of the Division of Grants Management, at (860) 713-6464 for information on the grant formula changes. If you have specific legislative questions, please call Katherine Nicoletti, Esq., in the Office of Legal and Governmental Affairs, at (860) 713-6520.

Attachment
TSS:ktn

Substitute Senate Bill No. 1175

Public Act No. 01-166
AN ACT CONCERNING HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION AND THE CONNECTICUT
ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE TEST.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Assembly convened:

Section 10-223a of the general statutes is repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof:

(a) On or before July 1, 2000, each local and regional board of education shall review and revise its policies for promotion from grade to grade and for graduation in order to ensure that such policies foster student achievement, reduce the incidence of social promotion and meet the requirements of this section. On and after said date, such policies shall: (1) Include objective criteria for the promotion and graduation of students, (2) provide for the measuring of the progress of students against such criteria and the reporting of such information to parents and students, (3) include alternatives to promotion such as transition programs, and (4) provide for supplemental services, and such policies may require students who have substantial academic deficiencies that jeopardize their eligibility for promotion or graduation to attend after school programs, summer school or other programs offered by the school district that are designed to assist students in remedying such deficiencies.

(b) On or before September 1, 2002, each local and regional board of education shall specify the basic skills necessary for graduation for classes graduating in 2006, and for each graduating class thereafter, and include a process to assess a student's level of competency in such skills. The assessment criteria shall include, but shall not exclusively be based on, the results of the tenth grade mastery examination pursuant to section 10-14n. Each local and regional board of education shall identify a course of study for those students who have not successfully completed the assessment criteria to assist such students to reach a satisfactory level of competency prior to graduation.