
OLR Bill Analysis

sSB 1028

AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION.

SUMMARY

This bill makes several changes in the statutes regarding interdistrict magnet schools.

The bill makes permanent the requirements that a magnet school's total enrollment (1) have no more than 75% of students from one school district and (2) meets the reduced isolation setting standards (i.e., desegregation) developed by the education commissioner. These requirements are set to expire after the 2023-2024 school year. It also makes permanent the law barring the commissioner from awarding grants to magnet schools that do not comply with these enrollment standards. This ban is set to expire after the 2022-2023 school year.

The bill leaves unchanged an exception that allows the commissioner to award a grant for an additional year or years to a noncompliant school if she finds it appropriate and approves a plan to bring the school into compliance with the residency and reduced isolation setting standards as existing law requires. (Reduced-isolation standards consider the racial composition of the school's student body.)

The bill also:

1. sunsets a targeted magnet school grant (§ 2),
2. reinstates the ban on *Sheff*-region host magnet schools charging tuition to sending school districts (§ 3) (see BACKGROUND),
3. allows the education commissioner to revise the magnet school reduced isolation standards (§ 4), and

4. allows the commissioner to award grants from existing *Sheff* settlement funds for four purposes under the settlement (§ 5).

It also makes several technical changes, including two in the statutes addressing the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunities for Military Children (§ 6).

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2023

§ 2 — SUNSETS TARGETED MAGNET SCHOOL GRANT

The bill sunsets a targeted magnet school grant at the end of FY 23 (June 30, 2023). The grant applies to a magnet school operated by a regional educational service center (RESC) that (1) began operations in the 2001-2002 school year and (2) for the 2008-2009 school year enrolled at least 55% but not more than 80% of the school's students from a single town. (The school, Edison Magnet School in Meriden, no longer exists in that form; it was moved to Waterbury and reconstituted as ACES at Chase and is eligible for other magnet grants.)

§ 3 — REINSTATES BAN ON MAGNET SCHOOL TUITION

The bill reinstates and makes permanent the prohibition on *Sheff* magnet schools operated by local or regional boards of education charging tuition to school districts sending students to the magnets. The ban had expired after the 2018-19 school year. *Sheff* magnet schools are schools operating under the *Sheff v. O'Neill* state Supreme Court decision and related stipulations and orders (see BACKGROUND).

The bill, as under existing law, (1) applies the ban to preschool programs and kindergarten through grade 12 and (2) includes an exception that allows the Hartford school district to charge tuition for any student enrolled in the Great Path Academy, which it operates in Manchester.

§ 4 — REVISING REDUCED ISOLATION STANDARDS

As discussed above, current law generally prohibits the education commissioner from awarding operating grants to magnet schools that fail to meet the state's reduced isolation standards. But it also gives her the discretion to award the grants to noncompliant schools while

assisting them with their efforts to regain eligibility. The law sets minimum criteria for the commissioner to use in setting the standards, including (1) at least 20% of a magnet school's enrollment must be reduced isolation students and (2) a school's enrollment may have up to 1% below the minimum percentage, if she approves a plan for the school to reach the 20% minimum or the percent she established in the standards. It also requires the commissioner to define "reduced isolation student."

The bill authorizes the commissioner to revise the standards as needed and adds the requirement that they comply with the *Sheff* decision and any related stipulations or orders. (It also allows the commissioner to revise, as needed, the alternative reduced-isolation enrollment percentages for the 2018-2019 school year. Those percentages expired in 2019, so it is unclear if this has any legal effect.)

§ 5 — GRANTS TO ASSIST SHEFF PROGRAMS

The bill allows the commissioner, to help the state meets its *Sheff* desegregation obligations, to award grants from funds appropriated for the *Sheff* settlement for academic and social student support programs at (1) magnet schools, (2) the Open Choice program, (3) the interdistrict cooperative program, and (4) the state technical education and career high schools.

By law, unchanged by the bill, the commissioner can transfer *Sheff* money for grants for unspecified purposes for the same programs, also including grants to state charter schools.

BACKGROUND

Sheff v. O'Neill State Supreme Court Decision

In this 1996 decision, the state's Supreme Court ruled that the state had a constitutional obligation to remedy the educational inequities in the Hartford schools caused by racial and ethnic isolation (238 Conn. 1 (1996)). The court ordered the state legislature and the governor to craft a solution and legislation was passed to create voluntary desegregation in Hartford by creating magnet schools and using other programs such as Open Choice.

Sheff Region

The Sheff region includes the school districts for the following towns: Avon, Bloomfield, Canton, East Granby, East Hartford, East Windsor, Ellington, Farmington, Glastonbury, Granby, Hartford, Manchester, Newington, Rocky Hill, Simsbury, South Windsor, Suffield, Vernon, West Hartford, Wethersfield, Windsor, and Windsor Locks.

Related Bill

sHB 5003, §§ 2 & 4, favorably reported by the Education Committee, also makes changes in the magnet school grant law by removing the current array of grants and replacing them with two new grants.

COMMITTEE ACTION

Education Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 40 Nay 0 (03/17/2023)