



General Assembly

**Substitute Bill No. 977**

January Session, 2021



**AN ACT CONCERNING VIRTUAL LEARNING.**

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

1 Section 1. (NEW) (*Effective from passage*) (a) As used in this section,  
2 "virtual learning" means the provision of instruction by means of one or  
3 more Internet-based software platforms as part of an in-person or  
4 remote learning model that is in accordance with the uniform virtual  
5 learning standards developed by the Department of Education pursuant  
6 to this section.

7 (b) (1) Not later than July 1, 2021, the Department of Education shall  
8 develop uniform standards for virtual learning. Such uniform standards  
9 shall be used by local and regional boards of education for the  
10 authorized provision of virtual learning, and shall be developed with  
11 consideration given to best practices, technological capabilities and  
12 equity. Such standards shall (A) include a requirement that any virtual  
13 learning provided by a local or regional board of education be in  
14 accordance with the provisions of sections 10-15 and 10-16 of the general  
15 statutes, as amended by this act, (B) be rigorous, aligned with  
16 curriculum guidelines approved by the State Board of Education, and in  
17 accordance with the state-wide subject matter content standards,  
18 adopted by the state board pursuant to section 10-4 of the general  
19 statutes, and (C) require any local or regional board of education that

20 wants to implement virtual learning when public school sessions may  
21 otherwise be cancelled for reasons of inclement weather or otherwise, to  
22 develop a plan for how and when such virtual learning will be provided.

23 (2) Not later than July 1, 2022, the department shall revise the uniform  
24 standards for virtual learning, developed pursuant to subdivision (1) of  
25 this subsection, to incorporate the findings of the comprehensive audit  
26 conducted pursuant to section 2 of this act.

27 (3) On and after July 1, 2023, the department shall annually review  
28 and may revise as necessary the uniform standards for virtual learning.

29 (c) The Department of Education shall periodically review whether  
30 the uniform standards for virtual learning are being satisfied by a local  
31 or regional board of education that is implementing virtual learning.

32 (d) Not later than July 1, 2021, the department shall develop  
33 guidelines for the provision of training in virtual learning offered as part  
34 of a program of professional development, pursuant to section 10-148a  
35 of the general statutes, as amended by this act, or as part of an in-service  
36 training program, pursuant to section 10-220a of the general statutes, as  
37 amended by this act. Such guidelines shall be used by local and regional  
38 boards of education, and shall be developed, and updated as necessary,  
39 with consideration given to best practices, technological capabilities and  
40 equity.

41 (e) The department shall make the uniform standards for virtual  
42 learning and the guidelines for the provision of training in virtual  
43 learning available on its Internet web site.

44 Sec. 2. (NEW) (*Effective from passage*) (a) As used in this section:

45 (1) "Virtual learning" has the same meaning as provided in section 1  
46 of this act; and

47 (2) "COVID-19" means the respiratory disease designated by the  
48 World Health Organization on February 11, 2020, as coronavirus 2019,

49 and any related mutation thereof recognized by the World Health  
50 Organization as a communicable respiratory disease.

51 (b) The Department of Education shall conduct a comprehensive  
52 audit of the virtual learning provided by local and regional boards of  
53 education as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic during the school years  
54 commencing July 1, 2019, and July 1, 2020.

55 (c) Such comprehensive audit shall include, but need not be limited  
56 to, an examination of (1) whether and how local and regional boards of  
57 education initially provided virtual learning during the beginning of the  
58 COVID-19 pandemic, with a focus on the technological capabilities or  
59 limitations at such time, (2) the curriculum used as part of virtual  
60 learning and whether students were able to complete the grade level  
61 curriculums, (3) the level of preparation or training in virtual learning  
62 that educators received prior to and during the provision of virtual  
63 learning during such school years, including the nature of such training  
64 and whether it was offered as part of a program of professional  
65 development, pursuant to section 10-148a of the general statutes, as  
66 amended by this act, or as part of an in-service training program,  
67 pursuant to section 10-220a of the general statutes, as amended by this  
68 act, and (4) the level of improvement, if any, of the provision of virtual  
69 learning from the school year commencing July 1, 2019, to the school  
70 year commencing July 1, 2020.

71 (d) Following the completion of such comprehensive audit, the  
72 department shall develop a report that uses the results of such  
73 comprehensive audit to (1) evaluate the efficacy of virtual learning, and  
74 hybrid learning models, and the potential to leverage technology for  
75 teaching in other scenarios and rethinking the delivery of instruction,  
76 (2) identify a system of metrics to hold local and regional boards of  
77 education accountable for virtual learning access and equity, and (3)  
78 review and make recommendations regarding ongoing public  
79 education requirements, including what defines a "school day", by  
80 aligning technology and how virtual learning may be optimally  
81 integrated into the program of study and the provision of public

82 education.

83 (e) Not later than February 1, 2022, the department shall submit such  
84 comprehensive audit and report, and any recommendations for  
85 legislation, to the joint standing committee of the General Assembly  
86 having cognizance of matters relating to education, in accordance with  
87 the provisions of section 11-4a of the general statutes.

88 Sec. 3. Subsection (a) of section 10-148a of the general statutes is  
89 repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective from*  
90 *passage*):

91 (a) For the school year commencing July 1, 2019, and each school year  
92 thereafter, each certified employee shall participate in a program of  
93 professional development. Each local and regional board of education  
94 shall make available, annually, at no cost to its certified employees, a  
95 program of professional development that is not fewer than eighteen  
96 hours in length, of which a preponderance is in a small group or  
97 individual instructional setting. Such program of professional  
98 development shall (1) be a comprehensive, sustained and intensive  
99 approach to improving teacher and administrator effectiveness in  
100 increasing student knowledge achievement, (2) focus on refining and  
101 improving various effective teaching methods that are shared between  
102 and among educators, (3) foster collective responsibility for improved  
103 student performance, (4) be comprised of professional learning that (A)  
104 is aligned with rigorous state student academic achievement standards,  
105 (B) is conducted among educators at the school and facilitated by  
106 principals, coaches, mentors, distinguished educators, as described in  
107 section 10-145s, or other appropriate teachers, (C) occurs frequently on  
108 an individual basis or among groups of teachers in a job-embedded  
109 process of continuous improvement, and (D) includes a repository of  
110 best practices for teaching methods developed by educators within each  
111 school that is continuously available to such educators for comment and  
112 updating, [and] (5) include training in culturally responsive pedagogy  
113 and practice, and (6) include training in the provision of virtual learning,  
114 in accordance with the guidelines developed pursuant to section 1 of

115 this act. Each program of professional development shall include  
116 professional development activities in accordance with the provisions  
117 of subsection (b) of this section.

118 Sec. 4. Subsection (a) of section 10-220a of the general statutes is  
119 repealed and the following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective from*  
120 *passage*):

121 (a) Each local or regional board of education shall provide an in-  
122 service training program for its teachers, administrators and pupil  
123 personnel who hold the initial educator, provisional educator or  
124 professional educator certificate. Such program shall provide such  
125 teachers, administrators and pupil personnel with information on (1)  
126 the nature and the relationship of alcohol and drugs, as defined in  
127 subdivision (17) of section 21a-240, to health and personality  
128 development, and procedures for discouraging their abuse, (2) health  
129 and mental health risk reduction education that includes, but need not  
130 be limited to, the prevention of risk-taking behavior by children and the  
131 relationship of such behavior to substance abuse, pregnancy, sexually  
132 transmitted diseases, including HIV-infection and AIDS, as defined in  
133 section 19a-581, violence, teen dating violence, domestic violence and  
134 child abuse, (3) school violence prevention, conflict resolution, the  
135 prevention of and response to youth suicide and the identification and  
136 prevention of and response to bullying, as defined in subsection (a) of  
137 section 10-222d, except that those boards of education that implement  
138 any evidence-based model approach that is approved by the  
139 Department of Education and is consistent with subsection (c) of section  
140 10-145a, sections 10-222d, 10-222g and 10-222h, subsection (g) of section  
141 10-233c and sections 1 and 3 of public act 08-160, shall not be required  
142 to provide in-service training on the identification and prevention of  
143 and response to bullying, (4) cardiopulmonary resuscitation and other  
144 emergency life saving procedures, (5) the requirements and obligations  
145 of a mandated reporter, (6) the detection and recognition of, and  
146 evidence-based structured literacy interventions for, students with  
147 dyslexia, as defined in section 10-3d, [and] (7) culturally responsive

148 pedagogy and practice, and (8) include training in the provision of  
149 virtual learning, in accordance with the guidelines developed pursuant  
150 to section 1 of this act. Each local or regional board of education may  
151 allow any paraprofessional or noncertified employee to participate, on  
152 a voluntary basis, in any in-service training program provided pursuant  
153 to this section.

154 Sec. 5. Section 10-16 of the general statutes is repealed and the  
155 following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective from passage*):

156 Each school district shall provide in each school year no less than one  
157 hundred and eighty days of actual school sessions for grades  
158 kindergarten to twelve, inclusive, nine hundred hours of actual school  
159 work for full-day kindergarten and grades one to twelve, inclusive, and  
160 four hundred and fifty hours of half-day kindergarten, provided school  
161 districts shall not count more than seven hours of actual school work in  
162 any school day towards the total required for the school year. Virtual  
163 learning, as defined in section 1 of this act, shall be considered an actual  
164 school session for purposes of this section. If weather conditions result  
165 in an early dismissal or a delayed opening of school, a school district  
166 which maintains separate morning and afternoon half-day kindergarten  
167 sessions may provide either a morning or afternoon half-day  
168 kindergarten session on such day.

169 Sec. 6. Section 10-15 of the general statutes is repealed and the  
170 following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective from passage*):

171 Public schools including kindergartens shall be maintained in each  
172 town for at least one hundred eighty days of actual school sessions  
173 during each year, and for the school year commencing July 1, 2014, and  
174 each school year thereafter, in accordance with the provisions of section  
175 10-66q. Virtual learning, as defined in section 1 of this act, shall be  
176 considered an actual school session for purposes of this section. When  
177 public school sessions are cancelled for reasons of inclement weather or  
178 otherwise, the rescheduled sessions shall not be held on Saturday or  
179 Sunday. Public schools may conduct weekend education programs to

180 provide supplemental and remedial services to students. A local or  
181 regional board of education for a school that has been designated as a  
182 low achieving school pursuant to subparagraph (A) of subdivision (1)  
183 of subsection (e) of section 10-223e, or a category four school or a  
184 category five school pursuant to said section 10-223e, may increase the  
185 number of actual school sessions during each year, and may increase the  
186 number of hours of actual school work per school session in order to  
187 improve student performance and remove the school from the list of  
188 schools designated as a low achieving school maintained by the State  
189 Board of Education. The State Board of Education (1) may authorize the  
190 shortening of any school year for a school district, a school or a portion  
191 of a school on account of an unavoidable emergency, and (2) may  
192 authorize implementation of scheduling of school sessions to permit full  
193 year use of facilities which may not offer each child one hundred eighty  
194 days of school sessions within a given school year, but which assures an  
195 opportunity for each child to average a minimum of one hundred eighty  
196 days of school sessions per year during thirteen years of educational  
197 opportunity in the elementary and secondary schools. Notwithstanding  
198 the provisions of this section and section 10-16, as amended by this act,  
199 the State Board of Education may, upon application by a local or  
200 regional board of education, approve for any single school year, in  
201 whole or in part, a plan to implement alternative scheduling of school  
202 sessions which assures at least four hundred fifty hours of actual school  
203 work for nursery schools and half-day kindergartens and at least nine  
204 hundred hours of actual school work for full-day kindergartens and  
205 grades one to twelve, inclusive.

206 Sec. 7. Section 10-198b of the general statutes is repealed and the  
207 following is substituted in lieu thereof (*Effective from passage*):

208 On or before July 1, 2012, the State Board of Education shall define  
209 "excused absence" and "unexcused absence", and on or before January  
210 1, 2016, the State Board of Education shall define "disciplinary absence"  
211 for use by local and regional boards of education for the purposes of  
212 carrying out the provisions of section 10-198a, reporting truancy,

213 pursuant to subsection (c) of section 10-220, and calculating the district  
214 chronic absenteeism rate and the school chronic absenteeism rate  
215 pursuant to section 10-198c. On or before July 1, 2021, the State Board of  
216 Education shall amend the definition of "excused absence" and  
217 "unexcused absence" to address virtual learning, as defined in section 1  
218 of this act, school sessions.

This act shall take effect as follows and shall amend the following sections:		
Section 1	<i>from passage</i>	New section
Sec. 2	<i>from passage</i>	New section
Sec. 3	<i>from passage</i>	10-148a(a)
Sec. 4	<i>from passage</i>	10-220a(a)
Sec. 5	<i>from passage</i>	10-16
Sec. 6	<i>from passage</i>	10-15
Sec. 7	<i>from passage</i>	10-198b

**ED**

*Joint Favorable Subst. C/R*

APP