

House Bill 5283, *An Act Concerning the Education Cost Sharing Grant Formula and the Funding of Other Education Programs*, contains several provisions that impact how operators of Connecticut's Agricultural Science and Technology Education (Vo-Ag) programs receive funding to support the education of students who attend their programs.

### Overview of H.B. 5283

- **Accelerates the Education Cost Sharing (ECS) formula's phase-in schedule and fully funds all districts** beginning in FY 2025 when one-time federal COVID relief funds expire;
- **Expands ECS weighted funding to students attending public schools of choice** (magnet schools, charter schools, Vo-Ag programs) while protecting funding for local public schools; and
- **Provides school districts the ability to leverage historic, but temporary, federal funding** for on-going expenses.

### Current Funding of Students Who Attend Vo-Ag Programs

- Vo-ag programs are operated by local and regional public school districts.
- Currently, students who attend a Vo-Ag program are funded with the support of a state grant as well as tuition that is billed by the Vo-Ag operator to the district in which the student resides (sending district).
- The amount of state support is currently \$5,200 per student.
- The amount of tuition billed by the Vo-Ag operator is statutorily capped at 59.2 percent of the foundation amount in the ECS formula, or \$6,822.80 at the current foundation amount of \$11,525.
- Any special education costs for students who attend a Vo-Ag program are billed to, and paid by, the sending district.

**The following is a summary of the modifications proposed in H.B. 5283 to the current system. All changes would go into effect on July 1, 2024.**

- Section 4 of H.B. 5283 changes the way students who attend Vo-Ag programs are funded beginning in FY 2025. Rather than being supported with a flat per-student grant from the State and tuition, the State will pay Vo-Ag operators a choice program grant that is equal to the full weighted amount per student calculated using the ECS formula of the sending district, thereby reflecting the need of the community where the student resides.
  - Each sending town has a weighted funding amount per-student (lines 220-223) that is based on the general needs of the students in that town.

- The formula begins with a foundation amount of \$11,525, or the cost to educate a student without additional learning needs (lines 162-169).
  - The foundation is then multiplied by the number of need students in a town. The result of this calculation is then divided by a town's resident student count to derive a weighted funding amount per-student (lines 224-226). The weighted need student count of a sending district is calculated as follows:
    - The total number of students enrolled in the local or regional public school district, plus
    - 30% of the number of students who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch (FRPL), plus
    - 15% of the number of students who reside in a district with concentrated poverty, which is triggered when more than 60% of students qualify for FRPL, plus
    - 25% of the number of students who are English Learners.
  - A Vo-Ag operator receives a grant that is the sum of all the weighted per-student grants it receives (lines 227-228).
  - For example: if X district receives \$12,000 per student under the ECS formula, and a student who resides in X district decides to attend an Vo-Ag program operated by Y district, Y district would receive a \$12,000 grant from the State for each student from X district that exercised choice and attended Y district.
- The bill provides a hold harmless to all Vo-Ag operators in lines 1141-1148 of Section 8 to ensure no Vo-Ag operator receives a per-student grant from the State, as a result of the modifications in the bill, which is less than the per-student total funding (state and local tuition for general education) that the operator received for the year prior to the bill's enactment.
    - This hold harmless is in effect for FY 2025, and annually thereafter, and is based on FY 2024 per-student total funding.
  - Since each Vo-Ag operator's grant will be annually calculated based on the Vo-Ag program's student population, the flat per-student state grants and bonus grants are eliminated in lines 1138-1141 and 1181-1234 beginning in FY 2025.
  - Since each Vo-Ag operator's grant will be 100% paid for by the State, lines 1168-1180 remove the ability for Vo-Ag operators to charge regular education tuition to sending districts.
  - Lines 1250-1253 of Section 8 clarify that a student enrolled in a Vo-Ag program is counted in the ECS resident student count of the district in which the student resides. This is not a change from current practice.
  - Since there will no longer be a negative fiscal impact to sending districts, the Vo-Ag operator "cap" contained in lines 1151-1163 is removed with the elimination of tuition billing.

- The bill establishes a task force in Section 11 to study accountability related to the increased funding entitled under the act.
  - To the extent that the task force recommends, and the General Assembly enacts, changes to the state's current accountability standards and processes, Vo-Ag operators may be impacted.