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Bill Considered To Reduce State Dropout Rates

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March 9, 2010

HARTFORD —

A bill being considered by the legislature is designed to reduce school dropout rates by prohibiting a practice known as "push out," said state Rep. Jason Bartlett and representatives of two youth advocacy groups who brought students and others to the Capitol Monday to talk about the issue.

"Push out" refers to the practice by some school districts of pushing poorly performing students out of high school and into adult education programs to keep dropout rates artificially low.

Hundreds of students from larger urban areas end up in adult education programs, according to the Center for Children's Advocacy of Hartford. In New Haven, for example, 526 children 16 to 18 ended up in adult education classes in the 2008-09 school year. In Waterbury, 516 kids ended up in adult education and in Hartford, 367 students were enrolled.

"It is disgraceful that we have some 500 kids going into adult education any given year," said Bartlett, a Bethel Democrat.

Bartlett has proposed moving the annual date when school systems get a head count of the number of students enrolled for the purposes of qualifying for state Education Cost Sharing grants. Moving the date from Oct. 1 to March 1 would give schools a financial incentive to keep students enrolled though the end of the school year, Bartlett said.

The "push out" legislation is part of a 10-point proposal that Bartlett and the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus has introduced to close the state's achievement gap between white and minority students.

State education spokesman Tom Murphy agreed that there are too many high school students switching to adult education, but he said moving the school census date wouldn't address the issue because the cost-sharing grants are not based on student head counts anymore.

He suggested that school districts set up alternative high schools or state high school certificate programs.

Joshua Michtom, a lawyer for the center for children's advocacy, said adult education should be closed to teens who are eligible to attend regular high school, a provision of a bill introduced by state Sen. Tom Gaffey, D-Meriden.