As Connecticut strives to close the Achievement Gap for our children, we know that abused and neglected children in foster care and other children in the juvenile justice system are working substantially below grade level, often are retained in school, and many youth do not go on to participate successfully in post-secondary programs. The Raise the Grade Pilot Project will ensure that these children and youth are provided with appropriate instruction, counseling, tutoring and related services with the goal of improving academic achievement, reducing truancy and adverse disciplinary actions and fostering positive outcomes for youth in state care and at-risk youth served by the state.

The Raise the Grade pilot may be implemented in New Haven, Hartford and Bridgeport. The Raise the Grade Pilot Project, based on innovative education-child welfare partnerships from around the country, seeks to improve interagency collaboration, enhance wrap-around supports for children and youth, and reduce the unique barriers to educational success created by a child’s commitment to state care and custody. The Raise the Grade Pilot Project will include:

- **Raise the Grade** Coordinators for each pilot district to facilitate interagency collaboration, timely school enrollment, records transfers, identification of youth working below grade level, and the creation of Educational Achievement Plans for underperforming youth.

- Creation and provision of supplemental academic support services as needed to increase children’s achievement levels.

- Support for the Department of Children and Families to ensure enrollment of three and four year old foster children in early childhood education programs.

- A **Raise the Grade** advisory board to review and consult on pilot implementation, while permitting each pilot site the flexibility to individualize protocols and wrap-around supports for youth.

- A rigorous pilot evaluation that will track how many children were served, what services were provided, and whether programs were successful at improving academic achievement levels.

### PROPOSED LEGISLATIVE LANGUAGE

**(BASED ON CALIFORNIA FOSTER YOUTH SERVICES MODEL AND TAILORED TO CONNECTICUT)**

#### RAISE THE GRADE PILOT

Commencing with fiscal year 2013, there shall be a **Raise the Grade** program, to be piloted in the cities of Hartford, Bridgeport and New Haven, the purpose of which is to increase academic achievement for children and youth living in the care or custody of the Commissioner of the Department of Children and Families and for whom the pilot school districts are responsible. Covered youth shall also include those youth who are residing in state custody and are being served by Court Support Services Division. Pilot districts and the Department of Children and Families shall receive use designated appropriations to be used exclusively for the purpose of implementing the **Raise the Grade** program. Children and youth served by the pilot shall also include youth who reside in congregate care facilities but who remain the
responsibility of the school district. The pilot sites shall be identified as “Raise the Grade” pilot programs.

**RAISE THE GRADE COORDINATORS**

Each Raise the Grade Pilot school district shall have at least two persons (one for preK-8 and one for grades 9-12) identified as Raise the Grade coordinators. The Raise the Grade coordinators shall be dedicated full time employees, and shall be assigned to assist with implementation of *Raise the Grade* Project requirements.

(a) The responsibilities of the Raise the Grade coordinators shall include, but shall not be limited to:

1. Working with the child welfare agency to minimize changes in school placement consistent with Connecticut General Statute 17a-16a (Connecticut Educational Stability Act, P.A. 10-62).
2. Facilitating the prompt transfer of educational records, including the health and education records, between educational institutions when placement changes are necessary, consistent with the provisions of Connecticut General Statute sections 17a-16a and 10-220h, and Public Act 11-115.
3. Providing education-related information to the Department of Children and Families to permit the Department to deliver services to foster children, including, but not limited to, educational status and progress information, which shall be required for inclusion in permanency plan reports submitted to the Superior Court for Juvenile Matters pursuant to Connecticut General Statute Section 46b-129(k).
4. Working to identify children performing below grade level and ensure referral to mentoring, tutoring, vocational training, and other services designed to improve educational outcomes for children in state care.
5. Facilitating communication between the foster or substitute care provider, the teacher, the educational surrogate, attorney for the child, probation officer, child welfare agency, and any other school staff or education service providers for the child.
6. Sharing information with the foster care provider regarding available training programs that address education issues for children in foster care.
7. Coordinating with DCF, the surrogate parent, the child’s attorney or educational advocate to create and amend, as appropriate, an Educational Achievement Plan as defined by this Act.

**RAISE THE GRADE EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT PLANS**

An Educational Achievement Plan (EAP) shall be prepared annually for each child living in the care and custody of DCF that is not performing at grade level. The EAP shall minimally include: the identity of the child’s DCF social worker, surrogate parent, the child’s present levels of educational performance, annual goals and short-term instructional objectives; proposed educational placement; special education and related services, if provided; the projected dates for initiation of any supplemental services; anticipated duration of services; and a schedule for determination of short-term objectives.

In the event that a student changes schools, fails a course, is removed from school for disciplinary reasons for a total of more than six days, fails to meet the state’s goal on a statewide standardized test, is “truant” as defined by state law, or has his or her education substantially disrupted in any way, the school, through the Raise the Grade Coordinator, will notify the student’s DCF worker, and surrogate parent, and the student’s EAP will be reevaluated and updated.

The Department of Children and Families shall ensure that Educational Achievement Plan be included in a child or youth’s permanency plan, submitted to and reviewed by the Superior Court for Juvenile Matters pursuant to Connecticut General Statute Section 46b-129(k) as amended.
RAISE THE GRADE SERVICES
Each Raise the Grade Pilot Site shall, consistent with the funds received to facilitate the Program and the goals of this legislation, include protocols that establish a schedule of services as follows:

1. Provide tutoring services for all youth who are at least one year behind grade level or who are not making progress with their Educational Achievement Plans.

2. Ensure that all third graders who are not reading on grade level receive research-based instruction, monthly progress monitoring, and supplemental individualized or small-group instruction to increase literacy levels.

3. Provide services that meet the EAPS. Such services shall include, but not be limited to, all of the following:
   - Mentoring.
   - Counseling.
   - Transitioning services, which shall include access to college, trade or vocational school informational and preparatory programs, in addition to programming designed to eliminate barriers to employment or post-secondary education.
   - Literacy development programs.

4. Ensure timely referral for special education evaluations and development of individualized education programs, in accordance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C. Sec. 1400 et seq.), and of all special education services.

5. Establish a mechanism for the efficient and expeditious transfer of health and education records consistent with the provisions of Connecticut General Statute Sections 17a-16a and 10-220h.

RAISE THE GRADE FOR YOUNG CHILDREN IN PILOT SITES
The Department of Children and Families shall use designated appropriations as part of the Raise the Grade Pilot to ensure that all three and four year old foster children residing in pilot sites are enrolled in credentialed early childhood education programs.

RAISE THE GRADE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
There shall be a Raise the Grade Pilot Advisory Committee to make recommendations regarding the implementation of the program in the pilot sites. The advisory committee shall be convened jointly by the State Department of Education and the Department of Children and Families and shall include representatives from each pilot school district, each applicable regional child welfare agency office, Court Support Services Division, the state surrogate parent program, the State Department of Education, two members of the state Achievement Gap Task Force, parents and foster parents from each pilot school district, and community-based advocates knowledgeable and experienced about the delivery of educational services to foster youth in the pilot districts. The Advisory Committee shall have timely access to all information about the operation of the pilot, and shall meet within thirty days of the passage of this Act. The Advisory Committee may prepare recommendations that shall be included in the Raise the Grade Evaluation and Report required by this Act.

RAISE THE GRADE EVALUATION AND REPORT
(a) Each Raise the Grade Pilot site shall be evaluated by the State Department of Education or an independent evaluator contracted by the State Department of Education, and such report shall be submitted to the Legislature by September 1, 2015. The Reports shall be prepared with the assistance
of DCF, CSSD, the Pilot districts, and the Raise the Grade Pilot Project Advisory Board and shall include, but not be limited to, the following:

1. Description of how many children and youth were served by the pilot, what services they were provided, including what percentage of children ages three and four were attending an early childhood education program.

2. Recommendations regarding the effectiveness of the Raise the Grade services and protocols.

3. Information which shall be sufficient to determine, at a minimum, whether the Raise the Grade services resulted in a major quantitative improvement or deterioration in any of the following indicators:
   (A) Pupil academic achievement, including review of standardized test scores, attendance rates, grade retention, post-secondary program enrollment, and measures of school stability and mobility.
   (B) The incidence of pupil discipline problems or juvenile delinquency.
   (C) Pupil dropout rates or truancy rates.

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