

Both Chambers Pass Bill That Bans Out-Of-School Suspension, Expulsion of Young Children

The Connecticut State Capitol

By Kathleen Megan, Hartford Courant

May 29, 2015

Lawmakers pass bill banning suspension, expulsion of young kids except in case of very dangerous behaviors

Young children would not be suspended or expelled from school except in certain extreme circumstances under a bill that won unanimous support from the state Senate last week and from the House on Thursday.

"A recent report from the state Department of Education showed a disturbingly large number of children getting [out-of-school] suspensions," said Rep. Andy Fleischmann D-West Hartford, co-chairman of the legislature's education committee. "That was one of the things that motivated the General Assembly to act."

That report released in March showed that the number of suspensions among children under seven went up from 1,100 in 2012-13 to 1,217 in 2013-14.

The bill prohibits out-of-school suspensions and expulsions for students in preschool through the second grade, except in cases where a gun is involved or when the child's conduct is "of a violent or sexual nature that endangers" the child or others.

Fleischmann said he expects those exceptions to be "very rare" and, he said, the bill makes it clear that both the victim and the perpetrator in that type of situation would "receive immediate intervention and supports."

A young child who behaves in that way "almost certainly comes from a home environment that has challenges that need to be addressed," Fleischmann said.

The bill also includes early screening and intervention for young children, so that if a child is acting out, "the source of their behavior is identified and understood and addressed," Fleischmann said, "and not by taking the child out of the educational environment, but by providing the proper wraparound supports."

Advocates for the bill, which now goes to the governor's desk, were pleased with the legislative passage. Asked if the governor would sign the bill, Devon Puglia, spokesman for Gov. Dannel P. Malloy said in an email that the "governor and his staff are reviewing the final language of the legislation."

State Child Advocate Sarah Eagan said that in the past couple of years, the rising numbers of suspensions of young children have been "very concerning because all the research on how to respond to kids of that age tells us that expulsion and suspension ... of little children are associated with terrible education and life outcomes."

Also, she said, children of color are much more likely to be subject to such exclusionary disciplinary practices.

"We're thrilled that the legislators and the state Department of Education and the governor's officer were able to come up with this terrific legislation that will benefit young children and help close the achievement gap for 'at-risk children,'" Eagan said.

Kathryn Scheinberg Meyer, a staff attorney with the Center for Children's Advocacy, said the bill will ensure that "Connecticut's youngest students will no longer be unnecessarily excluded from the classroom. These little children most need to be in school, gaining the benefits of the academic and social environment. This bill ensures these students will continue their learning without interruption."