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Indicates New Matter

AMENDED

May 18, 2010

**S. 1134**

Introduced by Senators Peeler and Ford

S. Printed 5/18/10--H.

Read the first time April 22, 2010.

**A** **BILL**

TO AMEND THE CODE OF LAWS OF SOUTH CAROLINA, 1976, BY ADDING CHAPTER 38 TO TITLE 59 SO AS TO ENACT THE “SOUTH CAROLINA EDUCATION BILL OF RIGHTS FOR CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE ACT” TO PROVIDE THAT SCHOOL DISTRICTS SHALL TAKE CERTAIN MEASURES TO HELP ENSURE THAT THE EDUCATION NEEDS OF CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE ARE MET BY ASSISTING WITH ENROLLMENT, SCHOOL RECORDS AND CREDIT TRANSFERS, ACCESS TO RESOURCES AND ACTIVITIES, AND EXCUSED ABSENCE MAKE‑UP REQUIREMENTS; TO PROVIDE THAT SCHOOL DISTRICTS SHALL PROVIDE ACCESS TO AN AUTHORIZED REPRESENTATIVE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES FOR SCHOOL RECORDS OF CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE; AND TO REQUIRE THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES TO PROVIDE AN EDUCATIONAL ADVOCATE FOR CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE.

Amend Title To Conform

Whereas, the South Carolina General Assembly finds that:

(1) it is universally acknowledged that a quality education is important for the future success of all children;

(2) a child in foster care in South Carolina is entitled to the same rights and privileges regarding access to public education as any other child;

(3) it is acknowledged that a child who is in the custody of the South Carolina Department of Social Services as a result of abuse or neglect or exploitation has experienced significant emotional trauma which may negatively affect the child’s educational outcomes;

(4) a child in foster care often experiences frequent school changes that negatively affect the child’s educational outcomes; and

(5) the State of South Carolina averages over 5,000 children in foster care each month and 70% of those children are of school age. Now, therefore,

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the State of South Carolina:

SECTION 1. This act may cited as the “South Carolina Education Bill of Rights for Children in Foster Care”.

SECTION 2. Title 59 of the 1976 Code is amended by adding:

“CHAPTER 38

South Carolina Education Bill of Rights

for Children in Foster Care

Section 59‑38‑10. (A) Each school district shall have in place procedures to ensure seamless transitions between schools and school districts for children upon notice that a child is in foster care. School districts shall consider maintaining a child in foster care in the same school if it is in the child’s best interest. A school district must not place additional enrollment requirements on a child based solely on the fact that the child is in foster care.

(B) Each school district shall:

(1) facilitate the immediate enrollment of a child in foster care residing in a foster home, group living facility, or any other setting that is located within the district or area served by the district;

(2) assist a child in foster care transferring from one district to another by ensuring proper transfer of records;

(3) request school records within two school days of placement into a school and transfer records within two school days of receiving a request for school records.

(C) The Department of Social Services immediately shall enroll the child in school, maintaining the child in the same school if possible, and shall provide a copy of the court order to the school district to be included in the student’s school record.

(D) Educational and school placement decisions for children in foster care must be made to ensure that each child immediately is placed in the least restrictive educational program and has access to all academic resources, services, and extracurricular and enrichment activities that are available to all students.

(E) Each school district shall accept for credit full or partial course work satisfactorily completed by a child in foster care while attending a public school, nonpublic school, or nonsectarian school in accordance with state and district policies or regulations.

(F) Each school district shall ensure that when a decision to change the foster home placement of a child is made by the court or the Department of Social Services and the child must change schools, the grades and credits of that child must be calculated as of the date the child left school, and the child’s grades must not be lowered as a result of these circumstances.

(G) Each school district shall ensure that if a child in foster care is absent from school due to a certified court appearance or related court‑ordered activity including, but not limited to, court-ordered treatment services, these absences must be counted as excused absences upon submission of appropriate documentation. If these absences exceed the limit provided for by law, the school administrator shall allow the child an opportunity to make up all assignments and required seat time.

(H) Each school district, subject to federal law, may permit an authorized representative of the Department of Social Services to have access to the school records of a child in foster care for the purpose of fulfilling educational case management responsibilities required by law and to assist with the school transfer or placement of the child.

(I) The Department of Social Services shall ensure that children in foster care have a willing and available adult to advocate for their best educational interests, and school districts shall acknowledge and accept this person’s role in advocating for educational services necessary to meet each child’s needs.”

SECTION 3. Section 59‑1‑425 of the 1976 Code, as added by Act 260 of 2006, is amended to read:

“Section 59‑1‑425. (A) ~~Each~~ A local school district board of trustees of the State ~~shall have~~ has the authority to establish an annual school calendar for teachers, staff, and students. The statutory school term ~~is one hundred ninety days annually and shall consist~~ consists of a minimum of one hundred eighty days of instruction covering at least nine calendar months or the equivalent one thousand one hundred seventy instructional hours. However, beginning with the 2007‑2008 school year the opening date for students must not be before the third Monday in August, except for schools operating on a year‑round modified school calendar. A local school district may decide how best to structure the instructional day and how many days of instruction comprise the school year. The number of instructional hours in an instructional day may vary according to local board policy and does not have to be uniform among schools in the district. A local school district shall schedule ten additional days or the equivalent sixty-five hours, three days or the equivalent nineteen and one half hours of which must be used for collegial professional development based upon the educational standards ~~as required by~~ provided in Section 59‑18‑300. The professional development shall address, at a minimum, academic achievement standards including strengthening teachers’ knowledge in their content area, teaching techniques, and assessment. No more than two days or the equivalent thirteen hours may be used for preparation of opening of schools, and the remaining five days or the equivalent thirty-two and one half hours may be used for teacher planning, academic plans, and parent conferences. ~~The number of instructional hours in an instructional day may vary according to local board policy and does not have to be uniform among the schools in the district.~~

(B) Notwithstanding ~~any other provisions~~ another provision of law ~~to the contrary~~, ~~all~~ school days missed because of snow, extreme weather conditions, or other disruptions requiring schools to close must be made up. ~~All~~ A school ~~districts~~ district shall designate annually at least three days or the equivalent nineteen and one half instructional hours within ~~their~~ its school ~~calendars~~ calendar to be used ~~as make‑up days~~ to make up missed time in the event of these occurrences. If ~~those~~ the designated days or times have been used or are no longer available, the local school board of trustees may lengthen the hours of school operation by no less than one hour per day for the total number of hours missed or operate schools on Saturday. Schools operating on a four‑by‑four block schedule shall make every effort to make up the time during the semester in which the days are missed. A plan to make up days by lengthening the school day must be approved by the Department of Education before implementation. Tutorial instruction for grades ~~7~~ seven through ~~12~~ twelve may be taught on Saturday at the direction of the local school board. If a local school board authorizes make‑up ~~days~~ time on Saturdays, tutorial instruction normally offered on Saturday for seventh through twelfth graders must be scheduled at an alternative time.

(C) The General Assembly by law may waive the requirements of making up missed days or time or, by law, may authorize the school board of trustees to forgive up to three days or the equivalent nineteen and one half instructional hours missed because of snow, extreme weather conditions, or other disruptions requiring schools to close. A waiver granted by the local board of trustees of the requirement for making up missed days or time also must be authorized through a majority vote of the local school board.

(D) If a school is closed early due to snow, extreme weather conditions, or other disruptions, the day or equivalent number six and one half instructional hours may count towards the required minimum to the extent allowed by State Board of Education policy.

(E) The instructional day for secondary students must be at a minimum six hours a day, or its equivalent weekly, excluding lunch. The school day for elementary students must be at a minimum six hours a day, or its equivalent weekly, including lunch.

(F) Elementary and secondary schools may reduce the length of the instructional day to not less than three hours for not more than three days each school year for staff development, teacher conferences, or for the purpose of administering end‑of‑semester and end‑of‑year examinations.

(G) Priority during the instructional day must be given to teaching and learning tasks. Class interruptions must be limited only to emergencies. Volunteer blood drives as determined by the principal may be conducted at times ~~which would~~ that do not interfere with classroom instruction such as study period, lunch period, and before and after school.

(H) The State Board of Education may waive the school opening date requirement pursuant to subsection (A) of this section on a showing of good cause or for an educational purpose. For the purposes of this section:

(1) ‘Good cause’ means that schools in a district have been closed eight days per year during any four of the last ten years because of severe weather conditions, energy shortages, power failures, or other emergency situations.

(2) ‘Educational purpose’ means a district establishes a need to adopt a different calendar for a:

(a) specific school to accommodate a special program offered generally to the student body of that school,

(b) school that primarily serves a special population of students, or

(c) defined program within a school.

The state board may grant the waiver for an educational purpose for that specific school or defined program to the extent that the state board finds that the educational purpose is reasonable, the accommodation is necessary to accomplish the educational purpose, and the request is not an attempt to circumvent the opening date set forth in this subsection. Waiver requests for educational purposes may not be used to accommodate system‑wide class scheduling preferences. Nothing in this subsection prohibits a district from offering supplemental or additional educational programs or activities outside of the calendar adopted under this section.”

SECTION 4. This act takes effect upon approval by the Governor.

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