



Governor's Advisory Council for Exceptional Citizens (GACEC)
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MEMORANDUM

DATE: February 24, 2017

TO: The Honorable Members of the Delaware General Assembly

FROM: Dafne A. Carnright, Chairperson
GACEC

RE: **House Bill No. 55 (Compulsory School Attendance)**

The Governor's Advisory Council for Exceptional Citizens (GACEC) has reviewed **House Bill (HB) No. 55** which would raise the compulsory school attendance age from 16 to 18 over the next few years. The compulsory attendance age would rise to 17 effective September 1, 2018 and 18 effective September 1, 2019 (lines 12-16 and 22-25). Related Code sections addressing waivers of attendance and police detention of "off campus" students are also revised. Similar or overlapping legislation is also pending. For example, House Bill No. 17 is a simpler bill which would raise the compulsory school attendance age to 17. House Bill No. 23 would require students over 16 seeking to withdraw from school to have parental consent and an exit interview. Council **endorses** an increase in the compulsory education age as long as the increase is accompanied by targeted supports such as graduation coaches. Also, Council would like to share the following observations on House Bill No. 55.

First, the National Center for Education Statistics table reveals that states surrounding Delaware had the following compulsory age standards as of 2015:

- New Jersey: 16
- Pennsylvania: 17
- Maryland: 17

The overall national picture is compiled in the following table:

NCES Statistics (2015)

Compulsory Education Age	Number of States (& D.C.)
16	15
17	11
18	25

Consistent with the statistics noted above, Delaware is in a minority in maintaining 16 as the compulsory education age.

Second, the GACEC provided commentary on legislation proposed in 2012 (House Bill No. 244) which included materials describing the pros and cons of raising the age of compulsory school attendance. National organizations have generally endorsed raising the compulsory education age if accompanied by other strategies and resources to promote student success. The GACEC 2012 commentary remains applicable to the current legislation:

There are pros and cons to raising the compulsory school attendance age. The National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) summary identifies perceived advantages and disadvantages. Advantages include encouraging more students to attend college and decreasing dropout rates, juvenile crime, and teen pregnancy. Disadvantages include financial costs and devotion of resources to truancy and disruption linked to students who do not wish to be in school. In 2010, the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NAASP) adopted a position statement endorsing compulsory education to age 18. However, both the NAASP and CLASP materials and January 28, 2012 News Journal editorial stress the importance of adopting additional strategies to promote effective implementation of higher-age compulsory attendance. For example, the NAASP statement included the following recommendation:

Provide funding for graduation coaches, counselors who focus solely on at risk students. They monitor student's academic progress and attendance and work with teachers to identify those who are falling behind or at risk of doing so. Graduation coaches also focus on getting parents involved and will make home or workplace visits with parents.

Third, the sponsors of this legislation may wish to review a technical observation in the context of exemptions. A student can qualify for an exemption by having an alternative learning plan approved by the head of the district or charter school of enrollment. See lines 35-37, 45-47, 78-79, and 88-90. However, if a student chooses to appeal a denial of a waiver, the appeal is not filed with the board of the district or charter school of enrollment. It is filed with the board of the district of residence (line 50 and 62) which has had no involvement with the decision. Consequently, a student who has opted for a "choice" program in a different district would submit a waiver to the "choice" district superintendent but appeal a denial to the board of the district of residence. This may be the intended model but Council suggests additional review.

Thank you for your time and consideration of our observations and endorsement. Please feel free to contact me or Wendy Strauss at the GACEC office should you have any questions.

CC: The Honorable Susan L. Bunting, Department of Education
Dr. Terri Quinn-Gray, State Board of Education