

CHAPTER 320

AN ACT establishing a robotics competition pilot program in the Department of Education.

BE IT ENACTED *by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:*

1. a. The Commissioner of Education shall establish a three-year pilot program that provides grant funding to encourage and support school districts to establish robotics programs and participate in robotics competitions. The purpose of the pilot program shall be to:

- (1) increase opportunities for students to participate in robotics competitions;
- (2) motivate students to pursue education and career opportunities in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics; and
- (3) improve students' knowledge in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

b. (1) The Commissioner of Education shall identify one or more eligible nonprofit organizations to assist school districts selected to participate in the pilot program in developing robotics programs and participating in robotics competitions. The commissioner shall compile a list of eligible nonprofit organizations available to partner with school districts and incorporate the contents of the list into the application created pursuant to paragraph (2) of this subsection. Nonprofit organizations included on the list shall offer technical assistance to participating schools, including mentor-based assistance in establishing a robotics program to develop science, technology, engineering, and mathematical skills for students. A school district that applies to participate in the pilot program shall partner with a nonprofit organization on the list.

(2) A school district that wants to participate in the pilot program shall submit an application to the commissioner in such form as required by the commissioner. The school district shall select no more than one school serving students from grades nine through 12 to participate in the pilot program.

c. The commissioner shall select up to 12 school districts for participation in the pilot program. The commissioner shall select districts in the northern, central, and southern regions of the State and shall seek a cross section of school districts from urban, suburban, and rural areas of the State. The school districts selected by the commissioner shall be eligible for grants, within the limit of available funds that are appropriated by the State or donated pursuant to subsection d. of this section, to be used to support the development and implementation of robotics programs in the selected schools. The commissioner shall determine the amount of each grant awarded under the program and may award multi-year grants. Grants awarded pursuant to this subsection shall be used by school districts to develop robotics programs in which school districts partner with an approved nonprofit organization that has demonstrated its ability to inspire students through mentor-based programs to build science, technology, engineering, and mathematical skills whereby funds may be used to provide coaching stipends, purchase materials for competitions, finance competition travel expenses, and register for events. School districts selected by the commissioner to participate in the pilot program may apply for additional funding in separate grant application periods as teams in the school district become eligible to participate in the robotics program's district, district championship, and world championship events.

d. Nonprofit organizations, educational advocacy groups, and private sector businesses may collaborate to encourage and identify the donation of funds for the purpose of awarding grants pursuant to subsection c. of this section. The donated funds shall only be used for the purpose of supporting grants under the program. Such funds shall be accepted by the Department of Education to be used for the purposes of the program. If sufficient funding is unavailable, the pilot program shall be paused and shall resume once funding becomes available to support the issuance of grants under the program.

e. There is established within the Department of Education a fund to be known as the “Robotics Competitions in Schools Fund”. The fund shall be credited only with funds appropriated by the State or funds donated for the purposes of the pilot program established under this section. The fund shall only be used to provide grants to school districts selected for participation under the pilot program.

f. Three years following the establishment of the pilot program, the commissioner shall submit a report to the Governor, and to the Legislature pursuant to section 2 of P.L.1991, c.164 (C.52:14-19.1). The report shall contain information on the implementation of the pilot program, the number of students participating in the program, and the recommendations of the commissioner on continuing, expanding, or modifying the program.

2. This act shall take effect immediately.

Approved December 21, 2021.