

SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

SENATE, No. 2349

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: JUNE 20, 2022

The Senate Education Committee favorably reports Senate Bill No. 2349.

This bill requires the State Board of Education, in coordination with the Commissioner of Education, to administer the New Jersey Graduation Proficiency Assessment as a field test for 11th grade students expected to graduate as part of the class of 2023. Under no circumstances would results of the field test, a substitute competency test, or any other demonstration of proficiency through techniques and instruments other than a standardized test be used as a prerequisite for graduation for students expected to graduate as part of the class of 2023. The bill also requires the State Board of Education and the Commissioner of Education to use the results of the test to assist in the development of State assessments for future graduating classes. Nothing in the bill would be construed to alter or amend local graduation requirements adopted by a board of education.

The COVID-19 pandemic has greatly impacted students throughout the State and led to a number of unique and pressing challenges. With many school districts returning to in-person learning, school officials are finding a significant drop in the number of students who are performing at grade level in key subject areas. For minority and economically disadvantaged students, those losses are even greater given the challenges they faced in acquiring learning devices, internet access, and in-person assistance from teaching staff. It is estimated that as many as 400,000 students in New Jersey are not proficient in English language arts and math.

Further compounding student learning losses has been a worsening of the student mental health crisis. Since the start of the pandemic, hospitals have reported an increase in the number of young people admitted to the emergency room with mental health emergencies while more parents are finding that their child has shown signs of a new or worsening mental health conditions such as anxiety or depression. Experts believe this increase is attributable to a number of factors including the implementation of social distancing measures, the pivot to virtual learning, the interruption of mental health services, pandemic-related job losses, and the death of a close relative from COVID-19.

By administering the New Jersey Graduation Proficiency Assessment as a field test for the class of 2023, the State will be able

to better understand the extent and severity of learning loss among its students and develop graduation assessments that are not only realistic and achievable, but appropriately rigorous.