

SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

SENATE, No. 1253

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: FEBRUARY 15, 2024

The Senate Education Committee favorably reports Senate Bill No. 1253.

This bill establishes a three-year pilot program to assess the academic and health benefits associated with the use of therapy dogs in public elementary school wellness programs.

Under the bill, a school district that wants to participate in the pilot program is required to submit an application to the commissioner. The application is required to include: the number of elementary schools in the school district; the number of students enrolled in each elementary school; information on student participation in wellness programs at each elementary school; and information on how the school district plans to use therapy dogs to promote student wellness.

The commissioner is to select two districts in each of the southern, central, and northern regions of the State to participate in the program and is to seek a cross section of school districts from urban, suburban, and rural areas of the State.

The commissioner is to provide pilot districts with guidance regarding the use of therapy dogs in schools including: examples of activities that students may engage in with a therapy dog; recommended training requirements for therapy dog handlers; recommended measures to evaluate the health and appropriate behavior of therapy dogs; and insurance issues relevant to having therapy dogs on school district property.

No later than June 30 of the third school year following the establishment of the pilot program, the commissioner is to submit to the Governor and to the Legislature a report that evaluates the effectiveness of the pilot program in improving the academic performance and health outcomes of students in elementary schools.

This bill was prefiled for introduction in the 2024-2025 session pending technical review. As reported, the bill includes the changes required by technical review, which has been performed.