

SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

SENATE, No. 3031

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: NOVEMBER 14, 2013

As amended, this bill establishes an Innovation Grant Program in the Department of Education, and appropriates \$5 million for its implementation. Under the bill, the Commissioner of Education will establish a competitive grant program under which school districts may apply for funding for professional development or to develop innovative educational practices. The bill stipulates that the commissioner may not award a grant to a program that would compensate teaching staff members on a competitive basis or for achieving specified objectives, nor may a grant be awarded to a program in which students receive instruction exclusively via the Internet with the student and teacher geographically separated.

As part of the program, the commissioner will appoint a seven-member advisory committee who will have expertise in education policy and practice. The members will consist of education stakeholders and at least one will be a representative of the New Jersey Education Association. The committee will advise the commissioner on the program's development, implementation, and assessment. The commissioner would also be required to enter into an agreement with an independent entity to evaluate the program. Up to 2 percent of the appropriation may be retained by the commissioner to cover the costs of administering the program.

A school district that elects to apply for a grant would be required to establish a five-member innovation grant committee consisting of at least two members selected by the majority representative organization. The committee would be responsible for recommending projects to the board of education for submission to the department for grant funding. A district may not apply for funding for a project that is inconsistent with the provisions of a collective bargaining agreement. Charter schools and renaissance school projects would not be eligible to apply for a grant.

The committee amended the bill to increase the number of members of the Innovation Grant Program Advisory Committee from five to seven and to stipulate that members of the committee will consist of education stakeholders. The amendments clarify that existing law will control which terms and conditions of employment related to the implementation of a grant-funded program that are subject to collective bargaining.

The amendments also:

- permit the commissioner to retain up to 2% of the amount appropriated to the fund for administration of the program rather than an amount up to 6.5% as provided in the bill as introduced;
- increase the membership of the district innovation grant committee from three to five members, provide that at least two members of the committee will be selected by the majority representative organization, and provide that only grant proposals recommended by the committee may be submitted to the department for funding;
- clarify the type of program utilizing instruction via the Internet that may not be awarded a grant; and
- permit school districts to use grants for professional development in addition to developing and implementing innovative educational practices.