

SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

SENATE, No. 447

with committee amendments

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: FEBRUARY 6, 2017

The Senate Education Committee favorably reports Senate Bill No. 447 with committee amendments.

As amended, this bill requires that, in the event that 10 percent or more of the students enrolled in a public school are chronically absent, the school must develop a corrective action plan to improve absenteeism rates. The plan must include, but need not be limited to: (1) identifying problems and barriers to school attendance; (2) developing recommendations to address those problems and barriers; (3) outlining communication strategies to educate parents on the importance of school attendance; (4) establishing protocols on informing and engaging parents when a child begins to show a pattern of absences; and (5) reviewing school policies to ensure that they support improved school attendance. The bill requires that in developing the corrective action plan, the school must solicit input from parents through multiple means, including through the administration of a survey, engaging with the school's parent organization, and, if the school does not have a parent organization, holding a public meeting to provide parents with the opportunity to provide input. The school would be required to present its corrective action plan to the board of education. The school would annually review and revise the plan, and present the revisions to the board, until the percent of students who are chronically absent is less than 10 percent.

The bill also requires the Commissioner of Education to include on School Report Cards data on the number and percentage of students who were chronically absent and the number and percentage of students who received a disciplinary suspension. The commissioner must annually review the chronic absenteeism rates of each school and school district and report on the rates to the State Board of Education.

The term "chronically absent," as used in the bill, will be defined pursuant to rules and regulations promulgated by the Commissioner of Education within 90 days of the bill's effective date.

The committee amended the bill to provide that a school in which at least 10 percent of the students are chronically absent must

develop a corrective action plan to improve absenteeism rates. Under the original bill, such a school would have been required to convene a Chronic Absenteeism Coalition, composed of at least one parent, one teacher, and other members as determined by the principal, for the purpose of monitoring chronic absenteeism and developing a corrective action plan. The committee amendments also remove the definition of “chronically absent” from the original bill and instead specify that the term “chronically absent” will be defined in rules and regulations promulgated by the Commissioner of Education.

This bill was pre-filed for introduction in the 2016-2017 session pending technical review. As reported, the bill includes the changes required by technical review, which has been performed.