

ASSEMBLY, No. 3168

STATE OF NEW JERSEY 219th LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED FEBRUARY 24, 2020

Sponsored by:

Assemblywoman CAROL A. MURPHY

District 7 (Burlington)

SYNOPSIS

Establishes pilot program to study feasibility of regionalization of certain school districts; appropriates \$150,000.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As introduced.



1 **AN ACT** concerning the regionalization of certain school districts,
2 supplementing chapter 13 of Title 18A of the New Jersey
3 Statutes, and making an appropriation.

4
5 **BE IT ENACTED** *by the Senate and General Assembly of the State*
6 *of New Jersey:*

7
8 1. The Commissioner of Education shall establish a school
9 district regionalization pilot program. The purpose of the program
10 shall be to study the feasibility of the establishment of a grade K-12
11 all purpose regional school district through the consolidation of an
12 existing grade 9-12 limited purpose regional school district and the
13 grade K-8 school districts of its constituent municipalities. The pilot
14 program shall consist of a one-year Phase I planning stage, a five-
15 year Phase II implementation stage, and an Evaluation Component.
16 The commissioner shall select three pilot sites to participate in the
17 program, including one in the northern, central, and southern
18 regions of the State.

19
20 2. If the board of education of a grade 9-12 limited purpose
21 regional school district and the boards of education of the grade K-8
22 school districts of its constituent municipalities determine to
23 participate in the pilot program, the boards shall jointly submit an
24 application to the commissioner. The application shall include a
25 copy of a resolution approving participation in the pilot program
26 adopted by a majority vote of the members of each of the boards of
27 education. The application shall also include such other information
28 as the commissioner may prescribe.

29
30 3. During the one-year Phase I planning stage of the pilot
31 program, the selected school districts shall conduct a feasibility
32 study to determine the educational and financial impact of forming
33 a grade K-12 all purpose regional school district. The districts may
34 apply to the commissioner for a planning grant in an amount not to
35 exceed \$50,000 to cover costs associated with their participation in
36 the pilot program including, but not limited to, the collection of
37 data, public relations activities such as community education and
38 outreach, and the organization of public meetings. In addition to
39 the planning grant, any costs associated with the feasibility study
40 shall be paid by the State.

41 The commissioner may extend the Phase I planning stage
42 through a second year if he determines it to be advisable.

43
44 4. a. In order to participate in the Phase II implementation
45 stage of the pilot program, the voters of each constituent
46 municipality of the proposed grade K-12 all purpose regional school
47 district shall approve such participation. The question of
48 participation in Phase II shall be submitted to the voters at the

1 annual or a special school election. The question shall be deemed
2 adopted and participation in Phase II approved by the voters if the
3 question receives an affirmative vote of a majority of the votes cast
4 in each of the constituent municipalities of the proposed grade K-12
5 all purpose regional school district.

6 b. The commissioner shall provide incentive State aid to school
7 districts that participate in the Phase II implementation stage of the
8 pilot program. State aid shall be provided in such amount as is
9 necessary to equalize the apportionment of costs of the grade K-12
10 regional school district among the constituent municipalities and to
11 support the initial costs associated with regionalization.

12 Incentive State aid shall be provided for each of the five years of
13 the Phase II implementation stage, except that the commissioner
14 shall annually reduce the amount of incentive State aid over that
15 five-year period.

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17 5. In the Evaluation Component of the pilot program, the
18 commissioner shall appoint an independent evaluator to work in
19 each of the pilot sites to design and implement the evaluation of that
20 site. The design of the evaluation shall begin during the Phase I
21 planning stage to ensure the collection of pre-regionalization data.
22 The design shall address issues such as the impact of the
23 establishment of a grade K-12 all purpose regional school district
24 on student achievement, school district finances, parent and student
25 satisfaction with educational programs and athletic and other extra-
26 curricular school programs, staffing, facilities, and governance.

27 Each independent evaluator shall submit interim reports to the
28 commissioner on an annual basis and a final report at the conclusion
29 of the pilot program. The reports shall include a description of the
30 project activities to date, the identification of issues of concern,
31 recommendations to ensure the successful implementation of the
32 pilot program, and recommendations on the advisability of
33 extending the program to additional sites.

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35 6. There is appropriated \$150,000 from the General Fund to the
36 Department of Education to finance the grants awarded to the pilot
37 sites pursuant to the provisions of this act.

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39 7. This act shall take effect immediately.

40 41 42 STATEMENT

43
44 This bill directs the Commissioner of Education to establish a
45 school district regionalization pilot program. The purpose of the
46 program is to study the feasibility of establishing a grade K-12 all
47 purpose regional school district through the consolidation of an
48 existing grade 9-12 limited purpose regional school district and the

1 grade K-8 school districts of its constituent municipalities. The pilot
2 program will consist of a one-year Phase I planning stage, a five-
3 year Phase II implementation stage, and an Evaluation Component.

4 The bill directs the commissioner to select three pilot sites to
5 participate in the program, including one in a northern, central and
6 southern region of the State. Under the bill, if a board of education
7 of a grade 9-12 limited purpose regional school district and the
8 boards of education of the grade K-8 school districts of its
9 constituent municipalities determine to participate in the pilot
10 program, the boards must jointly submit an application to the
11 commissioner.

12 The bill requires that selected school districts conduct a
13 feasibility study to determine the educational and financial impact
14 of forming a grade K-12 regional school district. The districts may
15 apply to the commissioner for a planning grant in an amount not to
16 exceed \$50,000 to cover costs associated with its participation in
17 the pilot program including, but not limited to, the collection of
18 data, public relations activities, and the organization of public
19 meetings. In addition to the planning grant, any costs associated
20 with the feasibility study will be paid by the State. The
21 commissioner may extend the Phase I planning stage through a
22 second year if he determines it to be advisable.

23 The bill specifies that the voters of each constituent municipality
24 of the proposed grade K-12 regional school district must approve
25 the participation in the Phase II implementation stage. The
26 commissioner will provide incentive State aid to school districts
27 that participate in the Phase II implementation stage in an amount
28 as is necessary to equalize the apportionment of costs of the grade
29 K-12 regional school district among the constituent municipalities
30 and to support the initial costs associated with regionalization.
31 Incentive State aid will be provided for each of the five years of the
32 Phase II implementation stage.

33 The bill also directs the commissioner to appoint an independent
34 evaluator to work in each of the pilot sites to design and implement
35 the evaluation of that site. The design would address issues such as
36 the impact of the establishment of a grade K-12 regional school
37 district on student achievement, school district finances, parent and
38 student satisfaction with educational programs and athletic and
39 other extra-curricular school programs, staffing, facilities, and
40 governance.