

ASSEMBLY APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE FOR ASSEMBLY, No. 4142

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: MAY 11, 2020

The Assembly Appropriations Committee reports favorably an Assembly Committee Substitute for Assembly Bill No. 3945.

This Assembly Committee Substitute requires the Commissioner of Education to establish a three-year “Bridge Year Pilot Program,” under which each school district with a high school will offer students in the graduating class of 2021 and the graduating class of 2022 the opportunity to pursue a bridge year during the year immediately following senior year of high school. Nonpublic schools may elect to participate in the pilot program. The purpose of the pilot program is to provide participating students an opportunity to address learning loss and missed opportunities in extracurricular activities, including spring sports programs, as a result of the public health state of emergency caused by the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic.

A student in the graduating class of 2021 or the graduating class of 2022 who has met all applicable high school graduation requirements by the end of the senior year of high school may defer graduation from high school to pursue a bridge year. A student who intends to pursue a bridge year will notify their host high school’s bridge year liaison, who is required to be designated by the host high school, of their intent no later than the first day of the second semester of the student’s senior year of high school. The host high school will permit students participating in the bridge year to participate in graduation ceremonies with the graduating class of 2021 or class of 2022, as applicable, but will not issue diplomas to those students until the conclusion of the bridge year. To be eligible to participate in the bridge year program, a student must be 19 years of age or younger and not turn 20 years of age at any time during the bridge year, except that a classified student will be eligible to participate if the student will turn 20 years old during the bridge year due to services provided under the student’s individualized education program.

A student pursuing a bridge year will remain enrolled in the host high school while participating in the Bridge Year Pilot Program. A bridge year liaison is required to develop, in consultation with a student pursuing a bridge year, an individual learning plan (ILP) for the student. The ILP will define academic and co-curricular goals for the bridge year and detail activities and strategies for accomplishing those goals.

During the fall semester of the student's bridge year, the student will take between nine and 12 credits at the host high school, the county college that serves the county of the host high school, or a combination. During the spring semester of the student's bridge year, the student will take between nine and 12 credits at the county college that serves the county of the host high school. During a semester of the bridge year, a student may take three credits offered by a four-year institution of higher education at any high school in the State or at any other location to fulfill the student's credit requirement. At the conclusion of each semester of the bridge year, the host high school will update the student's high school transcript to reflect any high school credits earned during the bridge year. The student will be considered a non-matriculated student of the county college. A student who pursues a bridge year and participates in a spring sport sanctioned by the New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association will enroll in less than 12 college credits, or otherwise be enrolled in a number of college credits as to not be considered a full-time college student, in each of the fall and spring semesters during the student's bridge year.

Under the committee substitute, a county college or four-year institution of higher education will charge students participating in a bridge year a maximum of \$145 per credit inclusive of all fees, except that fees associated with specific courses or with the use of on-campus science laboratories may be charged at a maximum of \$45 per course. In order to remain in the Bridge Year Pilot Program, a student must maintain a 2.0 grade point average.

Students participating in a bridge year will be eligible for State student financial aid under the Community College Opportunity Grant Program.

A student who pursues a bridge year will be permitted to participate in a spring sport sanctioned by the New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association (NJSIAA) and extracurricular activities at the student's host high school, which is defined under the committee substitute as the high school that the student attended as a junior in high school. A student will not be eligible to participate in any fall or winter sport. A student participating in a spring sport or extracurricular activity during the bridge year will pay applicable student athletics and activities fees and be subject to the host high school's student and athletic codes of conduct and any other applicable rules, codes, or policies that other students participating in the spring sport or extracurricular activity at the host high school are required to follow. The substitute directs insurers doing business in the State and issuing liability insurance policies to school districts to provide coverage for bridge year students participating in a spring sport or extracurricular activity, as part of a school district's liability insurance policy.

In order to participate in a spring sport during a student's bridge year, the student must meet the current age participation requirements

of the NJSIAA. For students participating in a spring sport, the NJSIAA will be requested to waive the eight semester rule, under which a student is not eligible for high school athletics after the expiration of eight consecutive semesters following the student's entrance into the ninth grade. The NJSIAA is directed to confer with the National Collegiate Athletic Association or any other similar entities to ensure that any student participating in a spring sport during a bridge year will be eligible to declare as a college recruit and participate in intercollegiate athletics.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The Office of Legislative Services (OLS) concludes that this Assembly Committee Substitute will lead to an indeterminate increase in State costs, primarily due to the substitute's provision which allows students participating in the Bridge Year Pilot Program to be eligible for State financial aid grants under the Community College Opportunity Grant (CCOG) Program. The substitute would increase costs to the Higher Education Student Assistance Authority to the extent that high school students graduating in 2021 and 2022, who pursue a bridge year in accordance with the substitute's provisions, would be eligible for a grant under the CCOG program. The OLS does not have the information necessary to project how many high school graduates would pursue a bridge year and how many of those students would be eligible for a grant under the CCOG program.

The OLS notes the CCOG program was authorized pursuant to the FY 2019 and FY 2020 appropriations acts to provide "last-dollar" financial aid grants to eligible students to cover the cost of tuition and certain educational fees not already covered by other available grants and scholarships. In FY 2019, \$20 million was appropriated to the CCOG program to provide financial aid grants to students enrolled in at least six credits with annual income not exceeding \$45,000. In FY 2020, \$25 million was appropriated to the program to provide financial aid grants to students enrolled in at least six credits with annual income not exceeding \$65,000.

The OLS also concludes that there will be an indeterminate revenue impact on certain county colleges and four-year institutions of higher education. On the one hand, these institutions will receive tuition and fees from participating bridge year students leading to an increase in revenues. On the other hand, the maximum that bridge year students may be charged under the bill is lower than what is charged to regular matriculating students. If bridge year students choose to enroll in a public institution of higher education following their participation in the pilot program, they will have paid less per college credit than if they had matriculated directly from high school, resulting in a net loss of revenue for the institutions.