

ASSEMBLY EDUCATION COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

ASSEMBLY, No. 4433

with committee amendments

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: DECEMBER 14, 2020

The Assembly Education Committee reports favorably Assembly Bill No. 4433 with committee amendments.

As amended, this bill establishes a grant program to assist school districts in the training of school-based mental health services providers to expand the pipeline of high-quality, trained providers and address the shortages of mental health professionals in school districts. School districts that receive a grant under the program will use the funds for efforts to create and grow programs that train students who are attending graduate school to become school-based mental health services providers. School-based mental health services providers are defined under the bill as State-licensed or certified school counselors, school psychologists, school social workers, or other mental health professionals qualified under State law to provide mental health services to children and adolescents.

Prior to applying for the grant program, a school district or a group of school districts seeking to participate in the program together is required to form a partnership with one or more institutions of higher education that offer graduate programs in school-based mental health fields. The partnership would allow a student enrolled in the graduate program to perform applicable fieldwork, credit hours, internships, externships, or other related training as applicable for the academic program of the student.

The Commissioner of Education will establish selection criteria for the awarding of grants under the program, including consideration of various information regarding the need for school-based mental health professionals and an increased level of student mental health services and supports. In awarding grants, priority will be given to high-need school districts, which will be designated according to criteria established by the Commissioner of Children and Families, in consultation with the Commissioner of Education.

Under the bill, the Department of Education is required to annually apply for and use any federal grant funds or other federal assistance which may be available to be used for the grant program including, but not limited to, funds under the Mental Health Service Professional Demonstration Grant Program and the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. The department

may, if applicable, apply for federal grant funds or other assistance on behalf of one or more school districts approved for participation in the grant program established under the bill. Any federal grant funds awarded to the department will first be used to provide grant awards to school districts, prior to using State funds.

COMMITTEE AMENDMENTS:

The committee amended the bill to specify that groups of school districts seeking to participate in the grant program together are eligible to submit applications and receive funds under the program.