

# ASSEMBLY, No. 4707

## STATE OF NEW JERSEY 219th LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED SEPTEMBER 21, 2020

**Sponsored by:**

**Assemblywoman AURA K. DUNN**

**District 25 (Morris and Somerset)**

**Assemblywoman CAROL A. MURPHY**

**District 7 (Burlington)**

**Assemblyman ANTHONY S. VERRELLI**

**District 15 (Hunterdon and Mercer)**

**Co-Sponsored by:**

**Assemblymen Benson, Simonsen and Assemblywoman Vainieri Huttle**

**SYNOPSIS**

Establishes Mental Health Awareness Pilot Program in DOE.

**CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT**

As introduced.



**(Sponsorship Updated As Of: 10/8/2020)**

1 AN ACT establishing a Mental Health Awareness Pilot Program in  
2 the Department of Education.

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

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7 1. a. The Commissioner of Education shall establish a two-  
8 year Mental Health Awareness Pilot Program, the purpose of which  
9 is to address mental health issues prevalent among middle and high  
10 school students. School districts that are selected to participate in  
11 the pilot program shall identify and implement innovative methods  
12 to increase mental health awareness among students and provide  
13 students with coping skills necessary to manage life stressors that  
14 give rise to or exacerbate mental health issues.

15 b. A school district that includes a middle or high school, or  
16 both, and wishes to participate in the pilot program shall submit an  
17 application to the commissioner. The application shall include, but  
18 not be limited to, the following:

19 (1) a description of the school district including the number of  
20 enrolled students; absenteeism rates; academic performance  
21 indicators, including the percentage of students not meeting  
22 expectations on State assessments; and the percentage of enrolled  
23 students who qualify for free or reduced price lunch under the  
24 federal School Lunch Program;

25 (2) the number of psychologists, social workers, and guidance  
26 counselors working in the targeted grade levels in the school  
27 district;

28 (3) an inventory of mental health services currently provided by  
29 the school district to students in the targeted grade levels; and

30 (4) any other information the commissioner deems appropriate.

31 c. After reviewing the applications submitted pursuant to  
32 subsection b. of this section, the commissioner shall select six  
33 school districts for participation in the pilot program. The  
34 commissioner shall select school districts in each of the northern,  
35 central, and southern regions of the State and shall seek a cross  
36 section of school districts from urban, suburban, and rural areas.

37 d. Two years following the establishment of the pilot program,  
38 the commissioner shall submit a report to the Governor, and to the  
39 Legislature pursuant to section 2 of P.L.1991, c.164 (C.52:14-19.1).  
40 The report shall contain information on the implementation of the  
41 pilot program and shall include the commissioner's  
42 recommendation on the advisability of continuing or expanding the  
43 program.

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45 2. This act shall take effect immediately.

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STATEMENT

This bill directs the Commissioner of Education to establish a two-year Mental Health Awareness Pilot Program, the purpose of which is to address mental health issues prevalent among middle and high school students. The school districts that are selected to participate in the pilot program will identify innovative methods to increase mental health awareness among students and provide students with coping skills necessary to manage the various life stressors that give rise to or exacerbate mental health issues.

Under this bill, a school district that wishes to participate in the pilot program will submit an application to the commissioner. The application will include (1) a description of the school district including the number of enrolled students; absenteeism rates; academic performance indicators; and the percentage of enrolled students who qualify for free or reduced price lunch under the federal School Lunch Program; (2) the number of psychologists, social workers, and guidance counselors working in the school district; (3) an inventory of mental health services currently provided by the school district; and (4) any other information the commissioner deems appropriate.

This bill directs the commissioner to select six school districts to participate in the pilot program. The commissioner will select school districts in each of the northern, central, and southern regions of the State and seek a cross section of school districts from urban, suburban, and rural areas.

Under this bill, the commissioner will submit a report to the Governor and Legislature two years after the establishment of the pilot program. The report will contain information on the implementation of the pilot program and the commissioner's recommendation on the advisability of continuing or expanding the program.