

ASSEMBLY, No. 4836

STATE OF NEW JERSEY 219th LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED OCTOBER 19, 2020

Sponsored by:

Assemblyman THOMAS P. GIBLIN

District 34 (Essex and Passaic)

Assemblyman DANIEL R. BENSON

District 14 (Mercer and Middlesex)

Co-Sponsored by:

Assemblywoman McKnight

SYNOPSIS

Establishes task force to evaluate quality, efficacy, costs, and educational outcomes of online courses offered by public and independent institutions of higher education during COVID-19 pandemic.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As introduced.



(Sponsorship Updated As Of: 2/22/2021)

1 AN ACT establishing a task force to study the quality of online
2 education provided by public and independent institutions of
3 higher education during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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

7
8 1. a. There is established a task force for the purpose of
9 examining the quality, efficacy, costs, and educational outcomes of
10 online courses offered by public and independent institutions of
11 higher education during the COVID-19 pandemic and providing
12 recommendations for potential improvements in the delivery of
13 online courses to students.

14 b. The task force shall consist of 15 members as follows:

15 (1) the Secretary of Higher Education, ex officio, or a designee;

16 (2) one public member appointed by the President of the Senate
17 and one public member appointed by the Minority Leader of the
18 Senate, both of whom have expertise in issues related to the
19 delivery of online course in higher education;

20 (3) one public member appointed by the Speaker of the General
21 Assembly and one public member appointed by the Minority Leader
22 of the General Assembly, both of whom have expertise in issues
23 related to the delivery of online courses in higher education; and

24 (4) 10 members appointed by the Governor, including: the
25 president of a public research university, or a designee; the
26 president of a State college or university established pursuant to
27 chapter 64 of Title 18A of the New Jersey Statutes, or a designee;
28 the president of a county college established pursuant to chapter
29 64A of Title 18A of the New Jersey Statutes, or a designee; the
30 president of an independent institution of higher education, or a
31 designee; a representative of the American Association of
32 University Professors; a representative of the Council of New
33 Jersey State College Locals AFT/AFL-CIO; two individuals who
34 are chief information officers or equivalent positions, one of whom
35 shall be employed at a four-year institution of higher education and
36 one of whom shall be employed at a county college; and two
37 students, one of whom shall be currently enrolled in a four-year
38 institution of higher education and one of whom shall be currently
39 enrolled in a county college.

40 c. Appointments to the task force shall be made within 30 days
41 of the effective date of this act. Vacancies in the membership of the
42 task force shall be filled in the same manner as the original
43 appointments were made. Members of the task force shall serve
44 without compensation, but shall be reimbursed for necessary
45 expenditures incurred in the performance of their duties as members
46 of the task force within the limits of funds appropriated or
47 otherwise made available to the task force for its purposes.

1 d. The task force shall organize not later than 30 days
2 following the appointment of its members. The task force shall
3 choose a chairperson from among its members and shall appoint a
4 secretary who need not be a member of the task force.

5 e. The Office of the Secretary of Higher Education shall
6 provide such stenographic, clerical, and other administrative
7 assistants, and such professional staff as the task force requires to
8 carry out its work. The task force also shall be entitled to call to its
9 assistance and avail itself of the services of the employees of any
10 State, county, or municipal department, board, bureau, commission,
11 or agency as it may require and as may be available for its purposes.
12

13 2. a. The task force shall study and consider issues including,
14 but not limited to, the following:

15 (1) the manner in which public and independent institutions of
16 higher education shifted to online learning following the issuance of
17 Executive Order No. 104 of 2020 and the methods undertaken by
18 institutions to resume in-person courses following the issuance of
19 Executive Order No. 155 and Executive Order No. 175 of 2020;

20 (2) a description of each public and independent institution's
21 strategy in delivering education to students, including whether an
22 institution offered all of its classes online, in person, or through a
23 hybrid program of online and in-person courses;

24 (3) a description of the technology and software utilized by the
25 institutions to provide online courses to students;

26 (4) the costs borne by institutions and students in the shift to
27 online learning that occurred as a result of Executive Order No. 104
28 of 2020 and throughout the pandemic;

29 (5) a description and assessment of the efforts and policies set
30 forth by the institutions to ensure that students had access to the
31 technology and other resources necessary to complete online
32 courses during the pandemic;

33 (6) the effect that offering an increased volume of online classes
34 had on student enrollment and retention compared to the prior
35 academic year and on the cost of attendance;

36 (7) the traditional cost of offering an online course at each
37 institution compared to the cost of offering an in-person course, and
38 how the COVID-19 pandemic affected that cost;

39 (8) the perceptions of students, faculty, and staff of the quality
40 and value of online courses as compared to courses provided in
41 person;

42 (9) a comparison of the average completion rate and average
43 grade for students enrolled in each online course offered by each
44 institution during the COVID-19 pandemic and the average
45 completion rates and grades for those courses in the prior academic
46 year. The comparison shall indicate whether or not the courses
47 were provided online or in person in the previous academic year;
48 and

1 (10) an assessment of the policies and procedures each public
2 and independent institution of higher education has in place to
3 ensure that institutional support, technological support, and faculty
4 support are provided to students enrolled in online courses to ensure
5 a high quality educational experience.

6 b. The task force shall issue a final report of its findings and
7 recommendations to the Governor, and to the Legislature pursuant
8 to section 2 of P.L.1991, c.164 (C.52:14-19.1), no later than two
9 years after the task force organizes.

10 c. The task force shall expire 30 days after the issuance of its
11 final report.

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13 3. This act shall take effect immediately.

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16 STATEMENT

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18 In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Governor signed
19 Executive Order (EO) No. 104 on March 16, 2020, which
20 suspended in-person instruction at institutions of higher education
21 and thus caused all classes taken by students attending college in
22 the State to be moved online. Subsequently, the Governor signed
23 EO No. 155, which allowed in-person clinical, lab, and hands-on
24 programming at institutions of higher education to resume as of
25 July 1, 2020; then, EO No. 175 was signed on August 13, 2020,
26 permitting institutions to resume all in-person instruction.

27 Despite being permitted to resume all in-person instruction,
28 many institutions in the State opted to provide most, if not all, of
29 their classes online for the fall 2020 semester. While the
30 implementation of a more expansive array of online classes is
31 necessary to limit the transmission of COVID-19, an examination of
32 the quality of those online classes is necessary to ensure that college
33 students continue to receive a valuable education and that
34 institutions are prepared to effectively provide that education in the
35 event of future emergencies.

36 This bill establishes a task force to examine the quality, efficacy,
37 costs, and educational outcomes of online courses offered by public
38 and independent institutions of higher education during the COVID-
39 19 pandemic and to provide recommendations for potential
40 improvements in the delivery of online courses to students. The
41 task force will consist of 15 members as follows: the Secretary of
42 Higher Education; four public members, one each appointed by the
43 President of the Senate, the Minority Leader of the Senate, the
44 Speaker of the General Assembly, and the Minority Leader of the
45 General Assembly; and 10 members appointed by the Governor,
46 including various representatives from each sector of the public
47 institutions of higher education, and from the independent
48 institutions, labor groups, and students.

1 The task force will study and develop a report on issues
2 including: the manner in which public and independent institutions
3 of higher education shifted to online learning during the pandemic;
4 a description of each institution's strategy in delivering education to
5 students; a description of the technology and software utilized by
6 the institutions to provide online courses; the costs borne by
7 institutions and students in the shift to online learning; a
8 description and assessment of efforts and policies set forth to ensure
9 that students had access to the technology and other resources
10 necessary to complete online courses; the effect that offering an
11 increased volume of online classes had on student enrollment and
12 retention; the traditional cost of offering an online course at each
13 institution compared to the cost of offering an in-person course, and
14 how the COVID-19 pandemic affected that cost; the perceptions of
15 students, faculty, and staff of the quality and value of online
16 courses; a comparison of the average completion rate and grade for
17 students enrolled in each online course offered by each institution
18 during the pandemic and the average completion rates and grades
19 for those courses in the prior academic year; and an assessment of
20 the policies and procedures each institution has in place to ensure
21 that institutional, technological, and faculty support are provided to
22 students enrolled in online courses.

23 The task force is required to issue a final report containing its
24 findings and recommendations to the Governor and to the
25 Legislature no later than two years after the task force organizes.