SENATE, No. 1229

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

219th LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED FEBRUARY 3, 2020

Sponsored by:
Senator THOMAS H. KEAN, JR.
District 21 (Morris, Somerset and Union)
Senator SANDRA B. CUNNINGHAM
District 31 (Hudson)

Co-Sponsored by:
Senator Ruiz

SYNOPSIS

Establishes pilot program to provide guidance to students applying for federal financial aid.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As introduced.

(Sponsorship Updated As Of: 12/9/2021)

AN ACT establishing a pilot program to provide guidance to students applying for federal financial aid.

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

1. a. The Commissioner of Education shall establish a three-year pilot program to provide public school students with information on and assistance in the proper completion and submission of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The goal of the pilot program shall be to ensure that each student enrolled in grade 12 has the opportunity and instruction necessary to apply for federal financial aid.

b. A school district that wants to participate in the program shall submit a proposal to the commissioner detailing its commitment to training staff or community volunteers on the proper completion and submission of the FAFSA and providing class time to students for instruction on how to complete the FAFSA with their parents or guardians. The proposal shall also indicate whether the district intends to offer any additional events, workshops, or other programming for the parents and guardians of students on FAFSA completion and submission.

c. The commissioner shall select four districts in each of the southern, central, and northern regions of the State to participate in the program and shall seek a cross section of school districts from urban, suburban, and rural areas of the State.

2. a. The board of education of a participating school district shall ensure that each student receives information at least once before the student enters grade 12 on how to properly complete and submit the FAFSA. Information shall be disseminated through classroom instruction during regular school hours. Information may also be provided through an existing school program, family information sessions, or group or individual sessions with school counselors. The information provided shall include, but need not be limited to, material related to:

(1) the types of documentation and personal information that each student financial aid application requires, including documents relating to income taxes, finances and income, college choices, academic status, and personal identification such as social security or taxpayer identification numbers;

(2) an explanation of terms used in the FAFSA application. These definitions may include, but need not be limited to, “legal guardianship,” “household size,” “parent,” “dependent,” and “taxable college grants and scholarships;”

(3) eligibility requirements for student financial aid; and

(4) application timelines and submission deadlines for the FAFSA.

b. The board of education of a participating school district shall ensure that a paper copy of the FAFSA is provided upon request to each high school student or his parent or guardian.

c. The board of education shall ensure that any information shared by a student, parent, or guardian pursuant to this act is handled according to applicable State and federal privacy laws and regulations.

3. At the conclusion of the pilot program, the Commissioner of Education shall submit a report to the Governor and, pursuant to section 2 of P.L.1991, c.164 (C.52:14-19.1), the Legislature. The report shall contain information on the implementation of the pilot program including the commissioner's recommendation on the feasibility of implementing the program on a Statewide basis.

4. This act shall take effect immediately.

STATEMENT

This bill directs the Commissioner of Education to establish a three-year pilot program to provide information on and assistance in the proper completion and submission of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The goal of the pilot program is to ensure that each 12th grade student has the opportunity and instruction necessary to apply for federal financial aid.

Under the bill, a school district that wants to participate in the program must submit a proposal to the commissioner. The commissioner will select four districts in each of the southern, central, and northern regions of the State to participate in the program.

The bill requires the board of education of a participating school district to ensure that each student receives information at least once before the student enters grade 12 on how to properly complete and submit the FAFSA. Information must be disseminated through classroom instruction during regular school hours. Information may also be provided through an existing school program, family information sessions, or group or individual sessions with school counselors. The information provided must include, but need not be limited to, material related to:

(1) the types of documentation and personal information that each student financial aid application requires;

(2) an explanation of terms used for each application;

(3) eligibility requirements for student financial aid; and

(4) application timelines and submission deadlines for the FAFSA.

Under the bill, the board of education of a participating school district must ensure that a paper copy of the FAFSA is provided upon request to each high school student or his parent or guardian. The

board of education must also ensure that any information shared by a student, parent, or guardian pursuant to this bill is handled according to applicable State and federal privacy laws and regulations.

At the conclusion of the pilot program, the Commissioner of Education is directed to submit a report to the Governor and the Legislature. The report must contain information on the implementation of the pilot program including the commissioner's recommendation on the feasibility of implementing the program on a Statewide basis.