

SENATE HIGHER EDUCATION COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

SENATE, No. 1229

with committee amendments

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: DECEMBER 9, 2021

The Senate Higher Education Committee reports favorably Senate Bill No. 1229 with committee amendments.

As amended, 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 may 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.

The bill also requires the board of education of a participating school district to ensure that the parent or guardian of each student entering grade 12 receives, via written or electronic means, information on the FAFSA and how to properly complete and submit the form.

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.

COMMITTEE AMENDMENTS:

The committee amended the bill to:

- require the board of education of a participating school district to ensure that the parent or guardian of each student entering grade 12 receives, via written or electronic means, information on the FAFSA and how to properly complete and submit the form; and
- permit, rather than require, the dissemination of information on how to properly complete and submit the FAFSA through classroom instruction during regular school hours.