SENATE, No. 2383

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

219th LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED MAY 4, 2020

Sponsored by:
Senator PAUL A. SARLO
District 36 (Bergen and Passaic)
Senator M. TERESA RUIZ
District 29 (Essex)
Senator STEPHEN M. SWEENEY
District 3 (Cumberland, Gloucester and Salem)
Senator STEVEN V. OROHO
District 24 (Morris, Sussex and Warren)

SYNOPSIS

Requires Commissioner of Education to establish three-year "Bridge Year Pilot Program" for students graduating high school in 2021 and 2022 who were impacted by public health state of emergency caused by coronavirus disease 2019.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As introduced.

(Sponsorship Updated As Of: 5/7/2020)

AN ACT requiring the Commissioner of Education to establish the Bridge Year Pilot Program.

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

1. As used in this act, "host high school" means the high school that a student, who pursues a bridge year pursuant to the provisions of this act, attended as a junior in high school.

2. a. The Commissioner of Education shall establish a three-year "Bridge Year Pilot Program," under which each school district with a high school shall offer students in the graduating class of 2021 and the graduating class of 2022 the opportunity to pursue a bridge year during the year immediately following graduation from high school, in accordance with the provisions of this act. The purpose of the pilot program shall be to provide eligible students and student-athletes an opportunity to address lost time in educational activities, extracurricular activities, and sports programs as a result of the public health state of emergency caused by the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic.

A nonpublic school may elect to participate in the Bridge Year Pilot Program.

Under the pilot program, each high school in a school district shall designate a school staff member as a bridge year liaison to serve as the school's central point of contact for students interested in pursuing a bridge year pursuant to this act and for students participating in a bridge year, as well as for county colleges and four-year institutions of higher education in which students may be enrolled in academic courses under the pilot program. Nothing in this subsection shall be construed to require a school district to hire an individual to serve as a bridge year liaison.

b. A student in the graduating class of 2021 or the graduating class of 2022 who decides to pursue a bridge year after graduating from high school shall, in a format and manner to be determined by the school district and no later than seven days prior to the beginning of the student's senior year of high school, notify the host high school of the decision to pursue the bridge year. Nothing in this section shall be construed to require a student to pursue a bridge year after graduating from high school. To be eligible to participate in the bridge year program, a student shall be 19 years of age or younger and shall not turn 20 years of age at any time during the bridge year, except as may otherwise be provided in a student's individualized education program.

c. (1) A student pursuing a bridge year shall enroll as a non-matriculated student in the county college that serves the county of his host high school. The student shall enroll in 12 credits in each of the fall and spring semesters during the student's bridge year. A student who pursues a bridge year and participates in a winter or

spring sport sanctioned by the New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association pursuant to section 3 of this act shall, during the semester in which he is participating in the sport, enroll in at least nine but less than 12 credits.

(2) The student shall maintain a grade point average of 2.25 in order to remain in the Bridge Year Pilot Program. The county college in which a student pursuing a bridge year is enrolled shall report quarterly to the bridge year liaison at a student's host high school concerning the student's academic progress and performance.

(3) A county college shall charge students participating in a bridge year pursuant to this act a maximum of $145 per credit inclusive of all fees, except that fees associated with specific courses or with the use of on-campus science laboratories may be charged at a maximum of $45 per course.

(4) A student may take any portion of the credits required pursuant to paragraph (1) of this subsection at the student's host high school, in the event that the county college which the student is attending offers courses at the host high school. During a semester of the bridge year, a student may take three credits offered by a four-year institution of higher education at any high school in the State or at any other location to fulfill the student's credit requirement. The four-year institution shall charge the student no more than is permitted pursuant to paragraph (3) of this subsection and shall report to the student's bridge year liaison as required pursuant to paragraph (2) of this subsection.

d. Notwithstanding the requirement established under the Tuition Aid Grant Program pursuant to N.J.S.18A:71B-20 and under the New Jersey Student Tuition Assistance Reward Scholarship (NJSTARS) Program pursuant to section 5 of P.L.2004, c.59 (C.18A:71B-85), to be enrolled as a full-time student in a course of study or a curriculum leading to a degree or certificate, a student pursuing a bridge year pursuant to this act shall be eligible for a tuition aid grant or scholarship under the Tuition Aid Grant Program or the NJSTARS Program if the student meets all other applicable eligibility requirements.

e. A public institution of higher education shall, pursuant to P.L.2007, c.175 (C.18A:62-46 et seq.), accept all applicable credits that a student, who completed a bridge year pursuant to this act, earned during the bridge year. An independent institution of higher education in the State may elect to accept the credits that a student earned during the bridge year.

f. A county college or four-year institution of higher education in which a student enrolls during his bridge year shall not, during the bridge year, release the student's transcripts as part of that student's application for admission to an institution of higher education.

3. a. A student who pursues a bridge year pursuant to this act shall be permitted to participate in a winter sport or spring sport sanctioned by the New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association and extracurricular activities at the student's host high school. A student pursuing a bridge year shall not be eligible to participate in any fall sport sanctioned by the association.

b. In order to participate in a winter or spring sport during the bridge year, the student shall turn 19 years of age after September 1 of his bridge year. The student shall participate in the winter or spring sport at the student's host high school and shall not be permitted to transfer to a different high school, even in the event that the student experiences a change in residence.

c. In the event that a student pursuing a bridge year elects to participate in a winter or a spring sport, the association shall waive the eight semester rule under which a student is not eligible for high school athletics after the expiration of eight consecutive semesters following the student's entrance into the ninth grade.

d. The association shall confer with the National Collegiate Athletic Association or any other athletic association, conference, or group or organization with authority over intercollegiate athletics to ensure that any student participating in a winter or a spring sport during a bridge year will be eligible to declare as a college recruit during the bridge year and participate in intercollegiate athletics.

4. a. The State Board of Education shall promulgate regulations pursuant to the "Administrative Procedure Act," P.L.1968, c.410 (C.52:14B-1 et seq.), necessary to effectuate the provisions of this act.

b. The Higher Education Student Assistance Authority shall promulgate regulations, pursuant to the "Administrative Procedure Act," P.L.1968, c.410 (C.52:14B-1 et seq.), necessary to effectuate the provisions of subsection d. of section 2 of this act.

5. This act shall take effect immediately.

STATEMENT

This bill requires the Commissioner of Education to establish a three-year "Bridge Year Pilot Program." Under the pilot program, each school district is required to offer students in the graduating class of 2021 and the graduating class of 2022 the opportunity to pursue a bridge year during the year immediately following graduation from high school. A nonpublic school may elect to participate in the Bridge Year Pilot Program. Through the establishment of the Bridge Year Pilot Program, it is the intent of the sponsor to provide students, who lost time engaging in educational and extracurricular activities and sports programs due to the public health state of emergency caused by coronavirus

disease 2019, an opportunity to make up for a major interruption in their scholastic careers and to assist student-athletes in recouping a lost year of recruitment and crucial playing time.

To be eligible for the bridge year, a student must be 19 years old or younger and cannot not turn 20 years old at any time during the bridge year, except as may otherwise be provided in the student's individualized education program.

A student pursuing a bridge year will enroll at a county college as a non-matriculated student and will enroll in 12 credits in each of the fall and spring semesters. The bill generally requires students to take courses at the county college that serves the county of their host high school, but they are given flexibility in certain circumstances to take course credits at other institutions of higher education. The student must maintain a grade point average of 2.25 in order to remain in the bridge year program. Under the bill, a county college or four-year institution of higher education will charge students participating in a bridge year a maximum of $145 per credit inclusive of all fees, except that fees associated with specific courses or with the use of on-campus science laboratories may be charged at a maximum of $45 per course. Students participating in a bridge year will be eligible for student financial aid under the Tuition Aid Grant Program and the New Jersey Student Tuition Assistance Reward Scholarship Program if they meet all eligibility requirements for those programs other than full-time enrollment in a degree program during the bridge year.

A student who pursues a bridge year will be permitted to participate in a winter or a spring sport sanctioned by the New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association (NJSIAA) and extracurricular activities at the student's host high school, which is defined under the bill as the high school that the student attended as a junior in high school. A student will not be eligible to participate in any fall sport. In order to participate in a winter or spring sport during a student's bridge year, the student must turn 19 years of age after September 1 of his bridge year. Under the bill, a student participating in a sport during the bridge year is required to enroll in at least nine but less than 12 credits, during the semester of participation in the sport.

In the event that a student pursuing a bridge year elects to participate in a winter or spring sport sanctioned by the NJSIAA, the NJSIAA is required to waive the eight semester rule, under which a student is not eligible for high school athletics after the expiration of eight consecutive semesters following the student's entrance into the ninth grade. The NJSIAA is directed to confer with the National Collegiate Athletic Association or any other similar entities to ensure that any student participating in a spring sport during a bridge year pursuant to the bill will be eligible to declare as a college recruit and participate in intercollegiate athletics.