

SENATE, No. 2984

STATE OF NEW JERSEY
219th LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED OCTOBER 8, 2020

Sponsored by:

Senator ANTHONY M. BUCCO

District 25 (Morris and Somerset)

Co-Sponsored by:

Senator Corrado

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.

3
4 **BE IT ENACTED** *by the Senate and General Assembly of the State*
5 *of New Jersey:*

6
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.

44
45 2. This act shall take effect immediately.

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.