Sponsored by:
Assemblywoman CAROL A. MURPHY
District 7 (Burlington)

SYNOPSIS
Establishes pilot program to study feasibility of regionalization of certain school districts; appropriates $150,000.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT
As introduced.
AN ACT concerning the regionalization of certain school districts, supplementing chapter 13 of Title 18A of the New Jersey Statutes, and making an appropriation.

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

1. The Commissioner of Education shall establish a school district regionalization pilot program. The purpose of the program shall be to study the feasibility of the establishment of a grade K-12 all purpose regional school district through the consolidation of an existing grade 9-12 limited purpose regional school district and the grade K-8 school districts of its constituent municipalities. The pilot program shall consist of a one-year Phase I planning stage, a five-year Phase II implementation stage, and an Evaluation Component. The commissioner shall select three pilot sites to participate in the program, including one in the northern, central, and southern regions of the State.

2. If the board of education of a grade 9-12 limited purpose regional school district and the boards of education of the grade K-8 school districts of its constituent municipalities determine to participate in the pilot program, the boards shall jointly submit an application to the commissioner. The application shall include a copy of a resolution approving participation in the pilot program adopted by a majority vote of the members of each of the boards of education. The application shall also include such other information as the commissioner may prescribe.

3. During the one-year Phase I planning stage of the pilot program, the selected school districts shall conduct a feasibility study to determine the educational and financial impact of forming a grade K-12 all purpose regional school district. The districts may apply to the commissioner for a planning grant in an amount not to exceed $50,000 to cover costs associated with their participation in the pilot program including, but not limited to, the collection of data, public relations activities such as community education and outreach, and the organization of public meetings. In addition to the planning grant, any costs associated with the feasibility study shall be paid by the State. The commissioner may extend the Phase I planning stage through a second year if he determines it to be advisable.

4. a. In order to participate in the Phase II implementation stage of the pilot program, the voters of each constituent municipality of the proposed grade K-12 all purpose regional school district shall approve such participation. The question of participation in Phase II shall be submitted to the voters at the
annual or a special school election. The question shall be deemed
adopted and participation in Phase II approved by the voters if the
question receives an affirmative vote of a majority of the votes cast
in each of the constituent municipalities of the proposed grade K-12
all purpose regional school district.

b. The commissioner shall provide incentive State aid to school
districts that participate in the Phase II implementation stage of the
pilot program. State aid shall be provided in such amount as is
necessary to equalize the apportionment of costs of the grade K-12
regional school district among the constituent municipalities and to
support the initial costs associated with regionalization.

Incentive State aid shall be provided for each of the five years of
the Phase II implementation stage, except that the commissioner
shall annually reduce the amount of incentive State aid over that
five-year period.

5. In the Evaluation Component of the pilot program, the
commissioner shall appoint an independent evaluator to work in
each of the pilot sites to design and implement the evaluation of that
site. The design of the evaluation shall begin during the Phase I
planning stage to ensure the collection of pre-regionalization data.
The design shall address issues such as the impact of the
establishment of a grade K-12 all purpose regional school district
on student achievement, school district finances, parent and student
satisfaction with educational programs and athletic and other extra-
curricular school programs, staffing, facilities, and governance.

Each independent evaluator shall submit interim reports to the
commissioner on an annual basis and a final report at the conclusion
of the pilot program. The reports shall include a description of the
project activities to date, the identification of issues of concern,
recommendations to ensure the successful implementation of the
pilot program, and recommendations on the advisability of
extending the program to additional sites.

6. There is appropriated $150,000 from the General Fund to the
Department of Education to finance the grants awarded to the pilot
sites pursuant to the provisions of this act.

7. This act shall take effect immediately.

STATEMENT

This bill directs the Commissioner of Education to establish a
school district regionalization pilot program. The purpose of the
program is to study the feasibility of establishing a grade K-12 all
purpose regional school district through the consolidation of an
existing grade 9-12 limited purpose regional school district and the
grade K-8 school districts of its constituent municipalities. The pilot program will consist of a one-year Phase I planning stage, a five-year Phase II implementation stage, and an Evaluation Component.

The bill directs the commissioner to select three pilot sites to participate in the program, including one in a northern, central and southern region of the State. Under the bill, if a board of education of a grade 9-12 limited purpose regional school district and the boards of education of the grade K-8 school districts of its constituent municipalities determine to participate in the pilot program, the boards must jointly submit an application to the commissioner.

The bill requires that selected school districts conduct a feasibility study to determine the educational and financial impact of forming a grade K-12 regional school district. The districts may apply to the commissioner for a planning grant in an amount not to exceed $50,000 to cover costs associated with its participation in the pilot program including, but not limited to, the collection of data, public relations activities, and the organization of public meetings. In addition to the planning grant, any costs associated with the feasibility study will be paid by the State. The commissioner may extend the Phase I planning stage through a second year if he determines it to be advisable.

The bill specifies that the voters of each constituent municipality of the proposed grade K-12 regional school district must approve the participation in the Phase II implementation stage. The commissioner will provide incentive State aid to school districts that participate in the Phase II implementation stage in an amount as is necessary to equalize the apportionment of costs of the grade K-12 regional school district among the constituent municipalities and to support the initial costs associated with regionalization. Incentive State aid will be provided for each of the five years of the Phase II implementation stage.

The bill also directs the commissioner to appoint an independent evaluator to work in each of the pilot sites to design and implement the evaluation of that site. The design would address issues such as the impact of the establishment of a grade K-12 regional school district on student achievement, school district finances, parent and student satisfaction with educational programs and athletic and other extra-curricular school programs, staffing, facilities, and governance.