

ASSEMBLY, No. 3549

STATE OF NEW JERSEY 219th LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED FEBRUARY 25, 2020

Sponsored by:

Assemblyman DANIEL R. BENSON

District 14 (Mercer and Middlesex)

Assemblywoman CAROL A. MURPHY

District 7 (Burlington)

SYNOPSIS

Establishes task force to study issues and make recommendations regarding Marie H. Katzenbach School for the Deaf.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As introduced.



(Sponsorship Updated As Of: 3/5/2020)

1 AN ACT establishing a Marie H. Katzenbach School for the Deaf
2 Task Force.

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

6
7 1. The Legislature finds and declares that:

8 a. Schools for the deaf across the country have contributed to
9 the education of students who are deaf and hard of hearing for
10 nearly 200 years.

11 b. Many of these schools have undergone changes in recent
12 years, including shifts in enrollment patterns, governance structure,
13 and the scope of services provided. Factors such as advances in
14 technology, state-level fiscal constraints, and a continued need to
15 maintain a visual learning environment for students who use sign
16 language to communicate have led to new, innovative programs in
17 many states that are both cost-effective and more academically
18 rigorous.

19 c. Students who are deaf or hard of hearing continue to benefit
20 from an educational environment where classmates, teachers, and
21 staff members who use sign language to communicate are the norm,
22 rather than the exception.

23 d. Language development is the key to learning, and
24 opportunities for language development are maximized in an
25 educational environment where all students can engage in rich
26 conversations with peers, teachers, and administrators throughout
27 the school day. Schools for the deaf, where students and staff
28 communicate through sign language, provide that crucial
29 environment for students who are deaf or hard of hearing.

30 e. The Marie H. Katzenbach School for the Deaf, with roots
31 dating back to 1832, provides that necessary environment in New
32 Jersey, offering comprehensive educational services for deaf and
33 hard of hearing students from birth to age 21.

34 f. In recent years, the Marie H. Katzenbach School for the
35 Deaf has faced several challenges, such as declining enrollment,
36 rising costs for maintaining the school's buildings and grounds,
37 overall fiscal issues, and instructional challenges. These concerns
38 warrant further study that includes taking a broad view of the
39 school to determine how the State can best meet the educational
40 needs of its students who are deaf and hard of hearing in an
41 effective and fiscally responsible manner.

42
43 2. a. There is established a Marie H. Katzenbach School for
44 the Deaf Task Force. The purpose of the task force is to study
45 current issues concerning the Marie H. Katzenbach School for the
46 Deaf, identify areas for improvement, and make recommendations
47 to the Department of Education that will enable the school to

1 achieve its goal of preparing students who are deaf or hard of
2 hearing for a postsecondary education or career upon graduation.

3 b. The task force shall consist of the following 21 members:

4 (1) the Commissioner of Education, or a designee, who shall
5 serve ex officio;

6 (2) the Director of the Department of Education's Office of
7 Special Education Programs, or a designee;

8 (3) two members appointed by the President of the Senate, one
9 of whom is a student who attends the Marie H. Katzenbach School
10 for the Deaf and one of whom is a parent of a student who attends
11 the Marie H. Katzenbach School for the Deaf;

12 (4) two members appointed by the Speaker of the General
13 Assembly, one of whom is a student who attends the Marie H.
14 Katzenbach School for the Deaf and one of whom is a parent of a
15 student who attends the Marie H. Katzenbach School for the Deaf;
16 and

17 (5) 15 members appointed by the Governor, who shall include:
18 one representative of the New Jersey Schools Development
19 Authority; two representatives of the New Jersey Division of the
20 Deaf and Hard of Hearing; two representatives of the New Jersey
21 Association of the Deaf; the current superintendent of the Marie H.
22 Katzenbach School for the Deaf; a former superintendent of the
23 Marie H. Katzenbach School for the Deaf; two alumni of the Marie
24 H. Katzenbach School for the Deaf; two representatives of
25 Leadership and Excellence in Education for the Deaf (LEED); two
26 recognized experts in the area of deaf education, both of whom are
27 residents of New Jersey and are deaf; and two representatives of the
28 Marie H. Katzenbach School for the Deaf's Citizen Advisory
29 Board.

30 c. Appointments to the task force shall be made within 30 days
31 of the effective date of this act. Vacancies in the membership of the
32 task force shall be filled in the same manner as the original
33 appointments were made. Members of the task force shall serve
34 without compensation, but shall be reimbursed for necessary
35 expenditures incurred in the performance of their duties as members
36 of the task force within the limits of funds appropriated or
37 otherwise made available to the task force for its purposes.

38

39 3. The task force shall organize as soon as practicable
40 following the appointment of its members, but no later than 60 days
41 after the effective date of this act. The task force shall choose a
42 chairperson from among its members and shall appoint a secretary
43 who need not be a member of the task force.

44

45 4. The Department of Education shall provide such
46 stenographic, clerical, and other administrative assistants, and such
47 professional staff as the task force requires to carry out its work.
48 The task force also shall be entitled to call to its assistance and avail

1 itself of the services of the employees of any State, county, or
2 municipal department, board, bureau, commission, or agency as it
3 may require and as may be available for its purposes.

4
5 5. It shall be the duty of the task force to study and analyze
6 current issues concerning the Marie H. Katzenbach School for the
7 Deaf, to identify areas for improvement, and to make
8 recommendations concerning the future direction of the Marie H.
9 Katzenbach School for the Deaf that will enable the school to
10 achieve its goal of preparing students who are deaf or hard of
11 hearing for a postsecondary education or career upon graduation.
12 The duties of the task force shall include, but need not be limited to:

13 a. reviewing facility conditions to identify repairs,
14 modifications, and improvements to the school that are necessary to
15 meet the educational and residential needs of the students;

16 b. identifying barriers, including any instructional challenges,
17 that prevent the school from best achieving its goals, and
18 identifying strategies to remove those barriers;

19 c. studying the demographics of the population of students who
20 are deaf or hard of hearing in New Jersey, making projections
21 regarding this population over the next 10 years, and generating
22 strategies to increase enrollment at the school and better serve this
23 population;

24 d. evaluating the current scope of programs and services
25 provided by the school and in the State for students who are deaf or
26 hard of hearing, and assessing what additional programs and
27 services are needed to improve educational opportunities for these
28 students;

29 e. evaluating the current governance structure of the school and
30 considering what type of governance system would best address
31 current operating issues and provide support for the long-term
32 viability of the school;

33 f. identifying and reviewing other successful public or private
34 schools for the deaf nationwide, and drawing ideas for improvement
35 to the Marie H. Katzenbach School for the Deaf from these models;
36 and

37 g. developing a set of recommendations for the school
38 regarding: an efficient and flexible system of school governance;
39 programs and services that incorporate next generation methods of
40 instruction and technology; state-of-the-art facilities that will best
41 meet the needs of the students; and expanded Statewide services to
42 meet the needs of a broader spectrum of deaf and hard of hearing
43 children and youth, their families, and the New Jersey deaf
44 community.

45
46 6. The task force shall issue a final report to the Governor, the
47 State Board of Education, and to the Legislature pursuant to section
48 2 of P.L.1991, c.164 (C.52:14-19.1), no later than six months after

1 the task force organizes. The report shall contain the task force's
2 findings and recommendations concerning the Marie H. Katzenbach
3 School for the Deaf.

4
5 7. This act shall take effect immediately, and the task force
6 shall expire 30 days after the issuance of its final report.

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9 STATEMENT

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11 This bill establishes a 21-member task force to study issues and
12 make recommendations related to the Marie H. Katzenbach School
13 for the Deaf in New Jersey. The task force will study current issues
14 concerning the school, identify areas for improvement, and make
15 recommendations concerning the future direction of the school that
16 will enable the school to achieve its goal of preparing students who
17 are deaf or hard of hearing for a postsecondary education or career
18 upon graduation.

19 The task force will be comprised of: the Commissioner of
20 Education; the Director of the Department of Education's Office of
21 Special Education Programs; two members appointed by the Senate
22 President, including one student and one parent of a student who
23 attends the Marie H. Katzenbach School for the Deaf; two members
24 appointed by the Speaker of the General Assembly, including one
25 student and one parent of a student who attends the school; and 15
26 members appointed by the Governor. The Governor's appointees
27 will include one representative of the New Jersey Schools
28 Development Authority; two representatives of the New Jersey
29 Division of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing; two representatives of
30 the New Jersey Association of the Deaf; the current superintendent
31 of the Marie H. Katzenbach School for the Deaf; a former
32 superintendent of the Marie H. Katzenbach School for the Deaf;
33 two alumni of the Marie H. Katzenbach School for the Deaf; two
34 representatives of Leadership and Excellence in Education for the
35 Deaf (LEED); two recognized experts in the area of deaf education,
36 both of whom are residents of New Jersey and are deaf; and two
37 representatives of the Marie H. Katzenbach School for the Deaf's
38 Citizen Advisory Board.

39 Under the bill, the duties of the task force will include, but need
40 not be limited to:

- 41 - reviewing facility conditions to identify repairs,
42 modifications, and improvements to the school that are
43 necessary to meet the educational and residential needs of
44 the students;
45 - identifying barriers, including any instructional challenges,
46 that prevent the school from best achieving its goals, and
47 identifying strategies to remove those barriers;

- 1 - studying the demographics of the population of students who
- 2 are deaf or hard of hearing in New Jersey, making
- 3 projections regarding this population over the next 10 years,
- 4 and generating strategies to increase enrollment at the school
- 5 and better serve this population;
- 6 - evaluating the current scope of programs and services
- 7 provided by the school and in the State for students who are
- 8 deaf or hard of hearing, and assessing what additional
- 9 programs and services are needed to improve educational
- 10 opportunities for these students;
- 11 - evaluating the current governance structure of the school and
- 12 considering what type of governance system would best
- 13 address current operating issues and provide support for the
- 14 long-term viability of the school;
- 15 - identifying and reviewing other successful public or private
- 16 schools for the deaf nationwide, and drawing ideas for
- 17 improvement to the Marie H. Katzenbach School for the
- 18 Deaf from these models; and
- 19 - developing a set of recommendations for the school
- 20 regarding: an efficient and flexible system of school
- 21 governance; programs and services that incorporate next
- 22 generation methods of instruction and technology; state-of-
- 23 the-art facilities that will best meet the needs of the students;
- 24 and expanded Statewide services to meet the needs of a
- 25 broader spectrum of deaf and hard of hearing children and
- 26 youth, their families, and the New Jersey deaf community.
- 27 The task force is required to issue a report to the Governor, the
- 28 State Board of Education, and the Legislature within six months of
- 29 its organization, which contains its findings and recommendations
- 30 concerning the Marie H. Katzenbach School for the Deaf.