

SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

SENATE, No. 2204

with committee amendments

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: MAY 13, 2021

The Senate Education Committee favorably reports Senate Bill No. 2204 with committee amendments.

As amended, this bill directs the Commissioner of Education (commissioner) to establish a three-year pilot program that provides grant funding to encourage and support school districts to establish the For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology (FIRST) nonprofit organization's robotics programs and to participate in a FIRST Robotics Competition. The purpose of the pilot program is to: 1) increase opportunities for students to participate in a FIRST Robotics Competition; 2) motivate students to pursue education and career opportunities in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics; and 3) improve students' knowledge in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.

The bill provides that a school district that wants to participate in the pilot program is to submit an application to the commissioner. The school district is to select no more than one school serving students from grades nine through 12 to participate in the pilot program. The commissioner is to select up to 12 school districts for participation in the pilot program. The school districts selected by the commissioner are to be eligible for grants, within the limits of available funds that are donated pursuant to the bill, to be used to support the development and implementation of a FIRST robotics program in the selected schools. The FIRST nonprofit organization is to determine the amount of each grant awarded under the program and may award multi-year grants. Grants may be used by school districts to provide coaching stipends, purchase materials for competitions, finance competition travel expenses, and register for events. School districts selected to participate in the pilot program may apply for additional funding as teams in the school district become eligible to participate in the FIRST robotics program's district, district championship, and world championship events.

The bill provides that the commissioner is to collaborate with the FIRST nonprofit organization, educational advocacy groups, and private sector businesses to encourage and identify the donation of funds for the purpose of awarding grants pursuant to the bill.

The bill provides that three years following the establishment of the pilot program, the commissioner is to submit a report to the Governor and the Legislature. The report is to contain information on the implementation of the pilot program, the number of students participating in the program, and the recommendations of the commissioner on continuing, expanding, or modifying the program.

As amended and reported by the committee, this bill is identical to Assembly Bill No. 2455(1R), which also was reported by the committee on this same date.

COMMITTEE AMENDMENTS:

The committee amended the bill to add language to clarify the intent of the three-year pilot program. The amendments also change the method by which grants are awarded by providing that school districts selected by the commissioner are to be eligible for funds within the limits donated pursuant to the bill. The amendments provide that the FIRST nonprofit organization is to determine the amount of each grant. The amendments add language providing that the commissioner is to collaborate with the FIRST nonprofit organization, educational advocacy groups, and private sector businesses to encourage and identify the donation of funds for the purposes of awarding grants pursuant to the bill. Lastly, the amendments make technical changes.