

SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

SENATE, No. 2715

with committee amendments

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: MAY 13, 2021

The Senate Education Committee favorably reports Senate Bill No. 2715 with committee amendments.

As amended, this bill establishes a grant program to assist school districts in the training of school-based mental health services providers to expand the pipeline of high-quality, trained providers and address the shortages of mental health professionals in school districts. School districts that receive a grant under the program will use the funds for efforts to create and grow programs that train students who are attending graduate school to become school-based mental health services providers. School-based mental health services providers are defined under the bill as State-licensed or certified school counselors, school psychologists, school social workers, or other mental health professionals qualified under State law to provide mental health services to children and adolescents.

Prior to applying for the grant program, a school district or a group of school districts seeking to participate in the program together is required to form a partnership with one or more institutions of higher education that offer graduate programs in school-based mental health fields. The partnership would allow a student enrolled in the graduate program to perform applicable fieldwork, credit hours, internships, externships, or other related training as applicable for the academic program of the student.

The Commissioner of Education will establish selection criteria for the awarding of grants under the program, including consideration of various information regarding the need for school-based mental health professionals and an increased level of student mental health services and supports. In awarding grants, priority will be given to school districts that demonstrate an unmet need for mental health services in the school community.

Under the bill, the Department of Education is required to annually apply for and use any federal grant funds or other federal assistance which may be available to be used for the grant program including, but not limited to, funds under the Mental Health Service Professional Demonstration Grant Program, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, the Coronavirus

Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations (CRRSA) Act, and the “American Rescue Plan Act of 2021.” The department may, if applicable, apply for federal grant funds or other assistance on behalf of one or more school districts approved for participation in the grant program established under the bill. Any federal grant funds awarded to the department will first be used to provide grant awards to school districts, prior to using State funds.

As amended and reported by the committee, this bill is identical to Assembly Bill No. 4433(1R), which was amended and reported by the committee on this same date.

COMMITTEE AMENDMENTS:

The committee amended the bill to:

(1) specify that groups of school districts seeking to participate in the grant program together are eligible to submit applications and receive funds under the program;

(2) provide that priority for grants awarded under the program shall be given to school districts that demonstrate an unmet need for mental health services in the school community and to remove the requirement that the Commissioner of Children and Families, in consultation with the Commissioner of Education, establish the criteria for designating high-need school districts; and

(3) specify additional sources of federal assistance, if available, that the Commissioner of Education is required to use for purposes of the grant program.