

LEGISLATIVE FISCAL ESTIMATE TO

[First Reprint]
SENATE, No. 127

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: April 1, 1996

Senate Bill No. 127 (1R) of 1996 requires that beginning in September of 1997, the Commissioner of Education shall develop and administer an annual test to all fourth grade pupils to assess progress toward mastery of State core curriculum standards. The test shall provide direction to school districts for the design of the most appropriate instructional program for elementary school pupils. In developing the test, the commissioner is directed to consult with educators, parents, community representatives, members of minority groups, and other persons who have expertise in cognitive development and the academic environment of elementary school pupils. The bill also provides that upon implementation of the fourth grade test, local school districts will not be required to administer commercial standardized achievement tests in any other grades.

The Office of Legislative Services (OLS) notes that although this bill is pending before the Legislature, a State-developed fourth grade test was due to be implemented in July, 1995 pursuant to State Board of Education regulations at N.J.A.C. 6:8-4.6 adopted as part of the school district certification process.

OLS also notes that in the FY 1996 Annual Appropriations Act, there was a State appropriation of \$1.4 million for the Department of Education (DOE) to develop the fourth grade test. In addition, the department received \$500,000 in federal grants under the Goals 2000 program to use for start-up costs. Information provided by the department indicates that the \$1.4 million State appropriation which was to be used to award a contract was rescinded due to the fact that the contract will not be awarded until FY 1997. The Governor has recommended in her budget the same amount of money for the program for FY 1997. The federal appropriation is being used to pay the salary and fringe benefits of a full-time staff member and also to cover the costs of conducting meetings with educators, parents, and minority groups regarding the contents of the test. The department anticipates that federal funding will be available again in FY 1997 to supplement the State appropriation.

DOE further estimates and OLS concurs that the enactment of this bill could potentially result in savings of approximately \$10 million to local school districts which under the bill's provision will not be required to administer commercial standardized achievement tests in any other grades

This fiscal estimate has been prepared pursuant to P.L.1980, c.67.