

SENATE BUDGET AND APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

[First Reprint]

SENATE, No. 127

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: JANUARY 29, 1996

The Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee reports favorably Senate Bill No. 127 (1R).

Senate Bill No. 127 (1R) requires the Commissioner of Education to develop and have administered annually to fourth grade pupils a test to assess progress toward mastery of State core curriculum standards. The tests are to begin September 1997. The fourth grade test will be used to identify problems and provide direction to school districts for the design of the most appropriate instructional program for elementary school pupils at the grade levels where intervention is more likely to be effective. Although the test may not be ready for use Statewide by September 1997, the department states that it will be ready to conduct pilot testing by that time.

Upon implementation of the fourth grade test, local school districts will not be required to administer commercial standardized achievement tests in other grades.

Under the current statutes, the State administers tests in the eighth and eleventh grades. A student must pass the eleventh grade test to graduate high school.

FISCAL IMPACT

The Office of Legislative Services (OLS) notes that the enactment of the bill will not result in any additional costs to the State in FY1996. This is because an appropriation of \$1.439 million has already been included in the Fiscal Year 1996 appropriations act for the Department of Education to develop a fourth grade test.

Information provided by the department indicates that \$1,433 million of the appropriation will be used to award a contract to develop and administer the test and the remaining \$6,000 will be used for printing, postage, and office supplies. In addition, the department also received \$500,000 in federal grants for start-up costs to the conduct initial meetings with educators, parents, and minority groups regarding the contents of the test.

The department further estimates, and OLS concurs, that the enactment of the 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 standardized commercial achievement tests after the fourth grade test is available.

The department estimates that the annual cost of administering the fourth grade test will be comparable to the annual cost of administering the eight and eleventh grade tests. These costs are approximately \$1.8 million annually per test.