Establishes School Funding Formula Evaluation Task Force.

Introduced Pending Technical Review by Legislative Counsel.
AN ACT establishing the School Funding Formula Evaluation Task Force.

BE IT ENACTED by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:

1. a. There is established the School Funding Formula Evaluation Task Force. The purpose of the task force shall be to study, evaluate, and assess the provision of State school aid pursuant to the “School Funding Reform Act of 2008,” P.L.2007, c.260 (C.18A:7F-43 et al.).

b. The task force shall consist of seven members, as follows:

(1) the Commissioner of Education or a designee; and
(2) six public members, each of whom shall have educational experience and expertise in education and municipal finance and school budgeting. Two of the members shall be appointed by the Senate President, two of the members shall be appointed by the Speaker of the General Assembly, one shall be appointed by the Minority Leader of the Senate, and one shall be appointed by the Minority Leader of the General Assembly.

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

d. The task force shall organize as soon as practicable, but no later than 30 days following the appointment of its members. The task force shall choose a chairperson from among its members and shall appoint a secretary who need not be a member of the task force.

e. (1) The task force shall hold meetings at the request of the chairperson and shall hold a minimum of three public meetings, which shall each be held in the northern, central, and southern regions of the State. The meetings may take place in-person or through remote means. It shall be the purpose of the public meetings to seek input and gather testimony on the effects of the State’s current school funding formula and potential areas for improvement within the formula from education stakeholders including, but not limited to, education finance experts, school leaders, school business officials, school board members, and members of the public.

(2) During meetings of the task force, the Department of Education shall make available to the members of the task force and to the public the data inputs and calculations used by the department in formulating State school aid for all school districts

f. The Department of Education shall provide such stenographic, clerical, and other administrative assistants, and such professional staff as the task force requires to carry out its work. The task force also shall be entitled to call to its assistance and avail itself of the services of the employees of any State, county, or municipal department, board, bureau, commission, or agency as it may require and as may be available for its purposes.

2. It shall be the duty of the task force to study the effectiveness of, and provide recommendations on potentially improving, various aspects of the “School Funding Reform Act of 2008,” P.L.2007, c.260 (C.18A:7F-43 et al.), including, but not limited to:
   a. the manner in which school district adequacy budgets and local shares are calculated;
   b. the current methodology of measuring and weighting at-risk students and students with limited English proficiency and the impacts on the educational outcomes of those students;
   c. the weights applied to students in different grade levels, as well as those applied to students enrolled in county vocational school districts;
   d. the current methodology used to calculate the geographic cost adjustment;
   e. the use of the census-based funding methodology used in the formula for determining the amount of State aid a school district receives to educate its special education population and the effects of potentially employing different methodologies;
   f. the provision of extraordinary special education aid and the cost thresholds used as the bases for reimbursement of extraordinary special education costs;
   g. the methodologies used to calculate security categorical aid and transportation aid; and
   h. the impact that the reallocation of State school aid pursuant to P.L.2018, c.67 (C.18A:7F-67 et al.) had on school districts’ finances.

3. The task force shall issue a final report detailing its findings and recommendations to the Governor, and to the Legislature pursuant to section 2 of P.L.1991, c.164 (C.52:14-19.1) no later than one year after the organization of the task force. The report shall be posted in a prominent location on the Internet website of the Department of Education.
4. This act shall take effect immediately, and shall expire 30
days after task force issues its final report.

STATEMENT

This bill establishes the School Funding Formula Evaluation
Task Force. The purpose of the task force is to study, evaluate, and
assess the provision of State school aid pursuant to the “School
Funding Reform Act of 2008” (SFRA). The task force will consist
of seven members, including: the Commissioner of Education or a
designee; and six public members, each of whom shall have
educational experience and expertise in education and municipal
finance and school budgeting. Two of the members will be
appointed by the Senate President, two members will be appointed
by the Speaker of the General Assembly, and the Minority Leaders
of the Senate and General Assembly will each appoint one member.
Under the bill, the duty of the task force is to study the
effectiveness of, and provide recommendations on potentially
improving, various aspects of the SFRA including, but not limited
to:

- the manner in which school district adequacy budgets and
  local shares are calculated;
- the current methodology of measuring and weighting at-risk
  students and students with limited English proficiency and
  the impact on the educational outcomes of those students;
- the weights applied to students in different grade levels, as
  well as those applied to students enrolled in county
  vocational school districts;
- the current methodology used to calculate the geographic
  cost adjustment;
- the formula’s use of the census-based funding methodology
  for determining the amount of State aid a school district
  receives to educate its special education population and the
  effects of potentially employing different methodologies;
- the provision of extraordinary special education aid and the
  cost thresholds used as the bases for reimbursement of
  extraordinary special education costs;
- the methodologies used to calculate security categorical aid
  and transportation aid; and
- the impact that the reallocation of State school aid pursuant
to P.L.2018, c.67, commonly referred to as “S-2,” had on
  school districts’ finances.

The bill requires that the task force will issue a final report
detailing its findings and recommendations to the Governor, and to
the Legislature, no later than one year after the organization of the
task force. The report will be posted in a prominent location on the
Internet website of the Department of Education.