

SENATE BUDGET AND APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

STATEMENT TO

SENATE COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE FOR SENATE, No. 2647

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DATED: JUNE 24, 2024

The Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee reports favorably Senate Bill No. 2647 SCS.

This committee substitute establishes the Office of Learning Equity and Academic Recovery in the Department of Education. The purpose of the office is to promote student literacy and advance learning equity through academic recovery practices. Personnel for the office are to be selected by the Commissioner of Education, and the leadership of the office is to directly advise the commissioner on these matters.

The committee substitute requires the office to establish guidelines as necessary to effectuate the duties of this office, which include:

(1) improving the capacity of the department to make data-driven decisions regarding literacy and learning equity policies by identifying, compiling, and analyzing data collected by the department and other reputable data sources that could improve the department's understanding of the factors that impact reading, English-Language Arts, and other performance metrics of students;

(2) coordinating resources within the department to promote the implementation of effective literacy and learning acceleration policies. These efforts may include recommending strategies for improving cohesion across all current and future literacy initiatives and providing expertise in analyzing current and future policy initiatives to ensure considerations for improving student literacy and closing academic achievement gaps experienced by students of color, low-income students, and students with disabilities;

(3) conducting research on State and national best practices in the areas of literacy, learning equity, and learning acceleration, and providing subject matter expertise that informs future policy decisions in these areas;

(4) supporting school districts in developing and implementing best practices, including the use of high-quality instructional materials, for improving elementary literacy and academic recovery through research, data analysis, stakeholder engagement, and other appropriate methods;

(5) supporting the department in seeking out opportunities and leading efforts to obtain funding, professional development, and other policy supports that promote literacy and learning equity; and

(6) any other duties as deemed necessary by the commissioner.

The committee substitute provides that the office is to be funded by any combination of State or federal funds, in accordance with the requirements of any federal funds.

Finally, the committee substitute provides that two years following the establishment of the office, the commissioner is to conduct a review of office operations. The review is to evaluate the success of the office in carrying out its duties, and is to include recommendations for improving the organization and administration of the office to enhance the department's capacity to promote student literacy and learning equity.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The Office of Legislative Services (OLS) concludes that this bill would result in an annual State expenditure increase for the establishment and operation of the Office of Learning Equity and Academic Recovery. The expenditure increase would be primarily derived from the payment of salaries and benefits to staff.

The OLS estimates that annual staffing costs for the office would range from \$260,000, assuming the payment of salaries and benefits is for just a chief administrator position, to \$650,000, assuming a chief administrator and three additional staff members are hired.

The OLS determines there would also be additional indeterminate annual costs for other operating expenses of the new office.