ASSEMBLY, No. 173

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

220th LEGISLATURE

PRE-FILED FOR INTRODUCTION IN THE 2022 SESSION

Sponsored by:
Assemblywoman LINDA S. CARTER
District 22 (Middlesex, Somerset and Union)
Assemblywoman VERLINA REYNOLDS-JACKSON
District 15 (Hunterdon and Mercer)

Co-Sponsored by:
Assemblyman Giblin

SYNOPSIS
Establishes School Connectivity Grant Program to expand access to online instruction for economically disadvantaged students; makes appropriation.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT
Introduced Pending Technical Review by Legislative Counsel.
AN ACT establishing the School Connectivity Grant Program, supplementing chapter 6 of Title 18A of the New Jersey Statutes, and making an appropriation.

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

1. a. There is established in the Department of Education the “School Connectivity Grant Program” to provide funds to school districts, charter schools, and renaissance schools to expand access to online instruction for economically disadvantaged students. The grant program shall award grants to school districts, charter schools, and renaissance schools to defray the costs, either in whole or in part, associated with purchasing a qualifying reserve of online instruction equipment, as set forth in subsection c. of this section.

b. A school district, charter school, or renaissance school may apply to the department for a grant. The grants shall be awarded in amounts determined by the Commissioner of Education. When awarding grants, the commissioner shall give preference to applicants with the largest number of students who lack access to online instruction.

c. To qualify for a grant, a school district, charter school, or renaissance school shall agree to purchase and maintain a reserve of one piece of online instruction equipment for every 12 students who were enrolled in the school district, charter school, or renaissance school during the previous school year. For the purposes of this section, one piece of online instruction equipment shall include:

1) one connected device; and
2) one Wi-Fi hotspot, or the provision of mobile broadband Internet access service.

d. Notwithstanding any provision of P.L.1968, c.410 (C.52:14B-1 et seq.), or any other law to the contrary, the commissioner may adopt, immediately upon filing with the Office of Administrative Law and no later than the 90th day after the effective date of this act, such rules and regulations as the commissioner deems necessary to implement the provisions of this act, which regulations shall be effective for a period not to exceed 12 months. The regulations shall, at a minimum, set forth the requirements for application submissions, the criteria for application selections, and the eligible uses of grant funds. The regulations shall thereafter be amended, adopted, or readopted by the commissioner in accordance with the provisions of P.L.1968, c.410 (C.52:14B-1 et seq.).

e. As used in this section:

“Connected device” means a laptop computer, tablet computer, or similar device that is capable of connecting to broadband Internet access service, either by receiving such service directly or through the use of Wi-Fi.
A173 CARTER, REYNOLDS-JACKSON

“Mobile broadband Internet access service” means a mass-market retail service by wire or radio that provides the capability to transmit data to and receive data from all or substantially all Internet endpoints, including any capabilities that are incidental to and enable the operation of the communications service, but excluding dial-up Internet access service.

“Online instruction equipment” means the equipment necessary for one student to participate in online instruction services at locations other than a school, and includes a connected device, Wi-Fi hotspot, and mobile broadband Internet access service.

“Wi-Fi hotspot” means a device that is capable of receiving mobile broadband Internet access service and sharing such service with another device through the use of Wi-Fi.

2. There is appropriated $2,000,000 from the General Fund to the Department of Education for the “School Connectivity Grant Program.”

3. This act shall take effect immediately.

STATEMENT

This bill establishes the “School Connectivity Grant Program” within the Department of Education to provide funds to certain public schools to expand access to online instruction for economically disadvantaged students.

Under the grant program, the department would award grants to school districts, charter schools, and renaissance schools to defray the costs of purchasing a qualifying stockpile of online instruction equipment. Specifically, any grant recipient would be required to purchase and maintain a reserve of one piece of online instruction equipment for every 12 students who were enrolled in the school district, charter school, or renaissance school during the previous school year. For the purposes of this reserve, one piece of online instruction would include (1) one connected device (e.g., a laptop or tablet computer); and (2) one Wi-Fi hotspot, or the provision of mobile broadband Internet access service.

Any school district, charter school, or renaissance school may apply to the department for a grant. The grants would be awarded in amounts determined by the Commissioner of Education. When awarding these grants, the commissioner would be required to give preference to applicants with the largest number of students who lack access to online instruction.

The bill authorizes the commissioner to adopt emergency regulations within three months of the bill’s effective date to effectuate the purposes of the grant program. At a minimum, these regulations would be required to set forth the requirements for
application submissions, the criteria for application selections, and
the eligible uses of financial assistance.

The bill also appropriated $2,000,000 from the General Fund to
the department to defray the costs of the grant program.