

ASSEMBLY, No. 5313

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

220th LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED MARCH 20, 2023

Sponsored by:

Assemblywoman AURA K. DUNN

District 25 (Morris and Somerset)

SYNOPSIS

Directs Commissioner of Education to develop guidelines on outdoor education opportunities.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

As introduced.



1 AN ACT concerning public school curriculum and supplementing
2 chapter 35 of Title 18A of the New Jersey Statutes.

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

6
7 1. a. The Commissioner of Education shall develop guidelines
8 to incorporate outdoor education opportunities in the public school
9 curriculum. The guidelines shall identify:

10 (1) ways to create and expand outdoor learning opportunities for
11 students, including field trips; and

12 (2) resources and training opportunities for public school
13 teachers on outdoor learning protocols and best practices.

14 b. Each board of education shall be encouraged, to the greatest
15 extent practicable and subject to available funding, to incorporate
16 the guidelines developed pursuant to subsection a. of this section as
17 part of the curriculum for the district's elementary and secondary
18 school students.

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20 2. This act shall take effect immediately and shall first apply to
21 the first full school year following the date of enactment.

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24 STATEMENT

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26 This bill directs the Commissioner of Education to develop
27 guidelines to incorporate outdoor education opportunities in the
28 public school curriculum. The guidelines are required to identify:

29 (1) ways to create and expand outdoor learning opportunities,
30 including field trips, for students; and

31 (2) resources and training opportunities for public school
32 teachers on outdoor learning protocols and best practices.

33 The bill further provides that each board of education is
34 encouraged, to the greatest extent practicable and subject to
35 available funding, to incorporate the guidelines as part of the
36 curriculum for the district's elementary and secondary school
37 students.

38 Outdoor learning provides an opportunity for school districts,
39 parents, and local communities to proactively combat the impact of
40 both Covid-related learning loss and mental health challenges
41 experienced by the State's youth. A recent study of American
42 children reports that parents of children eight to 12 years old said
43 that their children spend three times as many hours with computers
44 and televisions each week as they do playing outside. Further,
45 according to mental health professionals, the rates of depression and
46 anxiety observed in young people are soaring. In December 2021,
47 Surgeon-General Vivek Murthy declared that the United States had
48 entered a "youth mental health crisis." Experts know that exposure

1 to nature can help relieve depression and anxiety, and even help
2 heal trauma. Multiple studies show that spending time outdoors has
3 positive effects on physical and mental health. For young people in
4 particular, nature exposure can boost concentration, improve social
5 skills and even help them perform better in school. It is the
6 sponsor's belief that providing increased outdoor education
7 opportunities will contribute in positive ways to students' physical
8 health, mental health, and academic outcomes.