

# ASSEMBLY, No. 5618

## STATE OF NEW JERSEY 220th LEGISLATURE

INTRODUCED JUNE 20, 2023

**Sponsored by:**

**Assemblywoman CAROL A. MURPHY**

**District 7 (Burlington)**

**SYNOPSIS**

Establishes grant program in DOE for school districts to implement animal therapy programs.

**CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT**

As introduced.



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1 AN ACT establishing a grant program in the Department of  
2 Education for school district animal therapy programs and  
3 supplementing chapter 6 of Title 18A of the New Jersey Statutes.  
4

5 **BE IT ENACTED** *by the Senate and General Assembly of the State*  
6 *of New Jersey:*  
7

8 1. a. The Commissioner of Education shall establish a grant  
9 program to provide funding to school districts seeking to offer the  
10 services of therapy animals in their wellness centers or student  
11 counseling offices.

12 b. A school district that seeks to participate in the program shall  
13 submit an application to the commissioner. The application shall  
14 include: how the district plans to use therapy animals to promote  
15 student wellness; proof of a school district policy which provides  
16 guidelines that protect the health and safety of the students and  
17 staff, as well as the therapy animals; and such other information as  
18 deemed appropriate by the commissioner.

19 c. The commissioner shall annually select two school districts in  
20 each of the southern, central, and northern regions of the State to  
21 participate in the program and shall seek a cross section of school  
22 districts from urban, suburban, and rural areas of the State. The  
23 commissioner shall establish the amount for each grant that is  
24 approved, based upon the availability of funds.

25 d. A school district that receives a grant under the program shall  
26 permit a teacher employed in the school district to use the teacher's  
27 own therapy animal for the program, provided that the teacher has  
28 been approved to do so by the principal. Funding provided to the  
29 school district under the grant program may be used to pay any  
30 training fees for the teacher and the teacher's therapy animal  
31 necessary to meet the school district's requirements for providing  
32 therapy animal services.

33 e. The commissioner shall provide school districts with guidance  
34 regarding the use of therapy animals in schools including:  
35 recommended training requirements for therapy animal handlers;  
36 recommended measures to evaluate the health and appropriate  
37 behavior of therapy animals; and insurance issues relevant to having  
38 therapy animals on school district property.

39 f. Each school district that receives a grant under the program  
40 shall prepare and submit to the commissioner annually a report on  
41 its experience with, and the effects of, the program. The report  
42 shall include, to the greatest extent feasible, quantifiable measures  
43 of the impact of therapy animals on student well-being and learning.

44 g. The commissioner shall submit annually a report to the  
45 Governor, and to the Legislature pursuant to section 2 of P.L.1991,  
46 c.164 (C.52:14-19.1), containing information on the implementation  
47 of the grant program. The report shall include relevant information

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1 from the reports submitted to the commissioner by the grant  
2 recipients pursuant to subsection e. of this section.

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4 2. This act shall take effect immediately.

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**STATEMENT**

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9 This bill requires the Commissioner of Education to establish a  
10 grant program to provide funding to school districts that seek to  
11 offer the services of therapy animals in their wellness centers or  
12 student counseling offices.

13 Under the bill, a school district seeking to participate in the  
14 program is required to submit an application to the commissioner.  
15 The application is to include: how the district plans to use therapy  
16 animals to promote student wellness; proof of a school district  
17 policy which provides guidelines that protect the health and safety  
18 of the students and staff, as well as the therapy animals; and such  
19 other information as deemed appropriate by the commissioner.

20 The commissioner is to select two school districts in each of the  
21 southern, central, and northern regions of the State to participate in  
22 the program and is to seek a cross section of school districts from  
23 urban, suburban, and rural areas of the State. The commissioner is  
24 required to establish the amount for each grant, based upon the  
25 availability of funds.

26 A school district that receives a grant under the program is  
27 required to permit a teacher in the school district to use the  
28 teacher's own therapy animal for the program. The bill also  
29 provides that grant funding provided to the district may be used to  
30 pay any training fees for the teacher and the teacher's therapy  
31 animal necessary to meet the district's requirements for providing  
32 therapy animal services.

33 The commissioner is to provide districts with guidance regarding  
34 the use of therapy animals in schools including: recommended  
35 training requirements for therapy animal handlers; recommended  
36 measures to evaluate the health and appropriate behavior of therapy  
37 animals; and insurance issues relevant to having therapy animals on  
38 school district property.

39 School districts that participate in the program will report  
40 annually to the commissioner on their experience with, and the  
41 effects of, the program. Based on these reports, the commissioner  
42 will submit annually a report to the Governor and the Legislature on  
43 the implementation of the program.

44 According to the sponsor, the supportive, non-judgmental  
45 companionship provided by animals has been shown to provide a  
46 myriad of physiological and psychological benefits for students,  
47 including reduced feelings of stress and anxiety.