

CHAPTER 295

AN ACT concerning high school students and financial aid applications.

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

1. a. Beginning with the 2023-2024 grade 11 class, and for two school years thereafter, a board of education or a board of trustees of a charter school shall require a student, and the student's parent or guardian, if applicable, to complete and submit a financial aid application in a form prescribed by the Higher Education Student Assistance Authority as a prerequisite to the student receiving a high school diploma from a public high school or charter school unless a waiver is submitted to the school district or charter school as set forth in subsection b. of this section.

b. (1) A student shall be exempt from the requirement in subsection a. of this section if the student or the student's parent or guardian submits to the school district or charter school a waiver form signed by the parent or guardian, or by the student if the student is at least 18 years of age, requesting the exemption from the requirement.

(2) If the student is under 18 years of age and a form signed by the parent or guardian cannot be reasonably obtained, the student's school counselor may authorize the waiver as permitted by regulations promulgated by the State Board of Education pursuant to subsection h. of this section.

c. The Executive Director of the Higher Education Student Assistance Authority, in consultation with the Commissioner of Education, shall provide resources for school districts, charter schools, parents, and students that include instructions on how to complete a financial aid application prescribed by the authority. The resources shall include webinars, presentations, guidance documents, and a list of available State and federal resources. The executive director of the authority shall make available such resources as are necessary directly to school counselors or other school employees who shall share the resources with students and with the students' parents or guardians.

d. Each school district and charter school shall annually notify students and the parents or guardians of the requirement established pursuant to this section.

e. No adverse action shall be taken by a board of education or a board of trustees of a charter school against any student due to a student's receipt of an exemption from the requirement to complete and submit a financial aid application pursuant to subsection b. of this section.

f. Nothing in this act shall be construed as requiring school counselors, or any other school employee, to assist students in completing the financial aid application. Nothing in this act shall be construed as creating a private right of action against the school district, charter school, or the State upon compliance or noncompliance with the provisions of this act.

g. The Executive Director of the Higher Education Student Assistance Authority shall make the resources listed in subsection c. of this section available to institutions of higher education in order to facilitate the delivery of technical assistance to area high schools.

h. The State Board of Education shall adopt, pursuant to the Administrative Procedure Act," P.L.1968, c.410 (C.52:14B-1 et seq.), rules and regulations necessary to carry out the provisions of this act.

i. The executive director of the authority shall prepare and issue to the Department of Education, and to the Legislature pursuant to section 2 of P.L.1991, c.164 (C.52:14-19.1), a report that includes the number of students that completed a financial aid form pursuant to subsection a. of this section, as well as the number of waivers submitted to school districts or

charter schools pursuant to subsection b. of this section no later than three years following the effective date of this act.

2. This act shall take effect immediately.

Approved January 16, 2024.