

ASSEMBLY, No. 1165

STATE OF NEW JERSEY 221st LEGISLATURE

PRE-FILED FOR INTRODUCTION IN THE 2024 SESSION

Sponsored by:

Assemblywoman CAROL A. MURPHY

District 7 (Burlington)

Assemblywoman MICHELE MATSIKLOUDIS

District 21 (Middlesex, Morris, Somerset and Union)

Co-Sponsored by:

Assemblyman Sampson and Assemblywoman Flynn

SYNOPSIS

Establishes pilot program in DOE to use therapy dogs in public elementary school wellness programs.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

Introduced Pending Technical Review by Legislative Counsel.



(Sponsorship Updated As Of: 12/19/2024)

A1165 MURPHY, MATSIKLOUDIS

2

1 **AN ACT** establishing a pilot program in the Department of
2 Education on the use of therapy dogs in public elementary school
3 wellness programs.
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 three-
9 year pilot program to assess the academic and health benefits
10 associated with the use of therapy dogs in public elementary school
11 wellness programs.

12 b. A school district that wants to participate in the pilot
13 program shall submit an application to the commissioner. The
14 application shall include, but need not be limited to: the number of
15 elementary schools in the school district; the number of students
16 enrolled in each elementary school; information on student
17 participation in wellness programs at each elementary school; and
18 information on how the school district plans to use therapy dogs to
19 promote student wellness.

20 c. The commissioner shall select two districts in each of the
21 southern, central, and northern regions of the State to participate in
22 the program and shall seek a cross section of school districts from
23 urban, suburban, and rural areas of the State.

24 d. The commission shall provide pilot districts with guidance
25 regarding the use of therapy dogs in schools including: examples of
26 activities that students may engage in with a therapy dog;
27 recommended training requirements for therapy dog handlers;
28 recommended measures to evaluate the health and appropriate
29 behavior of therapy dogs; and insurance issues relevant to having
30 therapy dogs on school district property.

31 e. No later than June 30 of the third school year following the
32 establishment of the pilot program, the commissioner shall submit
33 to the Governor, and to the Legislature pursuant to section 2 of
34 P.L.1991, c.164 (C:52:14-19.1), a report that evaluates the
35 effectiveness of the pilot program in improving the academic
36 performance and health outcomes of students in elementary schools.
37

38 2. This act shall take effect immediately.
39
40

41 **STATEMENT**
42

43 This bill establishes a three-year pilot program to assess the
44 academic and health benefits associated with the use of therapy
45 dogs in public elementary school wellness programs. A therapy
46 dog is a dog that has been trained, evaluated, and registered with a
47 handler to provide animal assisted therapy and other animal assisted
48 activities within a school or other facility. Some research suggests

1 that the use of therapy dogs in schools is associated with
2 improvements in school attendance, confidence, motivation, and
3 reading and writing skills.

4 Under the bill, a school district that wants to participate in the
5 pilot program is required to submit an application to the
6 commissioner. The application is required to include, but need not
7 be limited to: the number of elementary schools in the school
8 district; the number of students enrolled in each elementary school;
9 information on student participation in wellness programs at each
10 elementary school; and information on how the school district plans
11 to use therapy dogs to promote student wellness.

12 The commissioner will select two districts in each of the
13 southern, central, and northern regions of the State to participate in
14 the program and will seek a cross section of school districts from
15 urban, suburban, and rural areas of the State.

16 The commission will provide pilot districts with guidance
17 regarding the use of therapy dogs in schools including: examples of
18 activities that students may engage in with a therapy dog;
19 recommended training requirements for therapy dog handlers;
20 recommended measures to evaluate the health and appropriate
21 behavior of therapy dogs; and insurance issues relevant to having
22 therapy dogs on school district property.

23 No later than June 30 of the third school year following the
24 establishment of the pilot program, the commissioner will submit to
25 the Governor and to the Legislature a report that evaluates the
26 effectiveness of the pilot program in improving the academic
27 performance and health outcomes of students in elementary schools.