

**SENATE, No. 1253**

**STATE OF NEW JERSEY**  
**221st LEGISLATURE**

PRE-FILED FOR INTRODUCTION IN THE 2024 SESSION

**Sponsored by:**

**Senator JAMES BEACH**

**District 6 (Burlington and Camden)**

**Senator ANTHONY M. BUCCO**

**District 25 (Morris and Passaic)**

**Co-Sponsored by:**

**Senator McKnight**

**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: 2/12/2024)**

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.  
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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.