

SENATE, No. 1777

STATE OF NEW JERSEY
221st LEGISLATURE

PRE-FILED FOR INTRODUCTION IN THE 2024 SESSION

Sponsored by:

Senator ANGELA V. MCKNIGHT

District 31 (Hudson)

SYNOPSIS

Establishes three-year pilot program for school-based mentoring in public schools located within 1,000 feet of gunfire.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

Introduced Pending Technical Review by Legislative Counsel.



S1777 MCKNIGHT

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1 AN ACT establishing a three-year pilot program for the
2 implementation of school-based mentoring in certain school
3 districts and supplementing chapter 6 of Title 18A of the New
4 Jersey Statutes.

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

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9 1. a. As used in this section, “crisis zone” means an area
10 within 1,000 feet of school property where gunfire occurred in the
11 prior school year.

12 b. The Commissioner of Education shall establish a three-year
13 pilot program for the implementation of school-based mentoring in
14 public schools located in a crisis zone. The purpose of the pilot
15 program shall be to build emotional resilience and improve the
16 social-emotional and behavioral skills of young children in grades
17 kindergarten through three who are at risk for mental health
18 disorders and substance abuse. The program is designed to improve
19 the task orientation, behavior control, assertiveness, and peer social
20 skills of participating students.

21 c. The commissioner shall select the Jersey City School
22 District and six additional school districts with schools located in a
23 crisis zone to participate in the pilot program. The six additional
24 school districts selected by the commissioner shall include two
25 districts in each of the southern, central, and northern regions of the
26 State.

27 d. The commissioner shall adopt a curriculum for the program
28 that includes a series of hierarchically-ordered skill trainings in
29 weekly, 25 minute one-on-one sessions. The curriculum shall
30 address the: monitoring of one’s own and others’ emotions;
31 building resilience and gaining effective coping skills to deal with
32 complex emotions; and skills for maintaining control and
33 equilibrium.

34 e. The commissioner is authorized to make grants to
35 participating school districts in such amounts as the commissioner
36 shall determine to assist the districts in the implementation of the
37 pilot program.

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39 2. It shall be the responsibility of a participating school to:

40 a. designate and train three to five mentors to facilitate the
41 program. Each mentor shall be assigned to work with no more than
42 20 students;

43 b. identify students for the program who have problems in at
44 least two of the following areas: behavioral development; social-
45 emotional development; and on-task learning abilities in the school
46 setting;

47 c. use the curriculum approved by the commissioner pursuant
48 to section 1 of this act to deliver the program. The curriculum shall

1 be offered slowly and sequentially in order to allow the student to
2 absorb and understand the lesson and practice the new skills in the
3 classroom setting; and

4 d. evaluate participating students at the beginning, mid-point,
5 and completion of the curriculum in each of the following areas:
6 recent disciplinary referrals and actions; task orientation; behavior
7 control; assertiveness versus withdrawn behavior; and peer social
8 skills.

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10 3. Upon the conclusion of the pilot program, the commissioner
11 shall report to the Governor, and to the Legislature pursuant to
12 section 2 of P.L.1991, c.164 (C.52:14-19.1), on the feasibility of
13 implementing the program on a Statewide basis.

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15 4. This act shall take effect immediately.

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STATEMENT

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20 This bill directs the Commissioner of Education to establish a
21 three-year pilot program for the implementation of school-based
22 mentoring in public schools located in a crisis zone. The purpose of
23 the pilot program is to improve the social-emotional and behavioral
24 skills of young children in grades kindergarten through three who
25 are at risk for mental health disorders and substance abuse. Under
26 the bill, the commissioner will select the Jersey City School District
27 and 6 additional school districts with schools located in a crisis
28 zone to participate in the pilot program. A crisis zone is defined in
29 the bill as an area within 1,000 feet of school property where
30 gunfire occurred in the prior school year.

31 The commissioner is directed to adopt a curriculum for the
32 program that includes a series of hierarchically-ordered skill
33 trainings in weekly, 25 minute one-on-one sessions. The
34 curriculum must address the: monitoring of one's own and others'
35 emotions; building resilience and gaining effective coping skills to
36 deal with complex emotions; and skills for maintaining control and
37 equilibrium. The commissioner is authorized to make grants to
38 participating districts in such amounts as the commissioner
39 determines to assist the school districts in the implementation of the
40 pilot program.

41 Under the bill, a participating school must:

- 42 • designate and train three to five mentors to facilitate the
43 program;
- 44 • identify students for the program who have problems in
45 certain developmental areas;
- 46 • use the curriculum approved by the commissioner to
47 deliver the program; and

S1777 MCKNIGHT

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- 1 • evaluate participating students at the beginning, mid-
2 point, and completion of the curriculum.
3 This bill is modeled on the Rochester Resilience Project, which
4 has shown promising results in improving the emotional regulation
5 of at-risk children through the provision of targeted mentoring
6 instruction.