SYNOPSIS

Requires Commissioner of Education to establish three-year “Bridge Year Pilot Program” for certain students who were impacted by public health state of emergency caused by coronavirus disease 2019.

CURRENT VERSION OF TEXT

Substitute as adopted by the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee.
AN ACT requiring the Commissioner of Education to establish the Bridge Year Pilot Program.

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

1. As used in this act, “host high school” means the high school that a student, who pursues a bridge year pursuant to the provisions of this act, attended as a junior in high school.

2. a. The Commissioner of Education shall establish a three-year “Bridge Year Pilot Program,” under which each school district with a high school shall offer students in the graduating class of 2021 and the graduating class of 2022 the opportunity to pursue a bridge year during the year immediately following their senior year of high school, in accordance with the provisions of this act. The purpose of the pilot program shall be to provide participating students an additional year to address learning loss and missed opportunities in extracurricular activities, including spring sports programs, as a result of the public health state of emergency caused by the coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic.

A nonpublic school may elect to participate in the Bridge Year Pilot Program.

Under the pilot program, each high school in a school district shall designate a school staff member as a bridge year liaison to serve as the school’s central point of contact for students interested in pursuing a bridge year pursuant to this act and for students participating in a bridge year, as well as for county colleges and four-year institutions of higher education in which students may be enrolled in academic courses under the pilot program. Nothing in this subsection shall be construed to require a school district to hire an individual to serve as a bridge year liaison.

b. A student in the graduating class of 2021 or the graduating class of 2022 who has met all applicable high school graduation requirements by the end of the senior year of high school may elect to pursue a bridge year. A student who intends to pursue a bridge year shall notify his host high school’s bridge year liaison of that intent no later than the first day of the second semester of the student’s senior year of high school. The host high school shall permit students participating in the bridge year to participate in graduation ceremonies with the graduating class of 2021 or class of 2022, as applicable, and to receive their diplomas. Nothing in this section shall be construed to require a student to pursue a bridge year. To be eligible to participate in the bridge year program, a student shall be 19 years of age or younger and shall not turn 20 years of age at any time during the bridge year, except that a classified student shall be eligible to participate if the student will
turn 20 years of age during the bridge year due to services provided pursuant to the student’s individualized education program.

c. (1) A student pursuing a bridge year shall remain enrolled in the host high school while participating in the Bridge Year Pilot Program. A bridge year liaison shall develop, in consultation with a student pursuing a bridge year, an individual learning plan for the student. The individual learning plan shall define academic and co-curricular goals for the bridge year and detail activities and strategies for accomplishing those goals including, but not limited to, counseling, academic support, coursework, and co-curricular or athletic participation. During each of the fall and spring semesters of the student’s bridge year, the student shall take between nine and 12 credits at the host high school if an institution of higher education offers courses at that location, the county college that serves the county of the host high school, or a combination thereof. The credits taken by a student pursuant to this paragraph shall together form a coordinated sequence of academic content that prepares the student for high-skill, high wage, or in-demand occupations. At the conclusion of each semester of the bridge year, the host high school shall update the student’s high school transcript to reflect any high school credits earned during the bridge year. For the purpose of enrolling in college credits pursuant to this paragraph, the student shall be considered a non-matriculated student of the county college. A student who pursues a bridge year and participates in a spring sport sanctioned by the New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association pursuant to section 3 of this act shall enroll in at least nine but less than 12 credits in each of the fall and spring semesters during the student’s bridge year.

(2) The student shall maintain a grade point average of 2.0 in order to remain in the Bridge Year Pilot Program. The county college or other institution of higher education which a student pursuing a bridge year is attending shall report at least quarterly to the bridge year liaison at a student’s host high school, in a manner specified by the student’s individualized learning plan developed pursuant to paragraph (1) of this subsection, concerning the student’s academic progress and performance.

(3) A county college shall charge students participating in a bridge year pursuant to this act a maximum of $145 per credit inclusive of all fees, except that fees associated with specific courses or with the use of on-campus science laboratories may be charged at a maximum of $45 per course.

(4) A student may take any portion of the credits required pursuant to paragraph (1) of this subsection at the student’s host high school, in the event that the county college which the student is attending offers courses at the host high school. During a semester of the bridge year, a student may take three credits offered by a four-year institution of higher education at any high school in the State or at any other location to fulfill the student’s credit
requirement. The four-year institution shall charge the student no
more than is permitted pursuant to paragraph (3) of this subsection
and shall report to the student’s bridge year liaison as required
pursuant to paragraph (2) of this subsection.

d. Notwithstanding the requirement established under the
Tuition Aid Grant Program pursuant to N.J.S.18A:71B-20 and
under the New Jersey Student Tuition Assistance Reward
Scholarship (NJSTARS) Program pursuant to section 5 of P.L.2004,
c.59 (C.18A:71B-85), to be enrolled as a full-time student in a
course of study or a curriculum leading to a degree or certificate, a
student pursuing a bridge year pursuant to this act shall be eligible
for a tuition aid grant or scholarship under the Tuition Aid Grant
Program or the NJSTARS Program if the student meets all other
applicable eligibility requirements.

e. A public institution of higher education shall, pursuant to
P.L.2007, c.175 (C.18A:62-46 et seq.), accept all applicable credits
that a student, who completed a bridge year pursuant to this act,
earned during the bridge year. An independent institution of higher
education in the State may elect to accept the credits that a student
earned during the bridge year.

f. In the event that a student initially decides to pursue a bridge
year in the fall semester but does not continue the bridge year in the
spring semester, the student’s host high school shall release all final
transcripts and other records as necessary and as may be requested.
A student who decides not to continue the bridge year in the spring
semester shall not be eligible to participate in a spring sports
program or extracurricular activities pursuant to this act.

3. a. A student who pursues a bridge year pursuant to this act
shall be permitted to participate in a spring sport sanctioned by the
New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association and
extracurricular activities at the student’s host high school. A
student pursuing a bridge year shall not be eligible to participate in
any fall or winter sport sanctioned by the association. A student
participating in a spring sport or extracurricular activity during his
bridge year shall pay applicable student athletics and activities fees
and be subject to the host high school’s student code of conduct,
athletic code of conduct, and any other applicable codes, rules or
policies that other students participating in the spring sport or
extracurricular activity at the host high school are required to
follow. Notwithstanding the provisions any law, rule, or regulation
to the contrary, an insurer doing business in the State and issuing
liability insurance policies to school districts shall provide coverage
for students participating in a spring sport or extracurricular activity
pursuant to this act, as part of a school district’s liability insurance
policy.

This section shall not be construed to supersede the governance
or eligibility rules applicable to a particular extracurricular activity,
except as otherwise provided in subsection c. of this section. This section shall also not be construed to supersede the governance or eligibility rules, which are established by a local, state, or national organization with bona fide authority over a particular extracurricular activity, that are applicable to that activity, except as otherwise provided in subsection c. of this section.

b. In order to participate in a spring sport during the bridge year, the student shall meet the current age participation requirements of the New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association. The student shall participate in the spring sport at the student’s host high school and shall not be permitted to transfer to a different high school, even in the event that the student experiences a change in residence.

c. In the event that a student pursuing a bridge year elects to participate in a spring sport, the association shall be requested by the student to waive the eight semester rule under which a student is not eligible for high school athletics after the expiration of eight consecutive semesters following the student’s entrance into the ninth grade.

d. The association shall confer with the National Collegiate Athletic Association or any other athletic association, conference, or group or organization with authority over intercollegiate athletics to ensure that any student participating in a spring sport during a bridge year will be eligible to declare as a college recruit during the bridge year and participate in intercollegiate athletics.

4. a. The State Board of Education shall promulgate regulations pursuant to the “Administrative Procedure Act,” P.L.1968, c.410 (C.52:14B-1 et seq.), necessary to effectuate the provisions of this act.

b. The Higher Education Student Assistance Authority shall promulgate regulations, pursuant to the “Administrative Procedure Act,” P.L.1968, c.410 (C.52:14B-1 et seq.), necessary to effectuate the provisions of subsection d. of section 2 of this act.

5. This act shall take effect immediately.