



NJPSA Position Statement on S-2383 (Sarlo)

Requires Commissioner of Education to establish three-year "Bridge Year Pilot Program" for students graduating high school in 2021 and 2022 who were impacted by public health state of emergency caused by coronavirus disease 2019.

Good afternoon. Thank you for the opportunity to share the perspective of the statewide membership of the New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association. NJPSA represents over 7,000 building level school leaders in New Jersey's public schools.

Our members are grateful for the leadership and support of the N.J. Legislature in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This crisis is like none we have confronted before, and it is without question that our students been impacted academically, experientially and socially, as a result of this virus. While some have lost opportunities far more than others, there is no doubt each and every one of New Jersey's students, has been impacted.

In this context, NJPSA appreciates the positive, student-centered intent of S-2383, to provide students who lost the opportunity to engage in extracurricular, educational and sports programs due to the shuttering of school buildings caused by COVID-19, an opportunity to make up for some of those lost opportunities. We understand that these activities are an important part of the high school experience and may play a role in a student's future. Everyone at this hearing today agrees – what these kids have missed out on is unfair.

Yet, our members also appreciate the fact that we in the school community cannot restore all of these experiences to all our students. Every spring athlete in the nation lost their spring playing season, so on that sad note, all spring high school athletes are being considered in the same context by higher education institutions. Additionally, once students graduate from high school to pursue higher education, the military or employment, they will have moved beyond this point in time toward their future goals. **We do support this bill's opening of opportunities for students to attend community college at a reduced tuition rate, particularly in this challenging economic time.** This is a forward step in our collective recovery.

However, for the Classes of 2021 and 2022 who might consider the opportunities of this pilot program, **NJPSA asks you to consider the following issues:**

- **Fiscal Impact**

We know that the fiscal impact of COVID-19 on our state and on our public schools is significant, as yet fully unknown in scope, and will impact schools' ability to fund programs, including sports and extracurricular activities. High school athletics can be expensive, and are often supplemented by a student activity fee for participation. **Will Bridge Program students be required to pay such fees if other high school athletes do so? Furthermore, provisions would have to be made to have these (graduated) students included on the district's insurance policy.**



- **Global problem**

All students across the globe have been impacted by this pandemic. The closure of schools was not unique to New Jersey. Every student in the classes of 2021 and 2022 will be similarly situated. We believe that colleges will make appropriate accommodations and adjustments for this group of impacted students.

- **Perpetuating Unfairness and Lost Opportunities**

Our members note that high school athletics are about team building, school connection and the experience of playing on a high school team, not primarily recruitment. An unintended consequence of the bill is the potential displacement of younger high school students from a spot on the team during their high school years, particularly since schools will be unlikely to expand team size with the current fiscal challenges. **Our members also ask, can a student who chooses to seek a Bridge year be cut from the team after try-outs?** We do not believe that participation in the Bridge program should guarantee a team slot. The bill is silent on this point.

- **Physical and Emotional Differences: 19-year-old vs. 15 year-year-old**

Unquestionably, the range of development from the start of high school into that first year of college, both physically and emotionally is significant. NJPSA has serious concerns about resulting impacts of these differences with respect to physical injuries, but also the emotional mismatch between these two very different age groups of students, particularly since the Bridge student is unlikely to be an active part of the high school student body or school culture. **The bill should clarify that Bridge students are subject to the athletic code of the school/team, the student code of conduct and all school rules of the host school during their participation in the high school sports season.**

- **Transcripts**

Paragraph 2(f) restricts a county college or 4-year institution from releasing the student's transcripts as part of the student's application for admission to an institution of higher education. We suggest an amendment, "unless the student enrolled in the bridge year requests a transcript release in writing."

Thank you for your consideration of our recommendations.