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CHAPTER 41

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. 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 defer graduation from high school 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, but shall not issue diplomas to those students until the conclusion of the bridge year. 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 the fall semester of the student's bridge year, the student shall take between nine and 12 credits at the host high school, the county college that serves the county of the host high school, or a combination thereof. During the spring semester of the student's bridge year, the student shall take between nine and 12 credits at the county college that serves the county of the host high school. 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 less than 12 college credits, or otherwise be enrolled in a number of college credits as to not be considered a full-time college student, 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 individual 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) 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 Community College Opportunity Grant Program to be enrolled in a course of study or a curriculum leading to a degree or certificate and subject to the availability of funds in the annual appropriations act, a student pursuing a bridge year shall be eligible for a financial aid grant under the Community College Opportunity Grant 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 wintersport 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 of 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. For students participating in a spring sport pursuant to this act, the New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association shall be requested 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.

Approved June 26, 2020.

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