



New Jersey School Boards Association

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NJSBA Position Statement Senate Bill No. 3214 (Ruiz)

Requires Commissioner of Education to prepare learning loss report and report on public school operations during COVID-19 public health emergency.

The New Jersey School Boards Association (NJSBA), a federation of all the state's local school districts, appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback on S-3214. This legislation requires the NJ Commissioner of Education to prepare two reports on the impact of the COVID-19 public health emergency on public schooling – one on learning loss that identifies and quantifies the impact of the emergency on student academic outcomes, and a second one on the continuation of school services during the same period. The NJSBA supports the intent of S-3214 and commends the sponsor for her leadership on this critical issue.

Throughout 2020, the NJSBA has issued a series of reports on how the Coronavirus is changing education in New Jersey. The most recent report issued in October, entitled *Reopening Schools: Online Learning and the Digital Divide*, looks at the challenges facing school districts in delivering instruction remotely to all students during the pandemic and beyond. The report makes several recommendations for action by the state and local school districts to address the digital divide and online instruction.

One recommendation included in that report was for the development of a statewide report regarding student learning during the pandemic. Working with local districts, the NJ Department of Education should assess the level of student learning during the shutdown. Data should be collected to provide a clear, statewide picture of what happened during that period. The NJSBA believes that this study and report would be an important step toward developing a funded strategic plan to help address remediation. S-3214 takes that first important step and sets a framework for the assessment of student learning during the pandemic.

However, the NJSBA is also fully cognizant of the tremendous burden that has been placed on superintendents, building-level administrators, classroom teachers and support staff during these challenging times. School personnel and resources have been stretched to the limit as they attempt to provide students with a thorough and efficient education under unprecedented circumstances. Therefore, any new initiatives, however well-intentioned and potentially valuable, must take into consideration whether districts have the capacity to comply in a meaningful way. Most importantly, we must ensure that any additional requirements do not take precious time and resources away from what must remain our top priority during the public health emergency – advancing student learning and achievement while protecting the health and safety for both students and staff.

With those concerns in mind, the timing for developing the reports required under this legislation is critical. The data collection and submission efforts required of districts could place a significant administrative burden on school personnel at this point in time and interfere with their day-to-day responsibilities. Therefore, it may be appropriate to temporarily delay this worthy initiative until all districts have the time and capacity to engage in thoughtful and in-depth assessment of student learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. We respectfully urge the

Legislature to consider postponing final passage of this legislation until district staff are able to give it the time and attention it deserves.

Thanks you for your consideration of the NJSBA's position on this legislation. Any questions may be directed to Jonathan Pushman, NJSBA Director of Governmental Relations, at jpushman@njsba.org.