



Position Statement

Expressing Concerns

A-1181 (Jasey, Timberlake, Moen) & S-2054 (Turner, Singer)

Requires high school students to complete financial aid applications.

The New Jersey School Boards Association (NJSBA), a federation of all local school boards in the state, believes the authority for management of public schools should rest with local boards of education and State authority over school districts should not exceed the scope necessary to fulfill the constitutional mandate for a thorough and efficient system of free public education.

The NJSBA appreciates the sponsors' intentions with A-1181/S-2054, which would require all high school students to complete financial aid applications as a prerequisite to receiving a high school diploma. We support the goal of providing our students with an affordable pathway to postsecondary education that will prepare them for a successful career. However, the NJSBA has several concerns and suggestions outlined below. We thank the sponsors for their consideration.

- **A-1181/S-2054 imposes a new non-academic requirement to graduate from high school.** As a condition of receiving the high school diploma, A-1181 requires parents or the adult student to submit a financial aid form, unless a waiver is sought. This mandatory non-curricular requirement is unlike other similar non-curricular requirements to provide information. For instance, *N.J.S.A. 18A:36-27* requires the board of education of each school district and the appropriate school officials in each nonpublic school to provide a voter registration form, a summary of voter registration eligibility requirements, and material describing the role of a citizen and the importance of voting to each eligible high school pupil prior to the graduation date for the school year. *N.J.S.A. 18A:36-27* does not mandate that the student actually register to vote in order to graduate.

Similarly, A-1181/S-2054 should not require the filing of a financial aid form to graduate high school; it should only require the provision of information necessary to file the forms should the parent wish to do so. The NJSBA believes that any student who has satisfied state and local *academic* graduation requirements should receive a high school diploma.

- **FAFSA information is already required to be provided as part of the curriculum.** Under the NJ Student Learning Standards Career Readiness, Life Literacies, and Key Skills content area students are required to “Demonstrate an understanding of Free

Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) requirements to apply for postsecondary education.” ([9.2.12.CAP.11](#) June 2020 p. 42). Because districts are already required to ensure that students have an understanding of the FAFSA process as part of the curriculum, local districts should have the local option to require completion of the FAFSA as part of those standards, rather than requiring completing of the FAFSA as a separate statewide mandate.

- **Establish A-1181/S-2054 as a true pilot program.** The bill says that the requirement to complete the financial aid application begins with the juniors in the 2022-23 school years and for two more successive years. This language gives the appearance that the bill is intended to serve as a pilot program due to its limited duration. Not only are many pilot programs of limited duration but they also have a limited number of voluntary or required participants. The pilot program outlined in A-1181/S-2054 would apply to every district in the state, while pilot programs typically apply to a subset of interested districts before applying them more broadly. The NJSBA suggests that, should this bill move forward, that it be implemented as a *voluntary* pilot program, rather than a statewide mandate. Upon conclusion of such a pilot program, the Legislature can utilize any data collected to determine the efficacy of the program and whether it should be expanded to additional districts.
- **Consider Other Non-Mandatory Options.** Currently New Jersey has one of the highest FAFSA completion rates in the country, as it ranks sixth among all 51 states and Washington, D.C. Before establishing a statewide mandate to increase completion rates, all other options should be considered and implemented first. These include providing more information on financial aid programs to students; enhanced parental education and outreach; and training of school staff; and increase resources and assistance from the state.

For the reason cited herein, the NJSBA is unable to lend its support to A-1181/S-2054. The NJSBA thanks the sponsors and this committee for their consideration of these concerns. We remain committed to working with the sponsors on this well-intentioned bill as it advances through the legislative process.