§ 612. Liberty partnerships. 1. The commissioner shall award grants for the purpose of providing support services to students enrolled in public and non-public schools who are identified as having a high risk of dropping out of school. Such awards shall be made on a competitive basis to degree-granting institutions of higher education or consortia of degree-granting higher education institutions in cooperation with school districts and not-for-profit community-based organizations. In addition, in areas of the state where no degree-granting institution or consortium of degree-granting institutions of higher education can provide appropriate services to students, the commissioner may award grants to not-for-profit community-based organizations in cooperation with school districts.

a. All grant applications shall contain the following program elements:

(1) a program for identifying students who are at-risk of dropping out as measured by academic performance, attendance, discipline problems, and other factors affecting school performance including but not limited to teenage pregnancy or parenting, residence in a homeless shelter or temporary living arrangement, substance abuse, child abuse or neglect, or limited English proficiency;

(2) a program for encouraging the use of volunteers and facilitating parent involvement where possible and involvement of current or former liberty scholarship recipients as peer or mentor counselors in programs; and

(3) a program to provide for continuity of services throughout a student's progression through secondary school.

b. In awarding such grants, the commissioner shall give priority to applications that:

(1) provide services to school districts receiving an apportionment under subdivision twenty-five of section thirty-six hundred two of this chapter;

(2) provide services to schools identified by the commissioner as in need of assistance pursuant to the comprehensive assessment report;

(3) provide services to rural schools with students at risk;

(4) replicate model programs of demonstrated effectiveness, including

models that provide for small group partnerships with low student-staff ratios. The commissioner shall identify model programs with proven effectiveness and shall make such models available to grant applicants;

(5) demonstrate a high level of institutional commitment to programs in fields relevant to counseling and mentoring, including but not limited to education, social work, psychology and sociology and the extent to which such institution shall involve faculty members and graduate/professional students from such degree programs;

(6) the need for such services in the area the institution proposes to serve; and

(7) the degree to which the institution proposes to cooperate with school districts and not-for-profit community based organizations to provide services and insure continuity of such services until such students graduate from high school or receive a high school equivalency diploma.

c. Services for non-public school students shall be provided at sites other than sectarian non-public schools.

2. Services. Funds available under this section shall be used for compensatory and support services to students who are identified as being at risk of dropping out of school. Services to be provided under this section may include skills assessment, tutoring, academic and personal counseling, family counseling and home visits, staff development activities for personnel with direct responsibility for such students and mentoring programs.

3. Allowable costs. Allowable costs under this program shall include, but not be limited to: salaries of program personnel, including graduate student stipends; transportation costs for students and program personnel; instructional materials; reimbursement to school districts for release time granted to employees while participating in the planning and development of activities funded pursuant to this section; training of program personnel; costs related directly to program provisions, including summer and weekend activities; and administrative costs directly attributable to the program.

4. a. For school years commencing in nineteen hundred eighty-nine--ninety and thereafter, the amount that shall be made available for funding liberty partnership grants shall be equal to four percent of the base year enrollment of children in public and non-public schools in New York state in grades seven through twelve, as computed in accordance with regulations of the commissioner, multiplied by seven hundred fifty dollars, provided, however, that notwithstanding the foregoing, the amount that shall be made available for funding liberty partnership grants for the nineteen hundred eighty-nine--ninety, nineteen hundred ninety--ninety-one and nineteen hundred ninety-one--ninety-two school years shall be twenty-five percent, fifty percent, and seventy-five percent, respectively, of the amount to be provided pursuant to this subdivision.

b. The grant recipients shall provide students at public and nonpublic schools the opportunity to receive compensatory and support services in an equitable manner consistent with the number and need of the children in such schools.

5. Regulations. The commissioner shall adopt regulations for the implementation of this section.

6. Annual report. The commissioner shall prepare an annual report evaluating the programs funded under this section and under sections sixty-four hundred fifty-four and sixty-four hundred fifty-five of this chapter and making appropriate recommendations. The report shall be submitted on or before December first, to the governor, the temporary president of the senate and the speaker of the assembly.