

Government relations report to NJASL April 30, 2007

State Board of Education: At the work meeting on May 16, the board will discuss the Alternate Proficiency Assessment. There will also be an opportunity for public testimony on May 16 at 3 p.m. on the Professional Licensure and Standards Amendments (Phase 5), State Board Rulemaking and Open Topic. (There are no proposed amendments relevant to SLMS.)

Department of Education:

New Funding for In-District Special Education. The DOE announced on May 1, 2007 that 28 New Jersey school districts and regional special education programs will share \$9 million in state and federal funding. State funds account for \$4.5 million with an additional \$4.5 million from the federal government under the Individuals with Disabilities Act. The funds are to enhance and expand in-district programs for students with disabilities. The need to strengthen in-district special education program was one of the subjects considered by the Joint Committee on Public School Funding and has been strongly supported by Governor Corzine. [Read more.](#)

Extended Deadline to identify Exceptional Secondary Educators. On April 25, 2007, the department announced that it would extend its deadline in its search for exceptional secondary teachers and principals. The original deadline of April 20 has been extended to May 18. [Read more.](#)

NIEER study gives good marks to New Jersey's Abbott preschool program. On March 14, the National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) at Rutgers University released its report on the state of preschool education in the nation. New Jersey's Abbott preschool program was among six states whose preschool programs met nine of ten quality standards on a research based checklist of standards. The report noted that only two states, Alabama and North Carolina, met all 10 of NIEER's quality benchmarks. In addition, New Jersey is among the 15 states that mandate lead teachers in every pre-k classroom to hold a four-year college degree and specialized training in early childhood education, a critical component of program quality, according to NIEER. [Read more.](#)

Education Law Center reports DOE going with Closed Process to Hire Department Evaluation. The non profit Education Law Center reported in its recent newsletter that Education Department Commissioner Davy has issued a private Request for Qualifications from a limited list of firms to conduct the management audit of the department ordered by the NJ legislature. ELC questions whether this process is likely to lead to a review that is independent, comprehensive and thorough. [Read more.](#)

State Legislature

On April 30, the Assembly Education Committee was to hear testimony from invited guests on the impact of No Child Left Behind.

Governor's Office

Property Tax Checks in the Mail. On April 10, 2007, Governor Corzine announced that property tax relief enacted in New Jersey will be delivered to taxpayers in the form of property

tax rebate checks in the mail. His original idea to deliver the relief via direct credits on tax bills turns out to be problematic in terms of logistics and privacy.

Governor Signs Tax Relief into Law. On April 3, 2007, Governor Corzine signed into law what is considered landmark tax reform intended to begin reducing New Jersey's highest in the nation property taxes. The legislation signed includes a four percent cap on property tax levies imposed by school districts or county and local governments which includes only limited waiver or adjustment provisions. Taxpayers will receive direct tax relief in the form of tax credits or rebates based on household income: taxpayers with income up to \$100,000 will receive a 20% reduction in property taxes; those with incomes between \$100,000 and \$150,000 will receive a 15% reduction; and those between \$150,000 and \$200,000 will receive 10%. [Read more.](#)

Approximately 1.9 million homeowners and 800,000 tenants will benefit from the new law with an average property tax reduction of almost \$1,100. New Jersey Treasurer says that senior citizens and disabled individuals will get their tax relief first with more than 500,000 tax payers to receive applications within the month.

Other Local Issues

More than Three Quarters of School Budgets Pass. New Jersey voters went to the polls in April to vote on school budgets and the result this year was much better for the school districts than last year. School budgets passed in 78% of New Jersey districts, a much larger percentage than last year's 52 % of budgets passed. Additional state aid for education was credited with calming voters' passions about school spending. Once again, voter turnout was low with just under 14% of eligible voters going to the polls compared to 15.7% last year.

More Projects Tabled by Schools Construction Corporation. On April 25, the Schools Construction Corporation announced that it was necessary to once again defer construction on planned projects; this time, 27 of the 59 projects the SCC thought it had the money to finish. Only 32 of those 59 projects can now be completed with the available funds. "We are at the bottom of the barrel in terms of dollars," said Scott Weiner, chief executive of the SCC, according to a April 26 article in the Star Ledger. [Read more.](#)

Ed Law Center Sues State over Construction Funding for Abbott Districts. Even before the School Construction Corp. announced its latest cutback in construction projects, the Education Law Center filed suit seeking a court order compelling the New Jersey Legislature to authorized additional construction funding required under the Abbott v. Burke Supreme Court rulings. The law suit was filed on April 12. David Sciarra, lead attorney in the Abbott lawsuit, stated that lawmakers have continued to fail to provide sufficient funding to accomplish the construction and repair work ordered by the court. Legislators have balked at providing more funding, saying they want to see reforms and spending safeguards before new money is provided. [Read more.](#)

National Issues

Alliance for Excellent Education Issues Report on Accuracy of Reported Graduation Rates. On May 1, 2007, The Alliance for Excellent Education issued a report entitled, "Understanding High School Graduation Rates" which focuses on the discrepancies reported in graduation rates self reported by states and those same rates reported by the federal government and independent analysis. "Misleading graduation rate calculations, inadequate systems to track students

throughout their education, and lack of accountability by the school are undermining efforts to understand and increase the nation's graduation rate," says Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia. The report identifies the rate of discrepancy between the state reported rate and an independently assessed rate. New Jersey fares well in this analysis with a low rate of discrepancy of only 4%. New York has a discrepancy rate of 18% and California, 22%. New Jersey does not fare well on several other factors examined by the study including the need for a state data system that tracks individual student progress. [Read more.](#)

Graduation Promise Act Proposed to Direct Federal Resources to Lowest Performing High Schools. A bi-partisan group of five senators, all members of the Education Committee, introduced this bill on April 23 to provide \$2.4 billion a year for grants to high schools with the highest dropout rates and support proven methods to increase their graduation rates and help middle schools identify students at risk of not completing high school. One researcher testified before the committee that 50% of the nation's drop outs attend only 15% of the nation's schools. Therefore, resources can be focused very directly on the schools with the problems. The senators co-sponsoring the bill are Edward M. Kennedy, D-Mass., the chairman of the education committee, Jeff Bingaman, D-N.M., Richard M. Burr, R-N.C.; Hillary Rodham Clinton, D-N.Y.; and Patty Murray, D-Wash. [Read more.](#)

Reauthorization of No Child Left Behind

Nation's governors and chief school administrators offer opinions on NCLB. The nation's governors, chief state school officers and school board leaders jointly released recommendations for the reauthorization of No Child Left Behind. The governors want more authority given to the states to meet the mandates of the law. Their recommendations include allowing states to decide the most appropriate way to test students; not requiring any new tests; differentiating consequences for schools that fail to make progress by a little or a lot; rewarding schools that perform well; and giving states grants to voluntarily benchmark themselves to international standards. [Read more.](#)

Education Trust offers Recommendations on NCLB Reauthorization. The research and advocacy group Education Trust weighed in recently on the NCLB debate. Certain principles should underlie NCLB reauthorization according to Ed Trust: Congress should provide incentives for states to strengthen their education standards and should focus funds on disadvantage students in poorly performing schools. The recommendation of Ed Trust outline a set of resources that lawmakers should make available to schools to bolster teacher professional development, improve curricula, and establish data systems to track student achievement and improve teacher effectiveness. [Read more.](#)