

**Government relations report to NJASL
December 30, 2006**

State Board of Education: The State Board of Education received a presentation on high school redesign at its meeting on December 20, 2006. The presentation was made by the [New Jersey High School Redesign Steering Committee](#) which was created by Governor Corzine last summer. Members of the committee include the Business Coalition for Educational Excellence, Montclair State University, NJEA, NJSBA, NJASA, NJPSA, New Jersey United for Higher School Standards, the Governor's Office, Achieve.org and the NJ DOE.

The committee's work stresses the need for students to learn 21st century skills in order to be competitive in the 21st century global job market. New Jersey has joined the American Diploma Project which lays out the academic skills that are necessary to meet these challenges. For more information, the power point presentation made to the State Board is attached.

At its January 3, 2007 meeting, the board will consider comments and agency responses to proposed revisions to charter school regulations and to the State Board rulemaking process. At the January 17 work session, the board will discuss the Annual Report of the State Operated District of Jersey City.

Department of Education:

Public Hearings on Cost of Education Report: On December 18, 2006, the department held three public hearings on its [Cost of Education Report](#) that was released on December 11. NJASL President Mary Moyer testified at the 9:30 a.m. hearing held at Burlington County Community College. The primary message of her testimony was that certified school librarians should be included in every school in any costing out recommendations. She noted that the professional judgment model used by the department did, in fact, include costs for a certified librarian in each of school district hypothetical models. A copy of her testimony is attached; [the archived hearings are available on the internet.](#)

The testimony presented at the three hearings was overwhelmingly critical of the report for the following reasons:

- Hearings were held only one week after the report was released, allowing insufficient time for adequate review.
- The report was based on out-dated information.
- The conclusions in the report were based on hypothetical school district models rather than on the experiences of actual school districts.
- The study was not done professionally (the expert consulting firm participated only in an advisory role) and the department failed to follow best practices in conducting the professional judgment process.
- The base cost established by the report is \$1700 below today's average cost per student across the state and \$2500 below the average that is being spent by the high spending I and J districts (data from Education Law Center.)

- The study uses below average districts, based on this year's Annual Yearly Progress reports, as "Successful School Districts."
- The study shortchanges low-income districts. The resource models don't recognize the needs of low income students required by the Supreme Court in the Abbott case.

Many of those testifying at the hearings recommended that New Jersey consider the example of the [new costing out study](#) that has just been commissioned by the Pennsylvania State Board of Education.

New School Funding Formula: The Star Ledger reported on December 19, 2006, that the new school funding formula is being criticized even before it has been released. The formula has not yet been finalized although Governor Corzine has said he hopes it is finished before his budget address.

Both the governor and Education Secretary Lucille Davy have said that the new formula will provide aid based on the specific needs of students within districts. Extra aid per student is expected to be based upon whether students are classified as special education, English Language Learners and from low income families. Sources have said that middle income districts are likely to be big winners in the process with Abbott districts, which have received the bulk of state aid in recent years, receiving little or no increases in funding. Sources also say that additional state funding is likely to expand pre-school opportunities in non Abbott districts.

DOE releases test scores for 2006. On December 19, the department released statewide test score summaries for 2006 [DOE Releases 2006 Statewide Scoring Summaries](#). Third and fourth grade math scores show continued improvement. Department officials also noted continued narrowing of the achievement gap between Abbott schools and non Abbott schools.

State House:

Property Tax Reform: Although the New Jersey Assembly made a modest start on following up the work of the special session by passing 11 measures in December, the Senate failed to follow suit. At its last session in December, no action was taken on the bills passed by the House or on proposals to revise state employee pensions and benefits.

The Democratic leaders promise action in January.

Office of the Governor: No separate report.

National:

Tough Choices or Tough Times: A high profile commission released its report in December calling for major changes to America's school system. [The New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce](#) calls the American system outdated and not up to the task of preparing American students for competition in the global economy. The

report recommends radical structural changes to our education system including allowing districts to hire contractors to provide education services, giving states control over local fiscal decisions, ending high school at 10th grade for most students and starting school for all children at age 3. The report also recommends ending teacher pensions, shifting the funds into higher pay for teachers.

The ultimate goal of such a changed system would be to produce people who can innovate, think creatively across more than one subject domain, communicate well and work collaboratively. This would require that students master higher levels of reading, writing, speaking, math, science, literature and the arts.

The report, entitled [Tough Choices or Tough Times](#), predicts that without radical change, it will be hard to maintain our standard of living in the face of increasingly sophisticated competition from the rest of the world.

For more information, read the [Washington Post story on the report](#).

attachments