

State Board of Education: The Board had its monthly meeting on May 3, 2006.

There was a brief discussion of the Vocational Education Code and a vote to formally propose the Special Education Code. The board also continued its ongoing discussion of NJQSAC rules and the "district performance review" (DPR) checklists that will be used to monitor annual performance.

State House:

- **New Fiscal Watchdog Statute** - On April 17, 2006, Governor Corzine signed legislation enhancing fiscal accountability for school districts. The School District Accountability Act gives the DOE Commissioner the power to appoint a state monitor to oversee business operations and personnel matters if a district receives an adverse opinion from an independent auditor.
- **State Revenue Lower than Expected** - On May 4, state Treasurer Bradley Abelow announced that revenues are running lower than predicted and the state could be short as much as half a billion dollars in the coming budget year. Abelow said Gov. Jon Corzine has told him to look for more spending cuts to make up for any shortfall in the proposed \$30.9 billion budget for the year beginning July 1. He said the governor does not want to add any more tax increases or one-shot revenues to his budget plan.
- **Retirement Fund Troubles** - Subpar investment earnings and missed contributions continue to batter the state's retirement fund for teachers and school employees, leaving it \$13 billion short of covering future benefits and prompting one of the fund's trustees to warn that insolvency is on the horizon. Overall, the Teachers Pension and Annuity Fund contained \$29.6 billion at the close of the state's last fiscal year, a new accounting report shows. That amounts to just 69% of the value of the benefits promised to the teachers enrolled in the system.
- **S. 226:** The Senate Education Committee will meet on May 11 and discuss, inter alia, S. 226, a proposal which includes changing the date of school board elections from April to November and eliminating voter elections of school budgets except in certain circumstances.

Abbott: On April 7th, Attorney General Zulima Farber filed a motion with the New Jersey Supreme Court asking for unprecedented permission to "flat fund" school aid to Abbott districts in FY2007, and to prevent the districts from seeking Abbott supplemental funds. Given the projected 4.0% rise in fixed costs, the State's proposal will cause across the board cuts in programs and services, and no funds for 20 new schools opening next year.

In [brief filed on April 21st](#), the Education Law Center, counsel to the school children, argued that the Governor's request to cut education programs for poor students clearly

violates the funding mandates established in the 1998 *Abbott V* decision. ELC also refuted the Governor's unsupported claim that Abbott districts are not using their Abbott supplemental funds properly or making enough improvement.

The argument against the state's motion was supported by a friend of the court brief filed by NJ NAACP, Paterson NAACP, Paterson Education Fund, New Jersey Community Development Corp., NJ ACLU, Newark Teachers Union and NJ Black Issues Convention.

The motion was argued before the New Jersey Supreme Court on May 2, 2006 by the Attorney General. Governor Corzine attended the argument personally, evidence of the very high stakes of the outcome of the state's motion.

Dept. of Education:

A Newcomb Middle School librarian (Pemberton Township) was rightfully dismissed from her job in 2002 for looking at pornography on a school computer, according to a recent decision issued by the state commissioner of education. For more on this story go to <http://www.phillyburbs.com/pb-dyn/news/112-05052006-651869.html>

School Budgets: Voter approval for school district budgets dropped significantly this year as voters approved only 53.4% of proposed budgets in elections held across the state <http://www.phillyburbs.com/pb-dyn/news/112-05052006-651869.html> on April 18, 2006. This is the lowest rate of approvals since 1994. Voter turnout was 15.7% up from 13.2% last year. For details about specific districts, click on <http://www.state.nj.us/njded/data/vote/06/>