

NJASL
New Jersey Association of School Librarians

Legislative and Agency Update
June 2008

Governor's News

On June 24th, Governor Jon S. Corzine issued the following statement regarding the passage of the state budget and other significant pieces of legislation:

“Tonight after much hard work and honest discussion our partners in the Legislature came to conclusion on a truly unprecedented \$32.8 billion state budget. The timely efforts of lawmakers under the leadership of Senate President Richard Codey and Assembly Speaker Joseph Roberts has provided the opportunity to closely review the final budget, as well as several other important pieces of legislation in the coming week.

“By its actions, the Legislature provided the means to build decent schools for New Jersey’s children; offered quality health care for children and those who are without access to health insurance and made a \$650 million payment toward reducing the state’s debt. It was, all things considered, an important day’s work for the future of New Jersey.”

Legislative News

Over several weeks of intense negotiations among legislative leaders and non-stop lobbying by special interest organizations both the Senate and Assembly passed the state’s budget bill for the next fiscal year. Overall, public education fared well receiving approximately 11.5 billion dollars of the state’s 32.8 billion dollar budget. Public libraries will receive 797.3 million dollars, which reflects and increase of 173 million dollars above the appropriation for the current fiscal year.

Separate legislation to change certain provisions of the public employee retirement pension systems was hotly debated and significantly watered down before final passage on June 20. The passage of pension reforms paved the way for legislative leaders to finalize the budget bill before the deadline of June 30. Under the pension reform legislation all future public employees including public school employees, will face an increase in the normal retirement age from 60 to 62. The new law also raises the annual salary threshold for pension eligibility for TPAF and PERS for all future employees to \$7,500 per year which will be adjusted upwards annually by the CPI or 4 percent, whichever is less. In addition, individuals earning less than \$7,500 but who earn at least \$500 will be eligible for the state’s defined contribution pension plan.

Legal Appeals to the State Board of Education

Until recently, the Commissioner of Education would hear and decide controversies and disputes that arise under the state's school laws. Those decisions could be appealed to the State Board of Education, which was the ultimate administrative fact-finder and decision-maker in matters arising under the education laws. Rulings by the State Board of Education could be appealed to the Appellate Division of the Superior Court. A new law eliminates role of State Board of Education in the appeals process. Therefore, all future appeals of legal decisions made by the commissioner would go directly to the Appellate Division of the Superior Court. Having been passed by both houses of the legislature, A-45 is on the governor's desk awaiting his signature.

Pending Bills on Libraries

The following bills are pending in the New Jersey State Legislature and no action is scheduled at this time.

- A1265 Permits municipal board of library trustees to transfer surplus funds to municipality for tax relief under certain conditions.
- A1981 Permits municipal board of library commissioners to reduce library tax rate when municipality acquires new ratables.
- S650 Increases the maximum amount of bonds issued by the New Jersey Educational Facilities Authority for the Public Library Project Fund from \$45 million to \$95 million to provide library construction and technology grants.
- S881 Removes appropriations for municipal library purposes from the four percent municipal property tax levy cap.
- S1306/A1507 These bills would reduce the cap for the annual increase in the amount required to be raised by taxation for the municipal library from 15% to 4%. This change would bring the municipal library cap in line with the 4% tax levy cap for municipalities imposed pursuant to P.L.2007. The 4% cap could be exceeded only with the approval of the State Librarian.
- A2107 would provide \$ 1 million to continue the New Jersey Knowledge Initiative until June 2008.
- S650 Increases the maximum amount of bonds issued by the New Jersey Educational Facilities Authority for the Public Library Project Fund from \$45 million to \$95 million to provide library construction and technology.

Department of Education News

Program Regulations

Action is still pending on the proposal to require all school districts to provide library-media services in each school building, including a certified school library media specialist. Earlier this month NJASL launched a letter writing campaign to support the commissioner's proposal. You can support this effort at <http://www.emanj.org>

Accountability Regulations

Earlier this month Commissioner of Education, Lucille E. Davy used her "emergency powers" to implement certain provisions of the proposed accountability regulations including the new *Travel Regulations* which limit the reimbursement for certain expenses that school board members and school employees may receive when they attend educational conferences and workshops. Organizations that sponsor educational conferences and workshops may file an application for a waiver of the regulations to allow individuals to apply to their school district and receive reimbursement for reasonable expenses as approved in the waiver. NJASL has prepared and filed a waiver application for its fall conference and will notify members when the commissioner's determination is received. The draft regulations can be reviewed at <http://www.state.nj.us/education/code/proposed/title6a/regs2.pdf>

State Board of Education

The board met on June 18 and received reports on several state and federal initiatives including the Reading First initiative [Reading First Update](#) and the [Early Literacy Task Force Report](#).

Department staff also presented two resolutions for standards setting for the board to discuss. [NJASK 5-8 Standards Setting Resolution](#)
[Standards for New Jersey High School End of Course Biology Test](#)

New board member Florence McGinn from Hunterdon County was sworn in by a representative of the Attorney General.

National News

Both a United States Senate Appropriations subcommittee and a House Appropriations subcommittee voted to eliminate all funding for the Reading First program, as part of a fiscal 2009 spending bill that would provide modest increases for other education programs. According to a recent article in *Education Week* the controversial reading program, which was authorized as part

of the No Child Left Behind Act was scrapped as a result of a preliminary federal evaluation of Reading First, released May 1, which found that the program has had no impact on students' reading comprehension.

Reading First, a major initiative of the Bush administration, received about \$1 billion annually until Congress slashed the program's budget to \$393 million for fiscal 2008, the current year. Lawmakers acted after a series of reports by the U.S. Department of Education's inspector general that suggested conflicts of interest had occurred among officials and contractors who helped implement the program in its early years.

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