



## **Legislative and Agency Update**

**May 2010**

### **Race to The Top Grant**

Earlier this month the Department of Education reported to the State Board of Education and the legislature on their work to develop the state's application for \$400 million in federal funding through the Race to The Top program. The deadline for the state to submit an application for funding in round two of the program was June 1<sup>st</sup>. Major changes to the section on Educational Effectiveness were added to the initial application because the state received very low scores on its earlier submission. The revised application proposed a program to reward highly effective classroom teachers that work with low performing children and for successfully advancing student performance as evidenced by higher percentile scores in mathematics and language arts assessments.

Efforts to inform and involve education stakeholders in finalizing the application resulted in endorsements by the major education organizations, the legislator, and the State Board of Education. However, in an unexpected turn of events Governor Christie rejected the application and submitted a new one.

In a press conference, the Governor stated that the new application returns to his administration's core principles of rewarding teachers based on merit and student advancement instead of seniority. Christie also said that his Education Commissioner Bret Schundler made a mistake by announcing an agreement with the New Jersey Education Association that included compromises on merit pay, teacher seniority, evaluations, and tenure. This unprecedented action prompted legislative leaders and others to express their deep disappointment and concern that New Jersey's chances of receiving a grant has been jeopardized by the Governor's actions.

### **Millionaires' Tax**

On May 20<sup>th</sup>, both the Senate and Assembly approved the "millionaires' tax" bill and the bill reinstating property tax rebates and prescription drug benefits for seniors and the disabled. The Office of Legislative Services estimated that the legislation would have generated an additional \$637 million in state revenue. Within minutes, after the bill was approved by both houses Governor Christie vetoed it. Senate President Steve Sweeney has announced that both houses are scheduling sessions to override the Governor's veto. Two-thirds of the members in each house must vote to override a veto.

## **State Budget**

Now that the hearings on the Governor's proposed budget have concluded, members of the budget and appropriations committees are working on the budget bill that will be introduced later this month. The deadline for the legislature to pass the bill is June 30.

## **Governor Christie's Toolkit for Controlling Taxes and Spending**

Governor Chris Christie presented the Legislature with a list of reforms for a 33-bill package aimed at solving New Jersey's property tax crisis. According to the governor's press secretary, the bill package, representing the legislative component of the Christie Reform Agenda, will put a hard cap on property tax increases and state spending at 2.5 percent. The "toolkit" is intended to give municipalities, school districts, higher education institutions, and county governments the necessary tools to control their costs and live within the cap.

The centerpiece of this legislative package is "Cap 2.5," a constitutional amendment creating a 2.5% cap on the increase in the property tax levy by municipal, school, and county taxes and a 2.5% cap on spending for State government operations.

<http://www.state.nj.us/governor/news/news/552010/approved/20100510c.html>

## **State Board of Education**

### Reciprocity for Out-of-State Endorsements

On May 19, the Department of Education proposed amendments to the Professional Licensure and Standards regulations to allow reciprocity for most out-of-state certificates. The amendments will allow any applicant presenting an out-of-state certificate and appropriate fee to receive the equivalent New Jersey standard certificate endorsement. The new rule would require out-of-state applicants for the New Jersey School Library Media Specialist endorsements who lack appropriate experience to complete a residency under a certificate of eligibility or certificate of eligibility with advanced standing. Applicants for reciprocity must also meet any requirements in N.J.A.C. 6A:9-13, including the completion of an approved program for state-issued professional licenses or certificates.

### Public Meeting Schedule

The Board voted to move its meetings, work sessions, and public hearings to the 1<sup>st</sup> Wednesday of the month beginning in July 2010. The new calendar is available at <http://www.state.nj.us/education/sboe/meetings/>

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