

Government relations report to NJASL May 31, 2007

State Board of Education:

At its May 2 meeting, the State Board considered for second discussion, amendments to regulations pertaining to teacher licensure and standards. No substantive amendments relating to SLMS are being considered.

At its May 16 meeting, the board received a presentation on two options for moving forward with the elimination of the Special Review Assessment (SRA) as an alternative to the High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA) for achieving a New Jersey high school diploma. The two options include an improved alternate mechanism for meeting the HSPA requirement and a waiver process. The presentation was made by Jay Doolan, assistant commissioner, Division of Educational Standards and Programs and Tim Peters, director, Office of State Assessments. [Read more.](#)

In addition, Barbara Gantwerk, assistant commissioner, Division of Student Services, Roberta Whole, director, Office of Special Education Programs and Elizabeth Celentano, APA Coordinator provided an overview of the design, underlying rationale, and implementation process of the Alternate Proficiency Assessment (APA) which is used to measure the achievement of students with some of the more severe cognitive disabilities. Read more at [Alternate Proficiency Assessment](#).

In addition, public testimony was received at the May 16 meeting on the topics of the readoption with amendments of *NJAC 6A:6*, State Board Rulemaking and amendments to *NJAC 6A:9*, Professional Licensure and Standards.

Future meetings. At its June 6 meeting, the board is scheduled to receive public comment on the proposal for voluntary policies for the random testing of student alcohol or other drug use, which is limited to students participating in extracurricular activities, including interscholastic athletics, and students who possess school parking permits.

At the June 20 meeting, the board is scheduled to consider the State Board Strategic Plan, State Operated School Districts and New Statewide Assessments. Public Testimony is scheduled for this date on *NJAC 6A:25*, Qualified Zone Academy Bond.

Department of Education:

Abbott Districts struggle with 3% state aid cap. The NJ Department of Education promised the Abbott districts an increase of only 3 % above last year's state allocation for the '07-'08 school year. This has resulted in many Abbott districts being forced to make substantial cuts on a tentative basis in programs and services as they await word from the state on supplemental funding requests. Many districts have already sent out hundreds of notices to employees, including teachers, that they might not have jobs come September. [Read more.](#)

State Legislature

Democrats push constitutional amendment dedicating sales tax increase to property tax relief. Last summer's government-closing budget impasse was resolved in part by agreement

between the governor and legislative leaders to dedicate a half penny of the one-cent hike in the state's sales tax to property tax relief. Now those same legislative leaders want to put a constitutional amendment on the November ballot to authorize dedication of the entire one penny increase to property tax relief.

At a brief but constitutionally required hearing on May 17, five people testified in support of the ballot question, including Assembly Speaker Joseph Roberts. Governor Corzine has been consistently opposed to the dedication, arguing that dedication of specific revenue to specific tax relief hinders future budget flexibility.

The constitutional amendment (ACR20) does not require Governor Corzine's signature to gain a spot on the Nov. 6 ballot, but it must win the approval of two-thirds of both legislative bodies by Aug. 9 to qualify. It next goes to the Assembly floor for a vote. The Senate has yet to consider it.

\$5000 state tax deduction proposed for NJ college savings. New Jersey residents who save money for college in the state run college savings program could get a state income tax break up to \$5000 under a proposal released by the Assembly Higher Education Committee on May 17, 2007. The proposal (A1418), introduced by Essex Assemblyman Fred Scalera, now goes to the Assembly Appropriations Committee. Senate committees have also approved the proposal but it has not yet been considered by the full Senate.

Governor's Office

Governor returns to Trenton office. Governor Corzine returned to work at the Statehouse in Trenton on May 30 for the first time since his near fatal traffic accident. Budget matters occupied his attention on that first day.

Other Local Issues

NJ Supreme Court denies motion but expects legislature to fund facilities construction in June 30 budget. On May 24, the New Jersey Supreme Court issued a ruling denying a motion by the Education Law Center on behalf of Abbott District school children to direct the state legislature to authorize more school construction funding by June 30. The court made clear in its ruling, however, that its decision was based on its "assumption" that lawmakers would take action themselves when preparing the fiscal year 2008 budget, due June 30. In addition, the court denied the motion "without prejudice" which means that the Education Law Center is permitted to renew the motion if new construction funds are not included in the new budget.

Camden School District gets new superintendent. The Camden school board announced the appointment of a new superintendent at its regular monthly board meeting on May 21. The board named veteran Philadelphia educator Bessie Young. She will start in her new position July 1. Young is a regional superintendent with substantial experience in urban schools. She replaces Annette Knox as Camden superintendent who resigned last June amid a state criminal investigation into school district spending practices.

National Issues

State by State per Student Spending Figures Released. According to a recently released Census Bureau report, the United States spent an average of \$8,701 per student in 2005 up 5%

from 2004. New York spent the most at \$14,119 per student with New Jersey in second place at \$13,800. Seven of the top ten states are in the Northeast. The lowest spending states are Utah at \$5,257 per pupil, Arizona \$6,261, Idaho \$6,283, Mississippi \$6,575 and Oklahoma \$6,613. [Read more.](#)

New Database Shows Drop out Rates Higher Than Reported Across the Nation. On May 9, First Lady Laura Bush was joined by national education leaders in announcing a new data base that more accurately tracks dropout rates in school districts across the nation. The statistics compiled by the new database show that only 70% of students nationwide graduated in four years as of 2003. This is a much lower rate than the rate reported by school districts themselves. The new database uses simple attrition to track drop out rates, i.e. comparing the size of a graduating class to the size of the same freshman class four years earlier. [Read more.](#)

Reauthorization of No Child Left Behind

Can State Education Agencies Implement NCLB? On May 10, 2007, the Center on Education Policy released a new report on the capacity of state educational agencies to carry out the No Child Left Behind Act. The report, *Educational Architects: Do State Education Agencies Have the Tools Necessary to Implement NCLB?* is the second report in a series of CEP publications on the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act that will be issued this year. According to the study, there are four significant challenges in the capacity of states to successfully implement NCLB: 1) insufficient staff and inadequate organizational structure; 2) inadequate funding at the state and federal level; 3) lack of guidance from the U.S. Department of Education; and 4) barriers within NCLB itself. [Read the report.](#)

Scholar's assessment of NCLB. Recently, the Nation magazine asked a leading education expert to comment on NCLB, its results and its prospects for reform. Then the magazine asked several additional experts to comment on her article. The original article was written by Linda Darling-Hammond, the Charles E. Ducommun Professor of Education at Stanford University, and the author of *The Right to Learn: A Blueprint for Creating Schools That Work*; responses were provided by Pedro Noguera, sociologist and author; Velma Cobb, longtime educator and vice president of the National Urban League; and Deborah Meier, New York University scholar and veteran school principal. The article and responses appeared in the May 21, 2007 issue of the Nation. [Read more.](#)

NCLB reform proposals considered on Capitol Hill. Twenty-five House members formally presented their ideas for revising NCLB in a meeting held May 16, 2007 with the senior members of the Education and Labor Committee including committee chair Rep. George Miller. Miller stayed throughout the entire three hour meeting. Among those making presentations were the leaders of House caucuses representing Asian-Americans, Hispanics, African-Americans, conservatives, and moderate Republicans. Among the ideas offered: change the method for calculating districts' and schools' yearly progress to measure student academic growth and include factors other than test scores; assess students with disabilities on the basis of their progress toward meeting goals in their individualized education programs; figure out ways to determine whether teachers are highly qualified other than by the types of credentials they have, and give rural schools leniency on the teacher-quality rules. [Read more.](#)

Education Secretary Margaret Spellings defends NCLB in meeting with Connecticut educators. In the context of a pending lawsuit by the state of Connecticut against NCLB, Secretary Spellings met with Connecticut educators on May 26 and defended NCLB. In particular, she said that imposing national standards in America, “would not be a pretty thing.” She also praised the law, saying, “As a matter of policy, this law is working. It is getting results.” [Read more.](#)