



# SCHOOL BOARD notes

## NJSBA Calls for Shared Services

Local school boards have been working for decades to operate efficiently, but they need the state Legislature's support to improve cost effectiveness, an NJSBA official told the Assembly Budget Committee last week.

Michael Vrancik, NJSBA's director of Governmental Relations, testified before the panel, which invited selected education, government and business organiza-

tions to address ways to save taxpayer dollars and increase state government efficiency and effectiveness. These efforts would include incentives to create more shared-service arrangements and eliminate many unnecessary state mandates.

"New Jersey's local boards of education have a long history of working collaboratively to share services and reduce the costs  
*continued on page 2*

### A Bad Idea: Forcing All Districts into SHBP

During the February 23 Assembly Budget Committee meeting, key members expressed strong interest in an NJEA proposal to require all public school employees to be enrolled in the New Jersey State Health Benefits Program.

Such a move would immediately impose sharp cost increases on school districts and property taxpayers. Although no legislation has been introduced, the requirement could be implemented simply as a footnote to the 2006 – 2007 state budget.

NJSBA urges you to tell members of the Assembly Budget Committee —

- The proposal would affect premium costs in districts that now purchase coverage from private carriers.
- It would rescind all health-benefit cost savings negotiated between school boards and employees in those districts.
- The concept runs directly opposite to recommendations made late last year by the state's Benefits Review Task Force.

**Cost-containment not possible** Currently, approximately 60% of the state's school districts do not provide benefits through SHBP, opting instead to secure coverage through private carriers. For these districts, the advantage of private carriers may include not only lower premiums

but also the ability to negotiate cost-containment provisions. These provisions—such as changes in deductible and co-pay levels, tiered coverage, employee contributions to individual employees' premiums, and incentives to waive duplicate coverage—are not available to school districts under current SHBP rules.

**Competition eliminated** With the creation of a state-driven health insurance monopoly, competition to reduce costs would be eliminated—along with any impetus to reform the SHBP.

**Contradicts blue ribbon panel** The NJEA proposal runs directly opposite to recommendations made late last year by the state's Benefits Review Task Force. That panel examined the pension system and SHBP. Its recommendations include—

- Giving school districts the ability to negotiate cost-control measures, such as changes in deductible and co-pay levels.
- Immediately applying to local school districts that obtain coverage through SHBP the same cost-saving measures now available to state government—such as negotiating premium-sharing arrangements and different benefit packages with different bargaining units at the same location.

### An Invitation from Governor Corzine

Dear Friend:

I promised you that I would change how our government conducts its business and that I would work to restore public integrity. A key component to achieving this is through financial responsibility and spending restraint. As Governor, it is my responsibility to propose a budget that is in the best interest of the people of this great state and one that puts New Jersey's fiscal house in order.

In preparation for my budget proposal, I am hosting three regional community dialogues. These events will be an opportunity to not only come and listen to various concerns about the multi-billion dollar budget crisis but to voice your thoughts on how we restructure New Jersey's future.

So I invite you to take part in these dialogues and to help New Jersey be the best place to live, work and raise a family.

#### North Jersey Region

Tuesday, March 7, 2006, 7 p.m.

RSVP: (609) 984-9850

Montclair State University  
University Hall

College of Education and Human Services  
Building

Conference Center Ballroom, 7th floor

#### Central Jersey Region

Wednesday, March 8, 2006, 7 p.m.

RSVP: (609) 984-9852

Monmouth University  
Woodrow Wilson Auditorium  
West Long Branch

#### South Jersey Region

Thursday, March 9, 2006, 7 p.m.

RSVP: (609) 984-7819

Rowan University  
Student Center Building  
Glassboro

Sincerely,

JON S. CORZINE  
Governor

## Budget Committee

continued

borne by local taxpayers,” Vrancik told the Assembly committee.

**Long History** He cited an NJSBA survey done 25 years ago that found 178 districts engaging in shared-service arrangements with other school districts. Efforts range from child study teams and remedial education to transportation and technology services. By 2001, the Regional Efficiency Aid Program (REAP) identified an additional 677 shared-service arrangements statewide, the majority (352) of which involved school districts. REAP, a state incentive to promote sharing of services by local governments, only recognized shared-service agreements created or expanded since 1997. It no longer operates, but is the type of program that could encourage more cost efficiency at the local level.

**Recent Examples** In 2002, Vrancik noted, an NJSBA publication identified a number of examples of shared services in school districts.

- In Bergen County, Northern Valley Regional High School shares special education services with seven elementary school districts and also operates a pre-school program for autistic children, which saves 22 districts significant money over private placement.
- In Salem County, the Pittsgrove school business administrator’s staff provides services to more than a dozen districts in four counties with costs savings of nearly half of what a district would pay individually.
- In 10 New Jersey counties, school districts share services through “educational services commissions” that provide a wide range of services including special education programming and transportation.

**Energy Cooperative** “Local school districts have responded enthusiastically to the Alliance for Competitive Energy Services

(ACES), an energy-buying cooperative for the public schools,” said Vrancik. ACES is coordinated by NJSBA and other state education associations.

“The energy-deregulation bill passed into law by the state Legislature authorized NJSBA to form a statewide purchas-



*Michael Vrancik, NJSBA director of Governmental Relations, discusses testimony before the Assembly Budget Committee with Barbara Horl, NJSBA lobbyist.*

ing cooperative for local school boards. The effort has paid off,” he noted.

In previous years, ACES districts (over 400) have saved an average of 13.75%, a cumulative total of \$5.9 million, off their entire electric bills.

“This past January, the ACES program was expanded to include natural gas purchasing following the dramatic price increase for this commodity that resulted from Hurricane Katrina,” Vrancik explained. “Thus far, 225 school districts have signed on as members of the ACES natural gas procurement program. This is just one example of an instance where the State Legislature paved the way for local school boards to operate more efficiently and reduce the burden on local taxpayers.”

## High Schools Need to Make More Effort

New Jersey high schools — like those in most states — are not doing enough to prepare students for college or careers, according to a report recently released by Achieve Inc., a Washington-based non-profit group that helps states raise their education standards. The report noted that while New Jersey is making efforts to improve its high schools, there is still much to do.

Achieve is urging New Jersey to make high school more rigorous and to use more useful standardized tests. For example, New Jersey now requires students to take three years of math to graduate from high school. Achieve wants the state to set standards for what skills the students

need to learn in specific classes, such as algebra and geometry. Also, Achieve wants high school graduation tests to be rigorous enough that they can be used for college admissions and college class placement purposes, too.

All those changes are being planned or implemented, according to a progress report on high school reform that New Jersey education and business leaders compiled for Achieve.

New Jersey education officials say they’re trying to follow Achieve’s recommendations for the state’s students. “We need to prepare them to succeed in the 21st century,” said Acting Education Commissioner Lucille Davy.

### Survey Reveals Difference in Math and Science Priorities

Parents and students differ sharply with U.S. leaders over lagging achievement in math and science, according to a survey released on February 15 by Public Agenda, a nonpartisan opinion research organization. The survey, called Reality Check 2006, found that, although parents feel high schools should be globally competitive, 57 percent of them say the amount of math and science provided for their child is adequate.

In fact, Public Agenda notes, parents’ concern about math and science achievement has actually declined since the mid-1990s. Among students, the report found that only 25 percent were aware of a lack of emphasis on math and science in their own school, and more than 40 percent expressed disinterest in a career focused on either of those subjects. These attitudes prevail despite widely publicized predictions about the role that math and science will play in the U.S. economy of the future.

To read more about the research, go to [www.publicagenda.org](http://www.publicagenda.org).

## CONFERENCE NOTES



**Wellness-Nutrition Policy Workshops** 16 morning and afternoon sessions sponsored by NJ Department of Agriculture on eight dates in March.

Program is designed to help school districts develop and implement local wellness policies by September 2006 as required by state and federal regulations. Workshop dates and locations:

- March 7** Gloucester County Office of Education – Sewell
- March 8** Morris Co. Police & Fire Academy – Parsippany
- March 9** NJ Association of School Business Officials – Robbinsville
- March 14** Monmouth Co. Superintendent's Office – Freehold
- March 16** Archdiocesan Center – Newark
- March 21** Egg Harbor Twp. Intermediate School
- March 22** Morris County Police & Fire Academy – Parsippany
- March 29** Monmouth County Superintendent's Office – Freehold

For workshop registration information and directions, contact the Division of Food and Nutrition at (609) 984-0692.

NJSBA is working with the state Department of Agriculture to develop sample policy language. It will post an updated sample wellness policy (File Code 3542.1) on its Web site in the near future. Check [www.njsba.org](http://www.njsba.org) for updates.

**Bergen County Shared Services Conference** Sponsored by the county executive and Department of Planning and Economic Development, March 15, 8: a.m.–3:30 p.m., Teaneck Marriott at Glenpointe, Teaneck.

The conference will focus on the root causes of the property tax problem in New Jersey and reducing the tax burden on taxpayers. Presentations will examine ways to reduce property taxes, eliminate redundancy in services, and establish a regional approach to balancing costs and benefits in schools, police and fire protection, emergency services, and public works.

Registration is \$40 per person in advance or \$50 per person at the door. For information, call the Bergen County Department of Planning and Economic Development at (201) 336-6446.

**PEI Roundtable Meeting -- Arts and Humanities Education: Beyond the Test Scores** Co-Sponsored by the Institute for Arts and Humanities Education, March 10, 8:30 a.m. – 12:15 p.m., Livingston Campus Student Center, Piscataway.

A study by the Council for Basic Education determined that the No Child Left Behind Act is resulting in schools spending more time on reading, math, and science but squeezing out social studies, civics, geography, languages, and the arts. This raises the specter of minority students from low-income families being denied the liberal arts curriculum that more privileged students take for granted, according to the council. Speakers will include representatives of the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, the Music For All Foundation, as well as students and educators.

To register, call 732-564-9099 or e-mail your name, address, telephone and fax number to [rupei@rci.rutgers.edu](mailto:rupei@rci.rutgers.edu).

**Celebration of Teaching and Learning** Tri-state conference for educators, parents and education leaders, March 24-25, 7 a.m. to 6 p.m., Pier 94 – The UnConvention Center, New York City.

A leadership summit, called "The Schools We Want, The Schools We Need," will be geared toward school administrators, board members, and other stakeholders in the education community. Other events include professional development conferences, exhibits, awards, a town hall meeting and a concert. The event is sponsored by Thirteen/WNET in partnership with New Jersey Network.

For information and to register, go to [www.thirteencelebration.org](http://www.thirteencelebration.org) or call (212)-560-4900. The deadline for registration is March 14.



### Program Proposals Due March 17

It won't be "your father's Workshop." In fact, Workshop 2006, on October 25-27 in Atlantic City, will offer new and expanded opportunities for school officials to highlight exemplary educational programs in their districts and share their expertise with colleagues throughout New Jersey. But your chance to be a presenter is nearing an end: *Workshop 2006 Program Proposals are due on March 17.*

**Action Labs** will be shorter than in the past (90 minutes), and there will be more of them. The hands-on sessions will involve numerous activities directed by the presenters. Admission is limited to 24-48 participants. Also this year, a select few Action Labs – those which have been traditionally "sold out" – will be repeated on Friday morning. This will give presenters a chance to reach a greater number of people.

**Group Sessions** will present information that brings education philosophy, best practices, contrasting viewpoints, etc. These programs are also scheduled for 90 minutes, with at least one-third of the time devoted to questions and answers. You may choose as your format a single speaker, a panel, a debate, or some other program structure. Group Sessions are limited to three presenters and can accommodate 300 people.

Program proposal forms were e-mailed to all board members, superintendents, and business administrators in January, and again this week. If you did not receive one, go to [www.njsba.org](http://www.njsba.org) and follow the link under the "What's New" column.

For further information, call Mark Bonjanni at 1-888-886-5722, extension 5207, or Walt Meyer at extension 5236. Remember, **March 17** is the deadline to submit program proposals for workshop 2006.

### Character Ed. Policies Needed

Does your district have a policy on character education? NJSBA is upgrading its Policy Clearinghouse files on this and similar topics (values education, citizenship education, etc.) to benefit other districts. Please send your information to NJSBA at [dbosted@njsba.org](mailto:dbosted@njsba.org) or by fax it to (609) 695-0413, attn: David Bosted.

## County Activities

The Northfield Board of Education was recognized recently for achieving the Board Certification designation through the NJSBA Board Member Academy. (For information about the Academy, visit [www.njsba.org](http://www.njsba.org).)



Pictured (left to right, front row) are John Palmieri; Linda Grabowski; Tracie Hurst; Dr. Richard Stepura, superintendent; Debbie Levitt (holding the plaque), board president; Ann Jungels; board vice president; Patricia Fitzsimons; and Jay Hurley. Also shown (back row) are Jane Kershner, NJSBA field service representative; Bill Chrisman; Keith Ferguson; and Linda Albright, school business administrator.

# C A L E N D A R

### March 6

- ✓ NJSBA Legislative Conference, The War Memorial, Trenton, 8:30 a.m.–5 p.m.

### March 7

- Cape May General Membership Meeting, Sand Barrens, Swainton, 6:30 p.m.
- Ocean General Membership Meeting, IL Giardino Sul Mare, Forked River, 6:30 p.m.

### March 8

- Union General Membership Meeting, Spanish Tavern, Mountainside, 6 p.m.
- Camden General Membership Meeting, Lucien's, Berlin, 6:30 p.m.

### March 9

- Monmouth General Membership Meeting, Neptune Township Early Childhood Center, 6 p.m.
- Bergen General Membership Meeting, Bleshaman Day School, Paramus, 7 p.m.

### March 10

- ✓ Urban Boards Committee, Middlesex County ESC, Piscataway, 6:30 p.m.

### March 11

- ✓ CAL Meeting, Monroe Township High School, Middlesex County, 8:30 a.m.

For more information on county school boards association activities, log on to [www.njsba.org](http://www.njsba.org) and click on the appropriate county association.



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