

SCHOOL BOARD notes

NJSBA: Flexible Coverage Saves Money

Negotiating provisions to control health benefit costs has enabled some school districts to save more than \$1 million a year, NJSBA representatives told a legislative panel exploring property tax reform during a hearing in Clifton on Tuesday.

Marie Hakim, president of the Passaic County School Boards Association, told the Joint Legislative Committee on Public Employee Benefits Reform that the ability to negotiate coverage with unions is not available to school boards that participate in the New Jersey State Health Benefits Program.

State regulations preclude SHBP-member districts from negotiating cost-

containment provisions, such as changes in deductibles and co-payments, employee contributions to premium, and placing new employees in managed-care systems.

Almost 40 percent of New Jersey's school districts use the state plan, with a large number concentrated in the Bergen and Passaic county area. The costly New York-area insurance market and contractual difficulties leaves many northern districts with no option but the state plan.

Giving SHBP-member districts negotiations flexibility, therefore, is the best cost-control option, according to NJSBA.

Savings to Taxpayers Clifton has been reaping savings since it began opting for

private health insurance in 1996, said Hakim, who has served on the city's school board for more than 16 years. The change initially saved her district \$1.5 million. In its latest round of negotiations, cost-containment provisions saved \$1.2 million.

The largest chunk of taxpayer money for schools, about 75 percent, is spent on salaries and skyrocketing employee health benefits. Therefore, property tax reform

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Task Force Urges Construction Funds

A task force reviewing New Jersey's school construction program recommends that the state invest an additional \$2.5 billion in new funding for Abbott districts and \$750 million for non-Abbott districts.

The report, released Sept. 14, is expected to serve as the basis for a new strategic and capital planning program for the state's troubled School Construction Corp, created in 2002.

"This report is an important step in ensuring that our education system has the necessary infrastructure to provide our children with a first-rate education," Gov. Jon S. Corzine said.

Need Continues "Both Abbott and non-Abbott districts need adequate and safe school facilities; the need has not diminished," said Edwina M. Lee, NJSBA executive director. "The task force recommendation for additional state funding builds on earlier steps to establish accountability and responsibility in the state's school construction agency."

NJSBA is in the process of examining the latest task force recommendations, including eligibility criteria and funding levels for individual districts.

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CAPITOL



WATCH

Learn about the important issues under discussion during the Legislature's Special Session on Property Tax Reform.

- Read recently published Op-Ed articles about tax reform, school funding and consolidation by Association President Kevin E. Ciak in the NJSBA Newsroom at www.njsba.org/PI. (The articles appeared in *The New York Times*, the *Star-Ledger*, and the *Trenton Times*.)
- Visit the Special Session Resources page for information and tools to advocate the interests of public school students at www.njsba.org/govrel/specialsession.
- Attend NJSBA's Oct. 7 forum on Consolidation and Shared Services. To register, visit www.njsba.org/consolidation.

Construction Funds

continued

New Criteria State Education Commissioner Lucille E. Davy said eliminating the SCC's 2003 process of a "first-come, first-served free-for-all" is among the most significant reforms recommended in the report.

"Districts that had plans and land ready to go got their money first. We are glad to see that the situation will change,"

Davy said.

The state's Education Facilities Construction Act of 2000 authorized \$6 billion to fund all school building costs in the Abbott districts, and another \$2.6 billion for up-front grants to fund a minimum of 40 percent of the eligible school construction in other districts.

Projects on Hold The additional \$2.5 billion for Abbott constructions would

last two to three years, according to the Interagency Working Group on School Construction's report. The funds would cover 59 construction projects scheduled for state funding in July 2005. The extra money also would allow the state to continue work on some of the nearly 100 suspended school projects and to cover emergency repairs.

Other task force recommendations suggest that the SCC devise a preliminary list of priority school construction projects planned for the 2005 Long Range Facilities Plan, and other suspended projects. Schools with emergent health and safety issues, early childhood centers and those that are overcrowded are among those that should be on the list, the report states.

Bridge Funding NJSBA is a member of Building Our Children's Future, a coalition of education and business organizations that is urging the administration and the Legislature to restore Education Facilities Construction Act funding.

The task force recommendation for new state funds is in line with NJSBA's advocacy of "bridge funding." Such funds would ensure that on-hold school construction projects would be completed in poor communities and would restore grants to lessen the property tax burden on voter-approved projects elsewhere.

To view the report, visit www.state.nj.us/governor.



Board of Directors Highlights

The reorganization meeting of NJSBA's Board of Directors took place on Friday, Sept. 15 in Mercerville. Action taken by the Board of Directors included the following:

- Presented resolutions and plaques to retiring Board of Directors members Barbara Para (Atlantic), Linda O'Connor (Bergen), Madeline Wollner (Essex), and Evern D. Ford (Salem). Rita Sweeney (Ocean), Robert Brandt (Warren), and Beverly Holland (Urban Boards) were unable to attend.
- Approved Consent Agenda Item: Minutes of the May 19, 2006 Board of Directors meeting.
- Completed annual Conflict of Interest Statement.
- Completed annual Certification Statement for Board of Directors Code of Conduct.
- Approved Roll Call Vote Items:
 - a. Legislative Committee Vacancies
 - b. Resolutions Subcommittee Vacancies
 - c. Extension of the payment of dues, until Oct. 13, for boards of education on which Board of Directors members serve.
 - d. Resolution to Approve Construction Review Committee & Charge.
 - e. Policy language to facilitate NJSBA's petition to participate as amicus in *Jenkins v. Pleasantville Board of Education et al.*
- Discussed the High School Reform Initiative.
- Heard reports from NJSBA officers.
- Heard report from the Executive Director.

Notice: NJSBA Resolutions Subcommittee

In accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act, notice is hereby provided of a meeting of the New Jersey School Boards Association Resolutions Subcommittee. The meeting will be held at 12:30 p.m., Oct. 7, 2006 at Monroe Township High School in Middlesex County.

The meeting is open to the public.

The agenda, to the extent known at this time, will include review and action on all resolutions which will come before the Annual Delegate Assembly on Nov. 18, 2006. The resolutions that will be considered by the subcommittee are listed below by sponsor, including the topic.

Berkeley Township (Ocean) Proposes *new* policy language which would support the Legislature establishing criteria to evaluate progress towards financial and education benchmarks for state aid.

Pennsville (Salem) Proposes *new* policy language opposing mandatory continuing training and education of board of education members.

Pennsville (Salem) Proposes *new* policy language opposing mandatory participation in the State Health Benefits program by local school boards.

Also included on the agenda will be the sunset review of the NJSBA *Positions and Policies Manual*, Section 3000 (Business and Non-instructional Operations) and Section 4000 (Personnel), for review and action prior to the Delegate Assembly. The agenda also includes review of proposed amendments to the NJSBA *Bylaws*.

Notice is also provided that the Emergency Resolutions Subcommittee may be required to meet on Nov. 13 at a place to be determined if any resolutions are received by the Association to be considered as emergency resolutions for the Delegate Assembly agenda.



Executive Director Edwina M. Lee (right) congratulates Mary Alice Durham, who recently completed her 35th year of service with NJSBA. Durham serves as executive assistant to the executive director.

Workshop Appetizers

Served Tuesday, October 24

Start your week of learning the day before Workshop begins and take away skills that will last long after it's done.

Attend Certificated Board Leader courses:
Engaging the Public *or*
Communicating Effectively

Engaging the Public *New!*

The time to educate and connect with the public is now—not just during times of crisis or selling the annual budget. Learn how to inform the community of your district's goals and plans, and encourage public participation and involvement. In this highly interactive session, you will:

- Examine your district's information sharing tools
- Develop public engagement initiatives
- Identify and activate the opinion leaders in your community, to help open a two-way flow of information

NEW COURSE
for the Certified
Board Leader (CBL)
designation.

The public is a powerful ally in promoting your district's efforts. Invite them to the table so they will not only understand your district's needs, but will stand by you in good times and bad.

Communicating Effectively

Every board has been there. Something is said, but how it is said and how it is received can drastically change its meaning, intent and impact. Learn how to avoid communication pitfalls and enhance skills to enable you to connect with your fellow board members, administrators and others.

As part of the new Certified Board Leader (CBL) curriculum, this interactive, hands-on training program is designed to help you:

- Learn active listening techniques
- Recognize one-way vs. two-way communication
- Give and receive feedback
- Avoid emotional triggers
- Create an non-threatening environment to confront the brutal facts

Remember: You can take CBL courses now and bank them for the future.

To register or for more information, call NJSBA's Inservice Education Department at 1-888-886-5722, extension 5232, or complete the coupon below and fax to 609-695-0413.



Credits: 1
Core Area for CBM: None
Core Area for MBM: None
Core Area for CBL: Elective

Please register me for (select one): **Engaging the Public** **Communicating Effectively**
October 24, Atlantic City Convention Center, Atlantic City, 1:00 p.m.—4:30.

- Bill Board (Voucher enclosed)* Payment enclosed (Make check payable to NJSBA)
- Member \$50 per person Non-member \$100 per person

Cancellation Policy: A fee of \$25 will be charged for cancellations made within 10 working days of the program. Cancellations made within 72 hours and no-shows will be charged the full fee. For possible program cancellations due to inclement weather, call 609-392-2000.

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*If you wish to be billed and a voucher is required for your records, please send it with your registration to avoid duplication. Travel directions will be provided when your registration is confirmed.



Marie Hakim (right), 2006 Board Member of the Year, speaks with Gov. Corzine at the NJSBA Legislative Conference in March. With Hakim is Clifton Superintendent Dr. Michael Rice.

CONFERENCE NOTES



The New Jersey High School Redesign Steering Committee will present five regional seminars for educators this month.

Topics will include globalization and technological advances, required skills for students entering the workforce or going on to further education, the state of high school education in New Jersey, high school reform initiatives across the country, and action steps to improve the quality of the high school experience for New Jersey students.

Sessions are scheduled as follows:

- Rowan University, Oct. 6, 2 to 4 p.m.;
- Stockton College, Oct. 10; 2 to 4 p.m.;
- Montclair State, Oct. 12, 2 to 4 p.m.;
- The College of New Jersey, Oct. 16, 2 to 4 p.m.;
- County College of Morris, Oct. 18, 1 to 3 p.m.

For more information or to register, visit www.njhighschoolsummit.org/events.asp.

Visit Workshop Online:
www.njsba.org/workshop

Marie Hakim: 2006 School Board Member of the Year

Marie Hakim, a member of the Clifton Board of Education, is New Jersey's Board Member of the Year. Hakim, a lifelong Clifton resident and a graduate of Clifton public schools, is in her 17th year of service for the Clifton Board of Education.

"Marie truly is a dedicated volunteer who serves the community and the school district that she loves with enthusiasm," said Edwina M. Lee, NJSBA executive director. "She knows policy, fights for quality education initiatives and understands how to energize her community."

Selection Process NJSBA established the Board Member of the Year program in 2005 to recognize the contributions of New Jersey's local school board members.

An independent, out-of-state panel selected Hakim from among 21 nominees. Nominations were made by other board members, superintendents, business officials, school district staff or members of the community.

Community Involvement Hakim has served on the Clifton board for six three-

year terms, four of them as president.

She founded the Clifton Education Foundation to raise money and to award grants to students and staff for creative programs and special projects that are not funded through the district budget.

Notably, Hakim also has achieved Master Board Member status through NJSBA's Board Member Academy. Master board members complete a comprehensive set of courses designed to enhance their competence in strategic planning, negotiations and leadership and must pass an NJSBA-administered exam. Only 179 school board members have earned that designation since the NJSBA created the program in 1992.

Hakim works as an adjunct professor supervising student teaching from William Paterson University and serves as a commissioner for Clifton's Clean Communities Committee.

NJSBA plans to honor her on Oct. 25 at Workshop in Atlantic City. 🍏

Benefits Commission OKs 2007 Rates

The New Jersey State Health Benefits Commission, which regulates the state health benefits program, this month approved rate changes, effective January 2007, for school districts in the state plan. The changes include an 11.9-percent increase in the traditional plan; a 5.1-percent increase in NJ Plus, a managed-care option; and an 8.1-percent decrease in the prescription plan.

For school districts using the prescription plan, employee co-payments will increase to the same levels as those paid by state employees—for example, \$3 for generic and \$10 for brand name for a 30-day supply. For school employees in NJ Plus and other managed-care options, co-pay for each doctor

office visit will increase to \$10, the rate currently in effect for state employees.

Flexibility Proposed At the Sept. 5 meeting, the commission also initiated rule changes that would give school districts the flexibility to negotiate some cost-control provisions at the local level.

The proposed changes, however, are at a *preliminary stage*. If adopted, they would not go into effect until next year. The proposed amendments will appear in the next issue of the *New Jersey Register*, a compilation of proposed state regulations.

NJSBA will analyze the proposed changes and, if necessary, will update members through *School Board Notes* and on its Web site, www.njsba.org. 🍏

Is bigger better?

For today's education community, the question is huge.
Don't miss this opportunity to join the debate.

SAVE THE DATE:

Saturday, October 7 for a *special forum ...*

Consolidation & Shared Services

Monroe Township H.S.

(Middlesex County)

**Saturday,
October 7, 2006**

**Registration
8:45 - 9:15 a.m.**

**Program
9:15 - 11:30 a.m.**

This forum is presented as a public service by the New Jersey School Boards Association and its County Association Leadership. There is no charge to attend. Space is limited.

Join us as NJSBA convenes a panel of legislators and government and education experts to discuss some of the *hottest* issues in town—

- **Consolidation of school district functions at the county level**
- **Regionalization**
- **Shared services among school districts and municipalities**



Michael Aron, host of New Jersey Network's *Reporters' Roundtable* and *On the Record*, will moderate the discussion.

Register today at www.njsba.org/consolidation.

The New Jersey School Boards Association, a federation of district boards of education, advocates the interests of school districts, trains local school board members, and provides resources for the advancement of public education.

Health Coverage Flexibility

continued

discussions must include strategies that give school districts in the state health program the ability to negotiate healthcare costs, Hakim said.

Increase Competition Richard Snyder, a Ramsey school board member, said that giving such flexibility would make the state plan more competitive with private carriers, attracting school districts back into the program.

More than 450 school districts were enrolled in the state plan in the early 1990s. By the end of the decade, only 276 remained, he noted. Today, only 239 districts are enrolled in the state plan.

Snyder represents Bergen County as an alternate member of the NJSBA Board of Directors. 🍏

C A L E N D A R



Sept. 27

Middlesex/Somerset County SBAs
Joint Legislative Forum, Victorian
Manor, Edison, 6 p.m.

Salem County SBA, Salem Co Techni-
cal School, Woodstown, 6:30 p.m.

Sept. 28

Monmouth County SBA, La Cipollina,
Freehold, 6 p.m.

Sept. 29

Sussex County SBA, Fall Dinner, Lake
Mohawk Country Club, Sparta, 6 p.m.

Sept. 30

Hunterdon County SBA Presidents/VPs
Leadership Roundtable, Union Hotel,
Flemington, 9 a.m.

✓ Intermediate Bargaining, Robert Wood
Johnson Hamilton Conference Center,
Mercerville, 9 a.m.

Oct. 3

Hudson County SBA General Membership
Meeting, La Reggia, Secaucus, 6 p.m.

Cape May County SBA, Sand Barrens
Golf Club, 6 p.m.

Mercer County SBA, Mercer County
Special Services, Mercer Elementary
School, Hamilton, 6:30 p.m.

For more information about county school boards association activities, visit www.njsba.org and click on the name of the appropriate county association.



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