

# SCHOOL BOARD notes

## Special Session Bills Expected Mid-December



The state's non-partisan Office of Legislative Services is currently reviewing the 98 recommendations posed earlier this month by the four joint committees that conducted the

Legislature's special session on property tax reform. (See "NJSBA Greets Reports with Caution," page 4.) The office may condense the recommendations into bills that lawmakers could consider as soon as Dec. 11 or 14.

On Monday, legislative leaders indicated that any bills developed as a result of the special session would go back to the joint committees for review before being released to the Senate and Assembly.

**Funding Formula: Next Year** The Senate and Assembly received the joint commit-

tees' reports on Nov. 15. They focused on four areas: school funding reform; governmental consolidation and shared services; public employee benefits reform; and constitutional reform/citizens tax convention.

By the end of December, the Legislature is expected to consider bills on all of these subjects, *except* school funding reform. Legislation to create a new formula will be delayed until after the New Year.

Commissioner of Education Lucille Davy last week told a meeting of the state's major education organizations that she plans to conduct public hearings in December on her department's research into the cost of a "Thorough and Efficient" education. This data is expected to

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### Getting Ready for Action



Mike Vrancik (left), director of governmental relations, speaks with County Association Leadership representatives about NJSBA's plan of action to address recommendations of the Legislature's special session on property tax reform. Spearheaded by the Association's Legislative Committee, the plan will involve direct contact with lawmakers by the county association leaders, the Board of Directors and other local school board members.

## At Issue: Special Education

NJSBA is sponsoring a year-long project on special education in New Jersey. The study will result in recommendations on reliable standards of student achievement, state and federal funding, and local cost efficiency. It will also showcase best practices.

Researchers are analyzing special education data from the state Department of Education. However, much of the critical information is available *only* from local school districts. NJSBA, therefore, has sent a survey to all superintendents and special education coordinators. Due Dec. 15, the survey seeks data, as well as opin-

ions on cost and funding issues and the impact of regulations.

### Why should my district return the survey?

- Special education funding is one of the core issues in the Legislature's debate over school finance reform. In addition, it will be a focus of strategies involving shared services and consolidation.
- By completing the survey, your district will weigh in on proposed solutions for special education funding and program improvement.

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## Board Approves Field Office Plan

The Board of Directors recently voted to close NJSBA's central field office in Manalapan this summer and its Voorhees office in 2008, in light of plans to build a new headquarters and conference center in central New Jersey.

During a Nov. 17 meeting, the board voted on a plan to address the Association's satellite locations and decided to merge the Manalapan office with Trenton headquarters, while still providing high levels of

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## At Issue: Special Education

continued

- The highest possible rate of return will ensure that the study's conclusions are representative of all school districts.

### Why is broad representation needed?

- Many aspects of special education affect individual school districts – and various types of districts – differently.
- Districts from every geographic region, district factor grouping (socio-economic ranking) and grade organization/operating type need to sound their voices on special education issues.

### What has been the rate of return?

Already, responses have come from more than 19 percent of the state's school districts, representing 19 percent of New

Jersey's students. Initial responses show a comparable return by region. However, we need more representation from the lower- and higher-end district factor groupings. We also need a greater response from K-6, K-8 and K-12 districts.

### Must all survey questions be answered?

Some items may not be applicable or the data might not be readily available. Please complete what items you can and return the survey.

### My district has an exemplary program. Can it be cited in the study?

Please let us know about your program. The study will identify 20 case studies of cost-efficient and effective special education programs. Districts may nominate their own programs through the survey instrument.

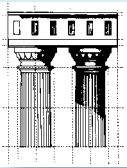
### When is the survey due?

Dec. 15, 2006.

### Who is conducting the study?

NJSBA has secured the services of MMI Associates. Principal researchers are Mari Molenaar and Michael Luciano, who have a combined total of more than 75 years of experience in special education. Dr. Molenaar has served as senior research analyst for the state education department's Office of Special Education. Luciano has extensive experience as special education director for local school districts.

For further information or to obtain a print or an electronic copy of the survey, contact Frank Belluscio at (888) 886-5722, ext. 5205, or [fbelluscio@njsba.org](mailto:fbelluscio@njsba.org).



NJSBA's newest Master Board Members and Certified Boards were honored during the Closing Session of Workshop 2006 in Atlantic City.



*Certified Board, River Dell Regional - Patrick J. Fletcher, superintendent, Katherine Norian, president, Christopher Ilg and Stephen Gellis, members.*



*Certified Board, Lakehurst – Joann Septor, board president, Mary Welch and Kevin Oliver, members, Allison Werner, vice president.*



*Master Board Members (front row, left to right): Nancy DiBartolo of Wanaque, Carol Byrne of South Plainfield, Patricia M. Snyder of Pittsgrove, and John Bulina of Tabernacle. (Back row, left to right) Paul E. LaFountain, Jr. of Pine Hill, Valerie R. Flournoy of Palmyra, Michael R. McClure of Maple Shade, and Cathy Zavorskas of Matawan-Aberdeen Regional. Not pictured: Sheryl S. Eaton of River Vale.*



*Certified Board, Fair Haven – Valery Petrone, business administrator, and Mary Chiarella, member, with NJSBA Vice President for Finance John Bulina.*



*Certified Board, Neptune Township – David A. Mooij, superintendent, Jason A. Jones, member, and John E. Daniels, vice president.*



*Certified Board, Edgewater – Cristina Stefani-Rackow and Irene Pynn, members, and Superintendent Dr. Ted Blumstein.*



*Certified Board, Somerdale – Richard Caswell, Cheryl Cronce and Linda Giambri, members, Kelly Peters, board secretary/business administrator, and Dr. Debra Bruner, superintendent.*

**Did you know that...** About 75% of your budget is set by the salaries and benefits agreed to in collective bargaining agreements. **Fact is...** A school board's obligation to negotiate terms and conditions of employment and to comply with labor agreements directly affects its ability to govern the schools. **For assistance in meeting this major obligation, contact NJSBA's Labor Relations Department. Call us at 609-278-5219 or explore [www.njsba.org](http://www.njsba.org).**

**In-District Consultations** Consultation and training of board members and administrators on specific labor relations problems. This service is available at all times during the negotiations process.

**Research & Resources** Analysis of teachers' contracts and other data useful to boards in negotiating and fact-finding. NJSBA also maintains an extensive file of arbitration awards.

**Contract Analysis** On-site analysis of the district's contract provided directly to board members and the administration.

**Publications** A series of books on labor relations issues.

**Training** Programs on core areas of personnel and labor relations. The curriculum includes *Preparing for Bargaining*, *Intermediate Bargaining*, *Advanced Bargaining*, and *Analyzing and Constructing Salary Guides*.

**Advice** Telephone and written advice on negotiations, grievance and arbitration handling, mediation and fact-finding, Public Employment Relations Commission rulings, court decisions, and employee job actions.

75%

# Anti-Gang Bills Advance in the Senate

The Senate Law, Public Safety and Veterans' Affairs Committee unanimously approved a series of anti-gang proposals on Nov. 20. The following bills now move to the full Senate for consideration:

**S-1749** - Requires boards of education to offer elementary school students instruction in gang violence prevention. While NJSBA strongly supports the intent of the measure, it is seeking amendments to an identical Assembly bill, A-1650, to ensure that the program is part of an overall effort on gang violence prevention, and not an unfunded mandate.

**S-2012** - Requires courts to conduct inquiries about the source of bail in all cases where a defendant is charged with a first or second degree crime, possessing a weapon for unlawful purpose, unlawfully possessing a weapon, a crime related to criminal street gang activity, or certain drug charges. The inquiry would make sure the funds used to pay the bail are acquired through legal means.

**S-2009** - Enhances penalties for receiving or transferring a "community gun," which is a firearm passed between two or more people involved in criminal activity. 🗳️

## HSPA Scores Available Online

School district test results for the High School Proficiency Assessment administration will be available in electronic format at <http://www.measinc.com/nj>.

Beginning Dec. 15, all section rosters will be posted on the site. On Dec. 29, Cycle 1 reports will be posted. From Jan. 2 to Jan. 5, 2007, Individual Student Reports, and student stickers are scheduled to arrive in districts.

School districts also will receive instructions in the mail before Dec. 15 for accessing their online score reports.

For further information contact Rob Akins, HSPA measurement specialist for the state Department of Education, at (609) 984-1435.

## Special Session Legislation

continued

serve as a foundation for a proposed school funding formula.

The hearings are based on a recommendation of the joint committee on school funding reform.

**NJSBA Study** To prepare for the legislative debate on school finance, NJSBA President Kevin E. Ciak has appointed a special committee that will study the Association's current beliefs on school funding in light of issues that are expected to come before the Legislature. The nine-member panel is

chaired by Roger Butler of the Burlington Township Board of Education. Membership is geographically and economically representative of the state.

**Read More About It** A recent special electronic edition of *School Board Notes* summarizes the reports on school funding, consolidation and employee benefits. It also contains links to the Legislature's special session reports. To view NJSBA's Special Session Report, go to the "In the News" section of NJSBA's homepage at [www.njsba.org](http://www.njsba.org). 🗳️

## NJSBA Greets Reports with Caution

The four joint committees formed as part of the Legislature's special session on property tax reform issued 98 recommendations on Nov. 15. They include—

- Conducting school board member elections in November.
- Eliminating the annual election on the base budget, but requiring ballot questions in the spring for proposed expenditures above the state-imposed budget cap.
- Creating a "hard" budget cap based on the consumer price index and adjusted for enrollment only.
- Creating the position of executive county superintendent, which would absorb certain administrative and business functions that now take place at the local school district level.
- Eliminating send-all (non-operating) school districts.
- Requiring referenda on consolidating elementary-only and secondary-only school districts into Kindergarten through 12th grade systems.
- Giving school districts in the State Health Benefits Program the ability to negotiate aspects of coverage with their employees.

Immediately after the release of the special session reports, NJSBA Executive Director Edwina M. Lee offered a mix of caution and enthusiasm about several of the committees' recommendations.

**Benefits reform:** "The committee's recommendations... can have a direct, positive impact on property tax relief," said Lee. "We strongly support the recommendation to allow school boards in the State Health Benefits Plan to negotiate terms of the benefits. The practice is common in the private sector, and saves money."

**School elections:** "We agree with the concept of eliminating elections for school budgets that are under the state-imposed spending cap. But moving school board member elections to November puts those candidates in a partisan environment."

**'Super' county superintendents:** "Creating 'super' county superintendents might cost communities money. By taking over procurement and, perhaps, negotiations, the concept could undermine cost savings that local boards have already achieved," said Lee. "The special session's cost-saving objectives could be achieved better through incentives that promote shared services. We are also wary about placing sweeping powers in the hands of a political appointee."

**School funding:** "We have long supported the concept of the state revenues being tapped to offset the cost to property taxpayers," said Lee. "New Jersey state government pays an average of 38 percent of the cost of public schools, where other states pay half, on average. This has put a tremendous burden on property taxes to pay for schools."

"NJSBA supports reasonable caps on spending, but we oppose the establishment of a 'hard cap' on budgets that would provide no adjustments for costs that are out of a district's control."

Visit [www.njsba.org](http://www.njsba.org) for summaries of the special session reports.



## BOARD OF DIRECTORS HIGHLIGHTS

The regular meeting of NJSBA's Board of Directors took place on Friday, Nov. 17, 2006 in East Windsor. Action taken at the Board of Directors meeting included the following:

- Approved Open Session Minutes of the Oct. 13, 2006 Board of Directors meeting.
- Approved Closed Session Minutes of the Oct. 13, 2006 Board of Directors meeting.
- Approved on 2nd Reading and Adopted Governance and Operations Policy File Code 4131.3, *Tuition Reimbursement*.
- Approved on 2nd Reading and Adopted Governance and Operations Policy File Code 1004, *Membership on Joint Committees and Education-Related Organizations*.
- Approved 1st Reading of Governance and Operations Policy File Code 4155, *Attendance*.
- Introduced and waived 2nd reading to approve waiver of Governance and Operations Policy File Code 3323, *Soliciting Prices (Bids and Quotations)* for the building project.
- Approved Executive Director's Recommendations for Relocation of Field Offices.
  1. Relocate Central Field Office staff to headquarters by July 1, 2007.
  2. Relocate Southern Field Office staff to headquarters by July 1, 2008.
  3. Retain the Northern Office in West Caldwell until the new headquarters facility has been in operation for a full budget cycle. A final decision about continuing the operation of the Northern Office would take place during the January 2009 discussion of the projected needs of the Association.
- Heard report from Construction Review Committee.
- Heard reports from NJSBA Vice Presidents for County Activities, Finance, and Legislation/Resolutions.
- Received reports from NJSBA's President and Executive Director.
- Reviewed and approved NJSBA plan for district-level teams to meet with lawmakers to discuss special sessions issues.
- Debriefed on Workshop 2006.
- Tabled until January 2007 discussion of rescheduling Board of Directors meetings to Saturdays.



*At the Nov. 17 Board of Directors meeting, members listen intently to a discussion of NJSBA's plan of action to address the recommendations of the Legislature's Special Session on Property Tax Reform. In front row are (left to right) Marida Tindall, Cumberland County; Allen Rude, Sussex County; and Giselda Mintz, Sussex alternate.*

## NJSBA Revises Model Policy on Absence

NJSBA has amended the "Absences and Excuses" policy, No. 5113, in its Critical Policy Reference Manual to reflect changes made by the New Jersey Department of Education on Oct. 16.

The Association considers actions, such as calling parents and keeping records of absences, to be procedure, rather than policy. However, new code (NJAC 6A:16-7.8) directs school districts to take specific action in response to student absences. Therefore, new language was added to the NJSBA model policy.

Because the state Department of Education might make additional changes to the regulations, NJSBA is advising its members of the minor policy change through this *School Board Notes* article, rather than by adding the 77 pages of new regulations to the Critical Policy Reference Manual.

To access the Critical Policy Reference Manual and the amended "Absences and Excuses" policy (5113) and legal references, visit [www.njsba.org/policy](http://www.njsba.org/policy). For information, contact David Bosted at (609) 695-5267 or [dbosted@njsba.org](mailto:dbosted@njsba.org).

## Field Office Plan

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service to member districts. Located about 20 miles east of the NJSBA's new 10-acre site in Hamilton Township, the Manalapan central office will close July 1.

"Let me assure you, the board's decision does not affect the number of our field service staff. It does not affect their ability to work with school boards. And in no way will we allow direct services to local school boards to be diminished," Kevin E. Ciak, president of NJSBA, told the Association's Delegate Assembly during its bi-annual meeting Nov. 18. "In fact, it's our plan to see direct services to you *grow*."

Groundbreaking for the building is anticipated in the spring of 2008, with construction completed a year later.

**Southern and Northern Offices** The southern field office in Voorhees, Camden County, is slated to close in July 2008. The board decided to retain the northern field office in West Caldwell, Essex County, for a full budget cycle after the new headquarters opens. The board will re-evaluate whether to keep that location in January 2009.

Field service representatives will be offered home-office options including office equipment, if necessary.

"Our field service representatives have always been well-trained, highly mobile staffers, never chained to a desk," Ciak said. "Today's technology allows them to provide services to you more effectively than ever before." 🍷



*School board representatives cast votes during NJSBA's Delegate Assembly Nov. 17 in East Windsor. Next week's School Board Notes will feature a full report on the semi-annual meeting.*



# NJSBA ONLINE

Check out NJSBA's homepage, [www.njsba.org](http://www.njsba.org), for these new features:

- A video of President Kevin E. Ciak's recent half-hour interview on Cablevision's "Meet the Leaders" program
- NJSBA's Comprehensive Report on the Legislature's Special Session recommendations
- A news report on the Nov. 18 Delegate Assembly.
- An update on NJSBA's plans for a new headquarters/conference center ([www.njsba.org/newfacility](http://www.njsba.org/newfacility))

## C A L E N D A R



### Dec. 7

Mercer County SBA, West Windsor-Plainsboro HS North, Plainsboro, 6:30 p.m.

Camden & Gloucester County SBA Joint Meeting, Auletts, Almonesson, 6:30 p.m.

Warren County SBA General Membership Meeting, Knowlton Twp. Elementary School, Delaware, 7 p.m.

### Dec. 8

✓ Urban Boards Committee Meeting, Trenton Board of Education, Trenton, 6:30 p.m.

### Dec. 9

✓ New Board Member Orientation, Clifton High School, 9 a.m.

✓ Communicating Effectively, Clifton High School, 9:30 a.m.

✓ Engaging the Public, Clifton High School, 9:30 a.m.

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

School Board Notes is printed on recycled paper using vegetable ink.

*School Board Notes* is published as a weekly supplement to *School Leader*, the official bimonthly journal of the New Jersey School Boards Association. Mailed to board members, superintendents and school business administrators or affiliated school boards as part of membership dues. Subscriptions may be purchased at the following prices. *School Board Notes*: members, \$27.50; non-members, \$55; *School Leader*, members, \$17.50; non-members, \$35.00. Members are all New Jersey school board members and staff of districts in good standing. ©2005

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