

# SCHOOL BOARD notes

## Cap Bill Rushed through Legislature



Will the 4 percent property tax cap bill, A-1—introduced late Friday afternoon and passed on Monday by the Assembly, 71-8—hurt or help public education?

Under such short time lines, a definitive answer is not possible. NJSBA, therefore, is urging the state Senate, which could address the bill as early as Monday, Feb. 5, to conduct a hearing to allow for analysis and comment on A-1. The 51-page bill would have a far-reaching impact on local school district operations.

“We don’t need another S-1701. When speed overtakes thoughtful review, the result can be a law that helps neither public educa-

tion, nor property taxpayers,” said Edwina M. Lee, NJSBA executive director.

NJSBA has issued an alert, asking members to contact Senate President Codey and their state Senators and urge them to conduct a hearing on A-1.

**State Aid Factor** The full impact of A-1 will also depend on a factor that is unknown at this time: the future level of state aid to education. That information will not be available until the end of February when Gov. Jon S. Corzine delivers his annual budget message to the Legislature.

“If under-funding of state school aid continues, as it has since 2002, the new property tax cap could lead to education

programs cuts,” said Lee.

**New Concept** A-1 would replace the existing state budget cap for five years (2007-2008 through 2011-2012). Unlike the state’s current spending growth limit, the new cap would restrict increases in property tax revenue *only*—rather than the combined increase in state aid, federal aid and local property tax revenue. Therefore, if state aid remains stagnant, school districts would have less access to local revenue to fund cost increases that are out of their control.

**Adjustments** A-1 would create automatic cap  
*continued on page 5*

### Now the Good News...

#### Special Session Bills = Health Benefits Reform

The special session bills aimed at capping property taxes and reforming pensions would also achieve major portions of NJSBA’s goals in the area of employee benefits reform.

Certain provisions of the property tax cap bill (A-1) and the pension reform bill (S-17) would—

- Permit employee contributions to premium. (A-1)
- Allow school districts to offer employees incentives to waive duplicate coverage. (S-17)
- Allow variations in levels of coverage for different classifications of employees, based on date of initial employment, salary and other factors. (A-1)

In late December, a coalition of public employer organizations, including NJSBA, sent a letter to Gov. Corzine asking him to support these reforms.

Without them, “there is very little local government employers can do to control increasing health benefits costs. The losers in this situation will be local property taxpayers,” wrote the executive directors of the organizations.

Groups in the coalition represent local school boards, municipalities, counties and county colleges.

### Education by the Numbers

**71.6** Percentage of New Jersey public school expenditures directed toward instruction, instruction related-services, and student support services, 2003-2004. (New Jersey’s percentage is above the national average.)

**9.9** Percentage of New Jersey public school expenditures directed toward administration, 2003-2004. (New Jersey’s percentage is below the national average.)

**37<sup>th</sup>** New Jersey’s rank among the 50 states in administrative spending.

Source: U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics, “Common Core of Data,” issued July 2006.



## Notice: Resolutions Cutoff

All resolutions submitted for the May 19, 2007 Annual Delegate Assembly must be received at NJSBA's Trenton office by 5 p.m., Monday, March 5, 2007. The second notice regarding the cutoff date was e-mailed and faxed to school business administrators, county association presidents and board presidents on January 25, 2007. The mailing included rules for appearing before the Resolutions Subcommittee, which is scheduled to meet Saturday, March 31 to consider the resolutions submitted for the Delegate Assembly agenda.

Resolutions must be mailed to:

Resolutions, May 2007  
Delegate Assembly

c/o Edwina M. Lee, Executive Director  
New Jersey School Boards Association  
413 West State Street, P.O. Box 909  
Trenton, N.J. 08605-0909

## Dues Letter in the Mail

NJSBA sent a letter to school district business administrators this week regarding Association dues for the next fiscal year. For further information, contact Francis Pullo, director of business services, at (888) 886-5722, ext. 5204.

## Dialogue on Issues

The Bergen County School Boards Association hosted Commissioner Lucille Davy at its Fall Dinner Meeting in Washington Township. More than 175 board members and administrators from Bergen, Essex, Hudson, Morris, Passaic and Sussex Counties participated in a dialogue on current educational issues.



(Left to Right) Kevin E. Ciak, NJSBA president; Beth Politti, Bergen SBA president; Lucille E. Davy, commissioner of education; Edwina M. Lee, NJSBA executive director; Maud Dahme, State Board of Education member; and Dr. Aaron Graham, Bergen County superintendent

# Pension Reform Passes Assembly



The state Senate and Assembly this week passed legislation to change eligibility and benefits under the state-operated pension systems.

S-17 would also allow school districts to offer employees incentives to waive coverage under the State Health Benefits Program. That provision represents an NJSBA goal. (See article, page 1.)

The bill must return to the Senate for concurrence on an Assembly amendment made Monday night. The next Senate voting session is scheduled for Feb. 5.

NJSBA is seeking clarification on bill provisions that address pension eligibility and pension benefits levels to determine their impact on school districts.

Some clarification would be made through regulations passed by the State Board of Education and other state agencies.

S-17 reflects recommendations of the Joint Legislative Committee on Public Employee Benefits Reform, one of the

four panels convened during the special session on property tax reform. **Financial Stability** NJSBA policy calls for a state pension system that is financially secure, properly funded and cost efficient. The Association will continue to analyze S-17 and other pension reform proposals to determine if they are in line with this belief.

S-17 would prohibit individuals who have professional services contracts with government entities and school districts from participating in the Public Employees' Retirement System. Public employees and officeholders making less than \$1,500 a year would also be ineligible for public pension systems. In addition, the bill would allow employees earning less than \$5,000 a year to opt out of the state pension system.

S-17 also contains provisions capping payment for unused sick and limiting carry-over of vacation time. However, it is not clear if these provisions would apply to school district employees. 🍏

# NJSBA: Construction Funding Needed

The issue of state funding for new school construction remains unresolved.

Last week, officials of the state agency created to oversee school construction in the state's poorest communities indicated in newspaper reports that, without an infusion of new money, construction projects would come to a halt in May or June.

**State Support** "We hope the governor and the Legislature will address this issue in the state's 2007-2008 budget, or through a new school funding formula," said Edwina M. Lee, NJSBA executive director. "There remains a severe need for adequate facilities in all types of school districts.

"Many districts are hesitant to go forward with new school construction or

renovations—and many voters are unwilling to approve such plans—because of the ambiguity of the state's support for school construction."

**Low Approval Rate** On Jan. 23, voters in three of seven school districts (Ridgefield, Westfield and Allamuchy Township) approved approximately \$25 million in construction. The small number of proposals and the rate of approval paint a dramatically different picture from 2000-2005, when a state program provided up-front grants to reduce the amount of money districts needed to borrow for construction.

For the Jan. 23 school bond election results, visit NJSBA's Newsroom at [www.njsba.org/PI](http://www.njsba.org/PI). 🍏

# The Leadership Conference

BECOME A LEADER OTHERS WILL WANT TO FOLLOW

New Time of Year



March 9-10, 2007

Princeton Marriott Hotel and Conference Center at Forrestal, Princeton

(Friday, 5:45 p.m. dinner – Saturday, 9:00 p.m.)

**Hit the ground running immediately after the April elections!**

Prepare to take the reins at reorganization and lead your board to new heights. Whether you're going to run for another term as president or vice president, or you are planning to seek one of those positions at reorganization, this conference is the **one that you must attend!** We've moved the program from summer to spring to help you develop the hands-on skills and provide you with the tools needed to enable your board to focus on the critical issues it faces.

## Jump Start Your Role as a Board Leader

This year's program has been moved to March, starts on Friday evening, and ends Saturday night. In an intense 28-hour period, you will be immersed in board leader boot camp. Through large group presentations and small group sessions, you will explore the critical aspects of board leadership and put newly-developed skills to the test. You will come away with tools and techniques to help your board "do it correctly."

### Topics Include:

- What is a Leader?
- Making Everybody Better
- Improving Your Board's Internal Communication
- The Open Public Meetings Act
- Managing the Meeting
- When Leaders Are at Their Best
- Working on Problems, Not Personalities
- Developing the Board-Superintendent Leadership Team



**Academy Credits:** 4

**CBM Status:** Elective

**MBM Status:** Elective

**CBL Status:** Required Course

**Cancellation Policy:** Cancellations made up to 10 working days prior to the program date will be refunded the entire registration fee. Cancellations made between 10 working days and 72 hours of the program start will be charged \$50. 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.

To register or for more information, call Heidi Bullock, Business Department, at 1-888-886-5722 extension 5217 or direct line 609-278-5217 or complete the coupon below and fax to 609-695-2934.

Please register me for the **Leadership Conference**, March 9-10, 2007 at the Princeton Marriott Hotel and Conference Center at Forrestal, Princeton.

**Registration Fee:** \$336 (Includes materials and meals). Room reservations **must** be made separately directly through the conference center, 609-452-7800. A special Leadership Conference rate is guaranteed until February 16.

Payment enclosed

Bill Board (Voucher enclosed)\*

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ TITLE: \_\_\_\_\_

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FAX: \_\_\_\_\_ E-MAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

**Return to:** New Jersey School Boards Association, Business Department, Heidi Bullock  
413 W. State Street, P.O. Box 909, Trenton, New Jersey 08605-0909 or FAX: 609-695-2934

\*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.

# Building Connections In Washington and at Home



Florence “Peggy” Saslow, a great-grandmother in her 80s, is among the New Jersey contingent of school officials at this week’s Federal Relations Network conference in

Washington, D.C.

“My middle name is not only Peggy, it’s grassroots” she said.

“I want to apprise our legislators in Washington as to what is happening on the local level and how we’re being choked and what they can do to help us. We need help, we all need help. We could do so much more,” she added. “There are things that we could offer that we cannot because it costs money. Local taxes are exorbitant; people don’t want their taxes to go up. You’ve got to present a budget that is fair and trim and lean.”

**Active and Engaged** Saslow, a member of the New Milford Board of Education in Bergen County for the past nine years, is finishing up her fourth term, but is not slowing down.

The former dietician, substitute teacher and full-time home economics teacher for 27 years is still active as ever.

Since retiring 13 years ago, she has taught nutrition at Simmons College in Boston, where she attended. She also acts as a volunteer recruiter for Simmons at college fairs, and acts as secretary for its alumni association’s executive board. Closer to home, Saslow serves on the senior advisory board in New Milford and she teaches an AARP driver’s education program.

**Passion for Education** The common theme of all in her activities is education.

This week, Saslow took part in her third visit to Washington D.C., as a member of NJSBA’s Federal Relations Network delegation, representing the 2,000 students in her kindergarten through grade 12 district and the 1.4 million public schoolchildren in New Jersey. She said she views face-to-face interaction with lawmakers as crucial, and brings back what she’s learned to PTO meetings as her school board’s liaison to the group.

“I talk about grass roots. What the individual can do in getting in touch with their congressman. What they need to know that is happening on the local, state and national levels,” said Saslow, who has seven grandchildren and one great-granddaughter.

“At the last PTO meeting I went to, I said, ‘When I come back, I will have come back from this conference in Washington and I will tell you about all the things that are happening and what you can do.’”

In particular, school board members need to make a big push for changes to the federal No Child Left Behind Act, which is up for reauthorization in Congress this year, according to Saslow.

“What you hear from the administration in Washington is how wonderful it is. And, really, I don’t think it’s done a damn thing,” said Saslow, 83. “It could, but there are so many things that they’ve never thought of as problems.

“One of the things that I talk about all the time is that we need to invest in our children because they are our future. And an educated child, who understands the world, not just math and English, but understands science and the arts and poetry, is someone who could face the world and love all kinds of people.” 🍏

## CONFERENCE NOTES



### Celebration of Teaching and Learning

NJSBA is a supporter of Thirteen/WNET’s Celebration of Teaching and Learning 2007.

This year’s event will be held March 23 and 24 in New York City.

Former Vice President Al Gore will discuss climate change during the event, themed “Science and Global Awareness.” Tim Russert, moderator of Meet the Press and political analyst for NBC Nightly News, also will host a Town Hall Meeting to discuss “Preparing Our Students for the 21st Century.”

More than 7,000 educators and administrators from throughout the U.S. attended last year’s inaugural celebration, a professional development conference for kindergarten through grade 12 educators. With nationally recognized speakers, prominent educators and more than 100 exhibitor booths, the event was a landmark event for the educational community of the Tri-State area.

For more information about the program, visit [www.wliwcelebration.org](http://www.wliwcelebration.org).

### Joint Conference to Address Prevention Programs

Rutgers and the New Jersey Department of Education are sponsoring a program to help school, law enforcement, health, community, non-profit and other professional group leaders learn effective ways for creating youth prevention programs and for sharing information with other organizations.

The Better Use of Data County Forums programs will specifically focus on “Improving Prevention Programming about Youth through Data-Driven Planning and Collaboration.” For more information for the program, which will be offered in Camden, Cumberland, Essex, Monmouth, Morris, Ocean and Salem counties, contact Lori Guerriero at (732) 445-6173 ext. 246 or [lguerri@rci.rutgers.edu](mailto:lguerri@rci.rutgers.edu).

Each program will be limited to 75 participants and offered between Jan. 30 and Feb. 27. To register online visit <http://education.state.nj.us/events/>.

# E-mail to Boards: Prepare for Evaluations

In a Jan. 25 e-mail to board presidents, NJSBA Executive Director Edwina M. Lee urged school districts to prepare for the superintendent evaluation process. Superintendent evaluations must be completed by April 30, according to state law.

As a service to its members, NJSBA has made available an improved superintendent evaluation form. Developed with input from board members and superintendents, the document ensures compliance with New Jersey laws and administrative code in a meaningful and user-friendly format.

To meet the deadline, boards should have evaluation forms in hand by the end of February. The superintendent evaluation goes hand in hand with the board self-evaluation, and both provide an excellent basis for goal setting for the upcoming school year.

**Onsite Help** NJSBA field service representatives can provide assistance to school boards with the superintendent evaluation and board self-evaluation processes. The Association can provide both forms in electronic format, will compile the results for discussion by school boards and will review and analyze superintendent evaluation and board self-evaluation results.

To obtain assistance from NJSBA, contact your NJSBA Field Services offices: North – (877) 294-6416; Central – (877) 294-6418; or South – (877) 294-6417. 🍏

## Correction

A recent obituary for Frank J. Cicarell, president of the Rahway Board of Education, incorrectly listed his age as 56. The article should have indicated that Mr. Cicarell had been a professional educator for more than 56 years.

## Cap Bill continued

adjustments and an expanded list of waivers. The approval process, however, may be more restrictive than current practice.

Beginning in 2007-2008, school districts would receive automatic cap adjustments for reductions in state aid, increases in health care costs, and sharp increases in enrollment.

For 2007-2008, districts would continue to have the current option of appealing to the commissioner of education for cap waivers based on special education costs over \$40,000 per pupil, increases in tuition charged through a sending-receiving relationship, capital outlay, and new school start-up expenses.

**New Waivers** Beginning in 2008-2009, the bill would expand the number of commissioner-authorized waivers, which would include the following: expenditures that address a district's failure to meet state academic standards; energy costs; use of surplus during the previous budget year; hazardous-route busing; insurance; extraordinary special education costs; new school start-up costs; and sending-receiving tuition.

Before granting the waiver, the state could shift allocations within the district's

proposed budget.

**Super-majority** For the 2007 Annual School Election, districts could still propose second questions for above-cap spending. Approval of the questions in this year's election would require a simple majority vote, and defeated second questions would be reviewed by the municipal governing body.

Beginning in 2008, however, 60 percent of participating voters would have to approve the questions. Municipalities would no longer review defeated over-cap questions; voter action would be final.

Requiring supermajority approval of public questions is without precedent in New Jersey. Even amendments to the state Constitution require only a simple majority for approval

**Property Tax Credits** A-1 incorporates proposals from the Legislature's special session on property tax reform. In addition to the 4 percent property tax cap, the bill would also reduce property tax bills by up to 20 percent for most New Jerseyans through credits to municipalities. To fund the credits, the state would use part of the new revenue generated by last year's 1-cent sales tax increase. 🍏

S T A T E



U P D A T E

**QSAC:** On Jan. 25, Gov. Jon S. Corzine signed into law A-3676/S-2136, legislation that amends the New Jersey Quality Single Accountability Continuum, the state's new student monitoring system. The bill contains NJSBA-sought amendments that eliminated provisions that would have given state-appointed "highly skilled professionals" sole authority to hire and fire employees in a district under full or partial state control.

**Gang Education:** The governor also approved A-1650/S-1749, which require boards of education to provide elementary school students with instruction in gang violence prevention.

**Mandated Holidays:** The governor issued a conditional veto of A-17/S-9, which would eliminate certain mandatory holiday observances in the schools.

Corzine said he agrees with the concept of removing mandatory observances. However, he is concerned with including Memorial Day and Veterans' Day among the list of those holidays left to local discretion.

# State Launches Security Site

The state Department of Education has launched a new Web site as a resource for school officials, parents, students and others interested in improving safety and security at New Jersey schools.

School officials also can use the site to request technical assistance from the education department in developing their school and district security plans. To access the new resource visit "New Jersey School Security" link on the education department's Web site at [www.nj.gov/education](http://www.nj.gov/education).

The site was developed as part of Gov. Jon S. Corzine's S.A.V.E. (Strategic Actions for Violence Elimination) initia-

tive, announced in October. It is designed in part to enhance collaboration among school officials, law enforcement agencies and the community.

**Crisis Planning** The site will act as a central resource for the latest information on crisis and emergency planning, school security, regulations, funding opportunities and available staff training, presentations and briefings, according to Commissioner of Education Lucille E. Davy.

Also included on the site is information about issues such as pandemic influenza planning, Internet safety, bullying and gang prevention. 🍏

## CALENDAR


### Feb. 8

Camden County SBA, The Mansion, Voorhees, 6:30 p.m.

### Feb. 10

Passaic County SBA and Passaic County Ed. Association Joint Brunch, The Brownstone, Paterson, 9 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.

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