

SCHOOL BOARD notes

Gov Offers Incentive for School Salary Freezes

Gov. Chris Christie said he plans to offer more state aid to school districts whose teachers agree to a wage freeze for the 2011 fiscal year, according to AP news reports on March 30.

The aid would be generated by the savings the state would receive from Social Security and Medicare payroll taxes as a result of the wage freezes. Districts could see more than 7 percent of the value of the wage freeze savings. For example, a district that saved \$1 million as a result

of keeping wages flat could receive about \$75,000 in extra aid.

The governor has been actively promoting school district staff wage freezes, a position supported by the New Jersey School Boards Association.

NJSBA Surveys Districts An ongoing survey of school business administrators shows that almost all boards in the first and second year of teacher contracts are discussing reopening negotiations with the goal of a wage freeze or other adjust-

ment to compensation. As of Tuesday, 322 school districts responded to the survey.

NJSBA has called on the state teachers unions to urge their local affiliates to cooperate with school board proposals to re-open contracts in order to adjust compensation, and to save important positions and education programs. The Association believes that a salary freeze should extend to all school employees, including administrators.

Several districts have reported reaching

continued on page 6

Department of Education Releases Spending Guide

The average cost to educate a New Jersey student was \$13,835 in 2009-2010 – a 4.3 percent increase from the previous year – according to the 2010 *Comparative Spending Guide* released last week.

The annual report issued by the New Jersey Department of Education provides statistics detailing local school spending in 14 categories.

“The guide allows people to compare districts’ efficiency, but it is important

to note that the guide is about spending patterns, not academic achievement,” Education Commissioner Bret Schundler said. “It does not attempt to make any correlation between expenditures and academic achievement.”

The *Comparative Spending Guide* can be found online at www.state.nj.us/education/guide/2010.

The Department of Education noted some of the trends:

- The average cost of classroom instruction was \$8,113 per student, an increase of 3.6 percent. Instructional costs make up about 59 percent of school districts’ average per pupil costs.
- The greatest increase since last year was in support services like nurses and guidance counselors. Those costs, which account for about 15.5 percent of an average district’s cost per pupil, came in at \$2,169 per student.
- The slowest rate of increase was in administrative costs, which grew by 2.4 percent. Administrative costs averaged \$1,453 per pupil, making up about 2.5 percent of school districts’ total costs per pupil.

The annual guide groups school districts of similar size and grade structure. It compares K-6, K-8, K-12, 7-12 and 9-12 districts – with subgroupings depending

continued on page 4

Learn@Lunch Conducts Online Program on the Budget



NJSBA staff members discussed Gov. Christie’s proposed budget and what it means to school districts in a Learn@Lunch online program on March 24.

From left to right, Ray Pinney, Member Outreach Coordinator; Michael Vrancik, Director of Governmental Relations; Patrick Duncan, Senior Consultant/Negotiator in the Labor Relations Department; and Frank Belluscio, Director of Communications.

New Jersey Still Outperforms Most on National Reading Test, But Progress is Flat

New Jersey students continued to score at the top of national rankings of students in the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading test, but the tests showed that scores have not improved appreciably. The NAEP, often called “The Nation’s Report Card,” is one of the few tests with data that allows state-by-state comparisons to be made.

In the reading test, New Jersey’s fourth grade students were tied for second in the country, along with Connecticut, New Hampshire and Vermont; Massachusetts ranked first. In the eighth grade test, Garden State students were ranked second, after Massachusetts.

Scores Flat Since 2007 However, in New Jersey, as was the case nationally, reading scores were flat. The state’s score on the

fourth grade test dropped slightly, by two points, from the 2007 test, while the eighth grade score rose by three points. The NAEP judged both to be statistically insignificant.

Achievement Gap Persists The tests also showed that the achievement gap, or the difference in academic performance between minority and low income children and their classmates, persists.

Among fourth grade students, black students had an average score that was 25 points lower than white children. This performance gap is narrower than 1992’s 35 point difference, but still significant. Hispanic children of that age had an average score of 24 points lower than their white counterparts; that gap narrowed from 38 points in 1992.

In 2009, black grade-eight students had

an average score that was 31 points lower and Hispanic students’ average score was 25 points lower than that of white students. In both cases, the performance gap was not significantly different than it was in 2003.

Race to the Top Grants Go to Just Two States

The first round of the federal Race to the Top grants were awarded to just two states this week – Delaware and Tennessee – as 14 other states that were finalists received none of the stimulus education funding.

In giving the first round of grants to only two states, the U.S. Department of Education sent a message that it placed a high premium on applicants that acquired the buy-in from local stakeholders, including teacher unions. In New Jersey, union leaders in more than 350 participating districts have refused to sign on to the program out of concerns that the federal grants encourage states to adopt merit pay – something labor unions routinely oppose. NJSBA wrote a letter of support for the state’s grant application.

The \$4.35 billion in competitive grants is for states that have plans to institute educational reforms to improve teaching, raise standards, track student performance and help struggling schools. Forty states applied for the first round of grants, but New Jersey was not one of the 16 finalists. The next round of applications is due June 1.

Delaware will receive approximately \$100 million and Tennessee will get \$500 million. New Jersey stands to receive between \$200 million and \$400 million, if approved.

Status Report on NJSBA Building Renovation

Renovation work on NJSBA’s headquarters building at 413 W. State St. is proceeding on-time and under-budget, according to Francis Pullo, NJSBA director of Finance and Operational Services.

The building, which dates from 1962, had several infrastructure problems, including roof and window leaks, old plumbing which was frequently out of order, and inefficient heating and cooling systems. In May 2009, the Association’s

board of directors voted to renovate the existing headquarters, rather than construct a new building.

At present, interior demolition is nearly complete, and the Association is awaiting additional construction permits from the City of Trenton. Once construction permits are received, work on building interior partitions and other infrastructure elements will begin.

A new roof on the building has been completed, and the support pieces for the rooftop solar panels are in place.

Contractor Under Budget NJSBA has hired a general contractor for the project, Fitzpatrick & Associates, which is based in Tinton Falls. The contractor’s bid came in about \$500,000 below the budgeted amount of \$4.8 million.

The Association expects to move staff members back to the headquarters from temporary quarters at 850 Bear Tavern Road in Ewing around August 1.



Interior demolition is nearly complete at NJSBA Headquarters at 413 W. State St..

How to Green Your School District in Difficult Times



Saturday, April 24 • 9 a.m. - 12 p.m. (registration 8:30)
The Willow School, 1150 Pottersville Road, Gladstone, NJ

Everyone is talking about making their schools more sustainable and how districts can integrate curriculum with conservation. In these challenging economic times for every district statewide, you may believe that your budget will not enable you to do anything at all. That is not true and at this event, you'll not only hear from districts that are doing it along with experts on how to do it, but you can see it first hand at The Willow School, where we are hosting the event.

Keynote Speaker

Sponsored by Parette Somjen Architects:

Jaimie P. Cloud, Author & Sustainability Expert,
Founder & President of the Cloud Institute for Sustainability, NYC

Presenters:

Mark Biedron, Co-founder, the Willow School

David A. Mooij, Superintendent of Schools, Neptune Township

Winnie Fattou, Project Manager, Sustainable NJ

Dr. Monica M. Browne, Superintendent of Schools, Upper Saddle River



This program is open to **ALL DISTRICT PERSONNEL** who can play a role in greening your schools and your district. Teachers, Supervisors, Buildings & Grounds Managers, Board Members and CSA's can all learn from what The Willow School is doing and what our speakers will share from their experience.

If you or any members of your district are unable to attend in person, you can participate online as we will broadcast a portion of the event live on the Internet. Register for either event at www.njsba.org/earth10.

We hope that you will find time to participate in this event in person or online. Remember, this program is open to **ALL DISTRICT PERSONNEL**.



Cost: Free
Academy Credits: 1
CBM and MBM Core Areas: Covers All Areas

YOU CAN REGISTER ONLINE NOW AT WWW.NJSBA.ORG/EARTH10.

The school district accountability law places travel restrictions on school board members. Travel approval is required in advance. For information, visit www.njsba.org/accountabilityact/. For possible program cancellations or postponements due to inclement weather, call (609) 392-2000.

Please register me for the **How to Green Your School District in Difficult Times**, Saturday, April 24, 2010, 9 a.m. – 12 p.m. (registration 8:30 a.m.), The Willow School, 1150 Pottersville Road, Gladstone, NJ.

NAME: _____ TITLE: _____

DISTRICT: _____ COUNTY: _____

ADDRESS: _____

PHONE: (h) _____ (b) _____

FAX: _____ E-MAIL: _____

Return to: New Jersey School Boards Association, Call Center
413 W. State Street, P.O. Box 909, Trenton, New Jersey 08605-0909 or FAX: 609-278-5280

New Jersey Gets \$66.7 Million Federal Grant for Low Achieving Schools

New Jersey has been awarded \$66.7 million from the U.S. Department of Education's (USDE) School Improvement Grants program to help districts enact changes in the state's lowest performing schools.

Districts with schools identified by the state Department of Education (DOE) as Tier I or Tier II will be eligible to apply for the competitive grant. Districts can seek between \$50,000 and \$2 million per school for each year of the three-year grant.

The state has identified Tier I and Tier II schools in the following districts: Asbury Park, Camden City, East Orange, Essex County Vocational, Irvington, Jersey City, Newark, Paterson, Roselle and Trenton.

Eligible districts have until mid-April to apply for the funds. As part of the applica-

tion, districts must identify one of four models to be used to implement change at each school.

The four federally-mandated methods include:

- **Turnaround** Replace principal, screen existing school staff, and rehire no more than half of the school's teachers; adopt a new governance structure; and improve the school through curriculum reform, professional development, extending learning time and other strategies;
- **Restart** Convert the school, or close it and re-open as a charter school or under an education management organization;
- **School closure** Close the school and send students to higher-achieving

schools in the district;

- **Transformation** Replace the principal and improve the school through comprehensive curriculum reform, professional development, extending learning time and other strategies

"USDE's four models all offer an excellent opportunity for districts to choose the transformation method that is most appropriate for each school and community," said Education Commissioner Bret Schundler in a statement released Monday. "DOE officials already have been in contact with districts that have Tier I or II schools, and we will continue to work with them to apply these and other strategies to provide every child with access to a high-quality education." 🍏

NJSBA Launches Online Resources for School Budgets, Elections

NJSBA has launched two special sections on its Web site: One is a resource section to help school boards navigate through the state's 2010 budget crisis, and another page promotes the Annual School Election in the community.

Budget Resources With school boards facing a proposed \$820 million cut in state aid for the coming year – and with public frustration over the highest-in-the-nation property taxes – school budgets are clearly at risk.

To help school boards, NJSBA has posted its 2010 School Budget Resources, located online at www.njsba.org/budgetresources.

The page includes sample resolutions that boards can discuss and approve, the latest news and public statements, and information about a survey to gauge the effects of state aid cuts to local schools. The resource center will be updated regularly throughout the 2010 school budget season.

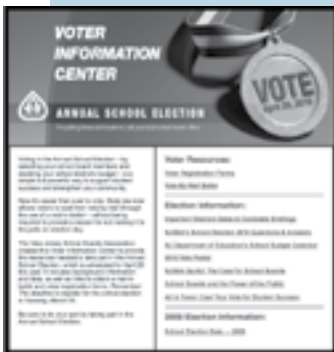
Voter Resources The 2010 Voter Information Center – located at www.njsba.org/elections – provides citizens with voter registration forms, absentee ballot information, and information and data about New Jersey's Annual School Election on April 20.

The site encourages public participation in the school election, and it reminds them that citizens not currently registered to vote must have done so by Tuesday, March 30 to participate in this year's school election. However, the site also has tools for school board use – such as NJSBA's 2010 Vote poster, which any district can download, print and post throughout the community.

In the Annual School Election, voters in more than 90 percent of New Jersey school districts select school board

members and decide whether to approve their school district's proposed operating budget for the year. Those proposed budgets must remain within state-mandated tax-levy caps.

For information or comments on either of NJSBA's online resource pages, contact NJSBA's Communications Department at (609) 278-5209.



NJDOE Releases Spending Guide

continued

on enrollment. It also compares county special services, county vocational schools and charter schools.

The guide reflects spending common to all school districts, such as special education, early childhood education, and bilingual education. However, certain types of spending can differ significantly from one district to the next – such as transportation, tuition and capital expenditures – and the Department of Education does not include that data in the guide.

Schundler noted that the cost per pupil is based only on the factors measured in the guide, not the total cost per pupil. Actual cost-per-pupil figures can be found in the State Report Card for each district. Those figures can be found at the Department of Education's Web site by selecting "NJ School Report Card," under "NJDOE Resources" on the home page at www.state.nj.us/education. 🍏

WWW.NJSBA.ORG/ELECTION

The New Jersey School Boards Association has launched an online **Voter Information Center** as part of its efforts to promote participation in the Annual School Election.

The **Voter Information Center** provides citizens with voter registration forms, absentee ballot information, and information and data about New Jersey's Annual School Election on April 20.

Check it out at www.njsba.org/election.



Keansburg Superintendent Settles Severance Dispute

The state Department of Education reached a settlement nullifying a \$556,290 severance payment to Barbara Trzeszkowski, former Keansburg superintendent, according to a statement released by Gov. Chris Christie's office on Friday.

After it became public in the spring of 2008, the retirement severance payment

for Trzeszkowski became a lightning rod for taxpayer anger and was the impetus for new state limits on administrator pay. That same year, the state brought a suit against Trzeszkowski and the Keansburg Board of Education that sought a court ruling to declare the intended payment excessive, unreasonable and in violation

of public policy, and thus null and void.

The state's suit does not affect the \$185,000 Trzeszkowski received for unused sick and vacation days, or her \$104,000 annual pension. The retired superintendent agreed to forego the severance payment in exchange for a payment of \$50,000 by the board to offset a portion of her legal fees in the matter.

In an article in the March 26 *Star Ledger*, Trzeszkowski's attorney, Kenneth Nowak, was quoted as saying that the retired superintendent believed that she had a valid contract and could continue the litigation, but she decided it would be more appropriate for the money to go to the school district in light of school aid cuts and the current economic environment. 🍏



LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

School Choice Bill Passes Assembly.

On March 22 the State Assembly passed A-355 by a 75-0 vote. The bill, which was sponsored by Assemblywomen Mila Jasey and Joan Voss and Assemblyman Paul Moriarty, establishes a permanent Interdistrict Public School Choice Program. A five-year interdistrict public school choice program was established in 2000 and expired on June 30, 2005. NJSBA supported this proposal, which is completely voluntary. The measure now goes to the Senate for its consideration.



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School Salary Freezes

continued

an agreement with their employee associations to freeze wages for part or all of the

2011 fiscal year. NJSBA will issue a second survey later this week reporting on the results of contract re-opening requests.

C A L E N D A R

April 14

Learn@Lunch: "Social Media 101." Register online under the April 14 heading at www.njsba.org/learnatlunch.

April 20

Annual School Election

April 24

How to Green Your School in Difficult Times, The Willow School, Gladstone, 9 a.m.

Denotes pre-registration required

For more information about county school boards association activities, go online to www.njsba.org and select the name of the appropriate county association.



Workshop 2010 Update

NJSBA is busy putting the final touches on its plans for Workshop 2010 to be held in Somerset on Oct. 19 and 20. This year's theme is "Tools, Techniques & Tactics" and the event will provide attendees with useful information about leadership, management, labor relations, constituent relations and lessons learned from both the education and private sector.

Workshop 2010 is being held at The Palace at Somerset Park and the Garden State Exhibition Center. Since announcing the venue change, NJSBA staff has been traveling the state to meet with board members and exhibitors to explore what they wish to see in this year's event.

Workshop is NJSBA's premier training event. Members can expect to see the same types of programs that have existed for many years including Action Labs, Group Sessions and exciting keynote speakers. In addition, a special evening event is being planned and will be held at the Somerset Park location for all attendees.

"We're excited about this year's event," said Erik Endress, director of Association & Business Development. "The Palace at Somerset Park is a fantastic venue for our training and our new evening event. And the Garden State Exhibition Center will be a fabulous site for our exhibitors, attendee luncheons and large group sessions. I am confident that all of our members and exhibitors will be very happy with the event."

The new Web site for Workshop 2010 will launch shortly. NJSBA members will be notified when it is operational.