

SCHOOL BOARD notes

Governor Unveils 33-Bill Financial Toolkit

“With the right tools, school boards can control costs, without diminishing the community’s influence over education policy,” said Marie S. Bilik, NJSBA executive director, on Monday, following Gov. Christie’s announcement of his 33-bill “toolkit” to help school districts and local governments control costs.

Some elements of the extensive package of legislation support long-term NJSBA goals. Other parts, however, raise serious concerns for school boards. The proposals address finance, labor relations and personnel practices. NJSBA will conduct a complete analysis of the legislation needed to implement the plan when it becomes available.

Cap 2.5 The centerpiece of the package is “Cap 2.5,” a constitutional amend-

ment creating a 2.5 percent “hard cap” on increases in the property tax levy for school, municipal and county purposes. The constitutional amendment would also place a 2.5 percent cap on spending growth of state operations, *excluding* increases in aid to school districts and municipalities.

For school districts and local governments, the proposal would provide a cap adjustment only for debt service. However, voters could approve a referendum, placed on the ballot in November or June, to allow a district budget to increase the school tax levy by more than 2.5 percent.

“NJSBA supports reasonable caps,” said Bilik. “But the definition of a ‘reasonable’ cap includes allowances for cost increases that are not within a local school board’s

control. This past year, for example, local school boards were hit unexpectedly with a 24 percent increase in the cost of health insurance premiums. They might experience a similar increase next year.

“These types of cost increases are not controlled by local school boards. Even required employee contributions to the cost of health coverage, which we strongly support, would not make up the difference.

“NJSBA will urge the Legislature to make sure that any new cap provides for such adjustments. It’s a fair and reasonable approach that will enable the state to control future property tax growth,” she continued. “A cap without such allowances will be detrimental to education programs.”

continued on page 2

Schundler Details 2nd Round ‘Race to the Top’ Application

Reforms, ranging from changes in seniority requirements and tenure to establishing merit-based teacher bonuses, will guide the Christie Administration’s education agenda and underscore New Jersey’s application for the second round of the federal Race to the Top (RTTT) competitive grants.

Starting last Thursday, Commissioner of Education Bret Schundler began providing details of the plan through a series of meetings, including a session with NJSBA and other education organizations, a 90-minute press briefing, and a gathering of approximately 400 teachers and school administrators.

If approved by the U.S. Department of Education, the grant could provide \$400

million in federal funding to New Jersey’s public schools.

Next week, administration-backed legislation to establish the initiatives will be introduced in the Senate and Assembly. According to Schundler, the bill would not get into specifics; implementation of the initiatives would be addressed through later legislation and regulation. However, its enactment would demonstrate to the federal government New Jersey’s commitment to the types of reform principles that are advocated by the Obama Administration and which, therefore, factor into the federal government’s review of the grant applications.

The legislation would endorse the

broad concept that student learning would be the chief factor by which the state should evaluate educators’ performance.

Proposals addressed by the revised RTTT grant application will include:

- **Teacher Bonus Incentives** A state bonus pool to reward teachers for student academic progress, with a special emphasis on growth by disadvantaged children.
- **Teacher Performance Index** Establish the principle that student learning must represent at least 51 percent of teacher and school leader evaluations.
- **Tenure** Extend the timeline for awarding tenure to five years, and require three years of “effective” or better

continued on page 3

Labor Law Changes The Association applauded the governor for proposing restoration of a local school district's ability to implement its last best offer when contract negotiations are fully exhausted.

"The administration understands the strength this proposal would give local school boards in keeping negotiations on track. It would result in contracts that balance the students' educational needs and the community's financial interests," said Bilik.

NJSBA also supports the governor's proposal to give state factfinders specific criteria that take into account the community's ability to pay for a contract and the current state of the economy.

"Such a change would clearly be in the public's interest," said Bilik.

Need to Go Further "Giving local school boards effective tools to use in collective bargaining will lower the cost of settlements. In some respects, however, the governor's proposals need to go further," the NJSBA executive director commented.

"We are disappointed that the toolkit does not include legislation to curtail employee job actions that negatively affect students' education and are used to intimidate local school boards and com-

munities—for example, job actions such as refusing to assign homework or write college recommendations, as well as the threat of illegal strikes.

"At the same time, there is no need for the state's executive county superintendents to review local school district collective bargaining agreements," said Bilik, referring to a proposal to give county superintendents the authority to reject settlements over 2.5 percent. She noted that over 75 percent of school districts negotiated some cost control measure over health benefits for 2009-2010. In addition, a majority successfully implemented provisions that have a positive impact on instruction time and practice.

School Elections The governor's press release notes that the legislative package would move "school elections" to November.

"Our members, who serve on a non-partisan basis, have expressed opposition to the idea of running for school board office in the partisan November General Election," said Bilik. That concern is reflected in NJSBA policy, which is set

by its members.

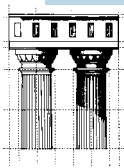
In its press release, the administration did not make clear the extent of the proposed election change. For example, would the annual referendum on the school district base budget also move to November, when voters could act on any over-cap spending proposals? Or would the proposal eliminate the base budget vote entirely – a change strongly supported by NJSBA?

"School budget proposals are controlled by a tax levy cap and undergo intensive review by the executive county superintendents for efficiency," said Bilik. "Such controls protect the taxpayers' interest.

"NJSBA supports the concept of a consolidated non-partisan election in the spring, during which school board, fire district and non-partisan municipal positions would appear on the ballot. The change would eliminate two existing election dates, but preserve the non-partisan nature of these offices."

NJSBA will provide members with details when the proposed legislation becomes available. 🍏

Town Hall to Feature Schundler



Education Commissioner Bret Schundler will be on hand at NJSBA's Southern Town Hall Meeting on May 22 to discuss the administration's education policies and to answer questions.

The commissioner will talk about the legislative "toolkit" package of bills that was introduced on May 10, as well as the state aid cuts. A similar program was held in March in the northern region of the state.

The program will be held from 9:30 a.m. to 11:45 a.m. on Saturday, May 22 at Glassboro High School, Glassboro. Registration is at 9 a.m. The registration form can be found at www.njsba.org. Select the "Town Hall" icon from the left side of the homepage.



Workshop 2010 – A "Must-Attend" Training Event

With school board and education-related issues in the news nearly every day, Workshop 2010 is shaping up to be the must-attend event of the year.

This year's theme – Tools, Techniques and Tactics – was selected to reflect a new approach to how the event would be designed and constructed. NJSBA has received more than 150 proposals for presentations and sessions from all over New Jersey and nationwide.

"We are selecting Workshop programs that will be topical, timely and useful," said Marie S. Bilik, executive director of NJSBA. "Our presenters will speak to what's happening in education right now."

In addition to changes to the content, participants will enjoy the new venue where Workshop will be held: The Palace at Somerset Park, a state-of-the-art meeting and conference facility.

Attendees will be able to explore the schedule for each day at Workshop online and select the sessions or activities that are of interest to them. They can view sessions in "tracks" based on the topic, or they can view sessions based on what their role is – board member, chief school administrator, business administrator, facilities director or other stakeholder. They can print their daily schedule or display it on their Blackberry or iPhone. They can even see who else plans to attend the same sessions that they have selected.

Each day at Workshop will also feature a new live version of the popular Learn@Lunch series that NJSBA has been offering online. Attendees will be treated to both a complimentary luncheon at the Exposition Hall and an engaging presentation at the same time.

"One of the reasons we moved Workshop from Atlantic City to Somerset was because the location would be more convenient for a greater number of board members," said Bilik. "This year we want every board member in the state to come to Workshop and learn tools, techniques and tactics for running more effective and efficient school districts."

GOVERNANCE I: NEW BOARD MEMBER ORIENTATION TRAINING



Saturday, June 12, 2010

9 a.m. – 4 p.m. (registration 8:30 a.m.)

Pond Road Middle School, Robbinsville

Under the School District Accountability Act, all board members must attend the **Governance I: New Board Member Orientation Conference** in their first year of service.

The New Board Member Orientation is designed to help you learn the essentials of school governance—so you can quickly assume an active role in school board decision-making. This intense, one-day program will immerse you in the basics of school law, policy, finance, curriculum, labor relations, advocacy and more.



Academy Credits: 2

Core Area for CBM: Covers all areas

Please register me for the **New Board Member Orientation Conference**, Saturday, June 12, 2010, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. (registration 8:30 a.m.) at Pond Road Middle School, Robbinsville.

NAME: _____

TITLE: _____

DISTRICT: _____

COUNTY: _____

ADDRESS: _____

PHONE: (h) _____

(b) _____

FAX: _____

E-MAIL: _____

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/.

Cancellation Policy: Any cancellations made up to 10 working days prior to the program date will be processed free of charge. Cancellations made between 10 working days and 72 hours of the program date will be charged \$25. Cancellations made within 72 hours and no shows will be charged \$50. A cancellation fee will be charged for changing a registration or cancelling a registration. For possible program cancellations or postponements due to inclement weather, call (609) 392-2000.

Please fax the registration form to (609) 278-5280.

Race to the Top

continued

- evaluations to qualify for tenure.
- **Seniority Reform** Reductions in force would be implemented on the basis of evaluation decisions, not length of service.
- **Data System** The state is developing a database that will enable it to track each student's quarterly progress and correlate the data with key factors, including teacher effectiveness.
- **Content Standards** Adopt national common core standards for English and mathematics; use the state's own high standards for other subject areas.
- **Equity Incentives** Provide bonuses to highly effective teachers willing to teach in schools with high proportions of at-risk students.
- **Teacher Certification** Establish "Master

Teacher" and "Master Principal" certifications to recognize the state's effective educators.

- **Struggling Schools** Support efforts to turn around struggling schools; close failing schools, to be re-opened by alternate providers.
- **Local Board-Authorized Academies** Allow local school boards to authorize the establishment of teacher-led, small-scale Achievement Academies, embedded in the district. Such acad-

emies would pilot "alternative public-school-based instructional models."

- **Charter Authorizers** The administration will ask the Legislature to create new Charter School Authorizers with the ability to approve new charter schools, monitor charter contracts and make non-renewal or closure decisions.

The state's Race to the Top grant application is due June 1. More information about the application is available in the "What's New" section of www.njsba.org.

Documentary Spotlights The Bordentown School

"A Place Out of Time," an hour-long film that chronicles the 89-year history of The Bordentown School, will air on the Public Broadcasting System on May 24.

The school was the last all-Black publicly funded, co-educational boarding school north of the Mason-Dixon line, and was known as "the Tuskegee of the North," after Booker T. Washington's famous Alabama educational institution.

The school was operated by the state of New Jersey, which closed it in 1955 after the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision made segregated education illegal.

For more information on the documentary, including a listing of local broadcast times, go to www.pbs.org/aplaceoutoftime.



NEW JERSEY SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION
 Headquarters: 413 West State Street, Trenton, New Jersey
 Mailing Address: P.O. Box 909, Trenton, NJ 08605-0909
 Telephone: 1-888-88NJSBA • Web site: www.njsba.org

**PRESORTED
 FIRST-CLASS MAIL
 U.S. POSTAGE PAID
 Trenton, NJ
 Permit No. 1068**


RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Harry J. Delgado, *president*
 Marie S. Bilik, *executive director*

SCHOOL BOARD NOTES

Frank Belluscio, director of communications
 Janet Bamford, editor
 Mike Yaple, contributor
 Adriana DiGiacomantonio, manager, graphic design
 Stacy Pezzola, graphic design

School Board Notes is published as a weekly supplement to *School Leader*, the official bimonthly journal of the New Jersey School Boards Association. It is mailed to board members, superintendents and school business administrators of affiliated school boards as part of membership dues. Non-members may purchase annual subscriptions at the following prices: *School Board Notes* – \$55; and *School Leader* – \$50.

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

May 13, 2010 Volume XXXIII Number 37

**Bergen County Honors
 Veteran Board Members**

At a recent meeting of the Bergen County School Boards Association, Bill Barnaskas, the group's president, honored board members who have served for 20 years or more on their local boards. All were presented with NJSBA Milestone Awards.



Barnaskas, second from left, is pictured with the following honorees, left to right: Lawrence Bongiovanni, Carlstadt-East Rutherford Regional; Sam Salierno, Saddle Brook; Dr. Kenneth Conte, Garfield; Sheli Dansky, River Edge; Mary Katherine Norian, Oradell; and John Ondrof, Carlstadt-East Rutherford.

C A L E N D A R

June 1

- ▶ Burlington County School Boards Association (SBA) Annual Spring Meeting, Burlington County Institute of Technology Atrium, Westampton Campus, Westampton, 6:30 p.m.
- ▶ Hunterdon County SBA Annual Spring Meeting, Hunterdon County Polytech Career Academy, Flemington, 6:30 p.m.

June 2

- ▶ Middlesex County SBA, Annual Spring Meeting, Center for Lifelong Learning, Parlin, 6:30 p.m.

June 3

- ▶ Monmouth County SBA, Annual Spring Meeting, Colts Neck High School, Colts Neck, 6:30 p.m.
- ▶ Sussex County SBA, Spring Meeting, Vernon Township High School, Vernon, 6:30 p.m.

June 4

- ▶ NJSBA Executive Committee Retreat, Wyndham Princeton Forrestal Hotel and Conference Center, Plainsboro, 6 p.m. (*tentative*)

June 5

- ▶ NJSBA Executive Committee Retreat, Wyndham Princeton Forrestal Hotel and Conference Center, Plainsboro, 8:30 a.m. (*tentative*)
- ▶ NJSBA Legislative & Urban Boards Committees Joint Meeting, Location TBD, 8:30 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.