February 22. 2022

**Testimony**

**The Teacher Shortage and its Impact on the Achievement Gap**

**The Joint Committee on the Public Schools**

The New Jersey School Boards Association (NJSBA), a federation of all of the district boards of education in the state, believes that continuous efforts to improve and increase the supply of qualified candidates for school employment are beneficial as long as those efforts do not compromise the quality of the applicant pool and do not result in state mandated intrusions into the authority of local boards of education, including but not limited to their right to: determine their local budgets and deliver an instructional program that best meets the needs of their students and their local communities. Further, the NJSBA believes that incentives, such as grants and loans, should be made available to attract outstanding students to the teaching profession, particularly in those areas of critical shortage. Loans to students who agree to teach a certain number of years in areas of critical shortage should be forgiven.

**Legislative Response to the Current Teacher Shortage**

While loans and grants may be one tool to expand the supply of qualified candidates in the teaching profession, the Legislature recently passed and the Governor enacted the following legislation aimed at providing more immediate relief from the current teacher shortage. These include:

* P.L.2021, c.420—Authorizes the Commissioner of Education to develop alternatives to the Praxis Core Academic Skills test for career and technical education teachers. This law will hopefully increase the supply of CTE teachers by creating alternate pathways for these teacher candidates to demonstrate core competencies.
* P.L.2021, c.408--Permits teacher and professional staff member who provides special services retired from TPAF to return to employment for up to two years without reenrollment in TPAF if employment commences during 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 school years.
* P.L.2021, c.296--Permits school nurse who is retired from TPAF to return to employment for up to two years without reenrollment in TPAF.
* P.L.2021, c.279--Establishes alternate route to expedite certification of teachers at early college high school programs.
* P.L. 2021, c.224--Directs DOE to establish five-year pilot program for issuance of limited certificate of eligibility with advanced standing and limited certificate of eligibility for certain teacher candidates.

There are also various bills that have been introduced in the current legislative session to increase the teacher supply. These include:

* A-2941/S-1559--Permits non-instructional staff member retired from PERS to return to employment in school district for up to two years without reenrollment in PERS if employment commences during 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 school years.
* A-677/S-896--Prohibits State Board of Education from requiring completion of performance-based assessment as condition of eligibility for certificate of eligibility with advanced standing.
* A-148/S-833--Eliminates requirement for State residency for public officers and employees with limited historic exceptions.
* A-2229/S-904--Eliminates requirement for State residency of public school employees for period of three years.
* A-896/S-546--Provides supplemental appropriation of $20 million for loan redemption program and tuition reimbursement program for certain teachers of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics.
* A-1287--Establishes teacher recruitment grant program in DOE; appropriates $6 million to DOE
* A-1694--Establishes loan redemption program for certain bilingual education teachers
* A-1820--Directs DOE to conduct study on feasibility of using and expanding virtual learning in school districts with teacher shortages.

**Background about the Shortage**

Fewer students are choosing education as a profession:

* Between 2006 and 2019 there was a **22%** decrease in the education degrees conferred by American colleges/universities according to the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education. Further, AACTE also noted that in 2020, **19%** of the undergraduate programs and **11%** of the graduate programs had significant decreases in enrollment.
* Teach for America, which recruits teachers for service in low-income school districts, reported significant decreases in recruitment.
* Between 2009 and 2020 of all the degrees awarded by New Jersey’s public and private colleges/universities, **9.6%** were in education. In 2020, of all the degrees awarded by New Jersey’s public and private colleges/universities, only **5.6%** were in education.
* Between 2009 and 2020, there was a **41% decrease** in the number of education bachelor degrees awarded in our state: **11.76%** of those bachelor degrees in 2009 while **6.9%** were awarded in 2020.

There are numerous factors and trends that have led to reduced interest in being a teacher:

* Expanded opportunities in business and industry for women and minorities
* Society’s diminishing respect for teachers
* The increasing emotional stress associated with teaching
* Proliferation of testing and its emphasis to determine teacher success and remuneration
* Movement to standardization that inhibits individual teacher creativity

**Impact of the Shortage**

Teacher shortages are having a negative impact students and their families in NJ, no matter their demographics or socio-economic status. One way to address this shortage is by modifying the requirements to earn a Certificate of Eligibility or Certificate of Eligibility with Advanced Standing. NJSBA believes that these requirements can be modified to increase the supply of teachers while still ensuring that every student is taught by an effective teacher.

These are issues of equity and fairness. Ensuring that all students have the benefit of a highly effective teacher with whom they can identify should be one of the outcomes of the current teacher shortage. Our state is rapidly diversifying and becoming minority-majority. Students and their families deserve to see themselves in the adults with whom they interact on a daily basis.

Another challenge of the teacher shortage that especially affects our urban districts is the lack of continuity of staff who work with our children. Many teachers in high poverty, low performing schools leave those districts within 3-5 years. Some leave for positions in high-performing, low poverty districts; increasingly, others are simply leaving the profession.

When one considers that it takes 3-5 years for a novice teacher to develop into a master teacher, the imbalance of experienced/less-experienced educators who work with our students who have the same potential as their suburban peers means that the teachers with whom they work are still on a deep slope of professional learning. This deficit has impacts on student learning which impacts their future opportunities and often lessens the collaboration with the families of their students. It is important to note that the impacts are not only academic, but also affect the status of Social Emotional Learning as well as co-curricular opportunities all of which contribute to a student’s post-secondary successes.

NJ DOE reports student achievement discrepancies among high schools in our state. According to the Deans of Rider University and The College of New Jersey Schools of Education, New Jersey’s requirements for teacher certification have a disproportionally negative impact on “marginalized students” who have graduated from “poorer-performing high schools.” Achieving a 3.0 GPA or passing and paying for the additional costs associated with the edTPA assessment are greater challenges for students from marginalized backgrounds than for others. Addressing these barriers will not only increase the supply of teachers but also further diversify our teaching corps.

**Removing Barriers while Maintaining Teacher Quality and Accountability**

There are four main requirements to receiving certification as a teacher in NJ. They are:

1. A minimum number of subject area course credits;
2. A minimum GPA;
3. A minimum score on a Commissioner-approved test of basic reading, writing, and mathematical skills;
4. A minimum passing score on an appropriate State test of subject matter knowledge.

With all due respect to the processes used to assess each of those four requirements for a CEAS to determine a “cut score” for each is essentially arbitrary and fails to account for current clinical supervision and evaluation processes or human factors that include setting goals and diligently working to be successful. Cut scores are not comprehensive predictors of effective teaching. By relying so heavily on them, we fail to consider that we all learn differently and that not all of us fully demonstrate our knowledge on tests and standardized assessments.

Enactments like P.L. 2021, c.224, which establishes a pilot program that permits teacher candidates to be excused from any one of the four requirements above, is a prime example of how barriers to entry into the profession can be removed.

The removal of these barriers will not negatively impact teacher quality because NJ enacted a very robust accountability system for teachers. The 2012 TEACHNJ act, *N.J.S.A.*18A:6-117 *et seq.,* provided the greatest paradigm shift to ensure excellence in the teacher corps. It and its AchieveNJ implementing regulations, ensure that educators in NJ receive the most effective evaluations to improve instruction. Administrators must be certified in a research-based, NJDOE-approved evaluation system. The focus of New Jersey’s teacher evaluation system is on ensuring effective teaching and learning.

Teacher recruitment and induction has also changed. Candidates demonstrate their accomplishments through professional portfolios and evaluations conducted by professors, cooperating teachers, and district/school administrators. District rigorous hiring processes include multiple interviews and demonstration lessons. Induction programs provide professional learning in content, and district instructional expectations. Effective mentoring is also another critical aspect to ensure excellence in the classroom.

These recruitment, induction, mentoring and evaluation processes provide greater assurance of teacher quality than arbitrary cut scores on teacher assessments and GPAs. These authentic measurements of teacher quality provide districts with significantly more information with which to ensure teacher quality and success.

Additionally, teacher professional learning supports the continued improvement of their craft. In many districts, the local teachers’ association collaborates with building administration and identifies coaches to assist teachers with their instructional and/or student management practices.

The impact of formal collaboration on student learning and the retention of teachers regardless of the demographic or socio-economic profile has been well documented, especially in our state. In 2013, Professor Saul Rubenstein of the Rutgers School of Labor & Management, along with the NJSBA, NJASA, NJPSA, NJEA and AFT-NJ established the NJ Labor Management Collaborative which is providing professional learning to districts across our state in collaborative decision making. The impact of this work is significant. Dr. Rubenstein’s twenty plus years of research reports that formal collaboration has a greater impact on improving student achievement than by reducing a district’s poverty rate by 10% --this is not to infer that we should not address poverty; it does suggest that poverty does not have to be a barrier to student learning. His research also reports that in a collaborative school, after five years, there is no difference in teacher retention between high poverty, low achieving urban schools and schools that are high performing in affluent suburbs which provides the important continuity of adults working with a schools’ students that has a positive impact on all facets of learning.

This work is so significant that in September 2021, US Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona visited the Delran Township school district to learn about this work that he has subsequently been sharing in his keynote speeches at both domestic and international educational conferences. The National Education Association has provided a $3 million grant to the NJ Labor-Management Collaborative of which $1.5 million is to provide the professional learning in support of this work in New Jersey school districts to support student learning, healthy school climates, and the retention of teachers.

When considering the TEACHNJ act’s significant impact on instructional quality and its impact on practice based on both legislation and research, revising the qualifications to be a successful teacher in NJ will not be detrimental to the students of our state and will provide additional qualified candidates to address the shortages that districts across the state are experiencing while supporting local control and furthering equity in our schools.

The NJSBA urges the Joint Committee to consider legislation that increases recruitment and reduces or eliminates the barriers that prevent many candidates from entering the teaching profession.