



Legislative and Agency Update

April 2009

Governor's News

Governor Jon S. Corzine issued a news release in support of *SAFRA*, the school funding formula enacted by the legislature in 2008. The release also contains a detailed and interesting history of school funding in our state.

<http://www.state.nj.us/governor/news/news/2009/approved/20090428a.html>

Legislative News

As noted last month, the legislature is currently enjoying the budget break, a time when only the state budget committees meet.

Department of Education News

Statewide Assessment Schedule for 2009-2010

Commissioner of Education Lucille E. Davy released the statewide assessment schedule for the 2009-2010 school year. Davy's memo also provides comprehensive guidance for school districts about the required tests and alternative procedures for meeting the state testing mandates.

<http://www.state.nj.us/education/assessment/schedule0910.shtml>

June 2009 State Aid Payment to be Delayed

The Commissioned has informed local school districts that their state aid payment for the month of June will be delayed until July 1 or 2. Districts may apply to the department for authorization to borrow sufficient funds to meet their short term financial obligations and for reimbursement for any interest paid on approved loans.

Proposed State Education Budget for 2010

The Commissioner presented information about the department's proposed budget to the Senate Budget and Appropriations and Assembly Budget Committees on April 28 & 29. In her statement to the legislature, Davy noted,

“the Governor has increased state aid to local school districts by more than \$300 million with assistance from federal stimulus money.” A Q&A period followed the commissioner’s testimony with many legislators questioning the impact of the new funding formula on the former Abbott districts and those districts with declining enrollment. An extensive discussion of the law to require local school districts to find efficiencies through consolidation and regionalization of services also occurred.

http://www.njleg.state.nj.us/legislativepub/budget_2010/Testimony/DOE_Davy_testimony.pdf

School Budget Elections

This month, voters passed 73.5% of the local school district budgets, the same percentage as last year thanks in part to the proposed increase in state aid to local districts. Many districts presented proposed budgets at or below cap to keep local property taxes in check. Unfortunately, a number of school districts proposed cuts in non-mandated teaching staff positions including school librarians to achieve efficiencies and to present a proposed budget at or below cap.

In addition, fewer “second questions” were presented to the voters for their approval. Only eleven districts submitted second questions which if passed would authorize the districts to fund certain programs above the 4% spending cap on local revenue increases. All 11 questions failed to get voter approval. Details about the school election results can be found at

<http://www.state.nj.us/education/data/vote/09/>

American Recovery and Reinvestment Act Funding (ARRA)

The department released a comprehensive memo describing the allocation of funds from ARRA for Title 1 and IDEA programs in New Jersey. The memo provides guidance for local school districts and a schedule of regional meetings to assist them in planning for the use of ARRA funds.

In the memo, the department outlines its priorities for IDEA Recovery Funds as follows:

Priority Area 1: In-District Program Options Create and/or expand in-district programs options that maximize the opportunities for students with disabilities to be educated with their non-disabled peers.

Priority Area 2: Positive Student Outcomes

Plan and conduct program improvement and personnel development activities in response to local district performance on certain indicators.

Priority Area 3: Upgraded Data Systems Upgrade current district data systems through purchase of hardware and software systems to: improve student level databases; integrate special education and general education student level databases; design tracking and IEP applications, provide training for staff in using data systems for data driven decision-making.

Some of the allowable uses for Title I, Part A include the following:

- Establishing a system for identifying and training highly effective teachers to serve as instructional leaders in Title I school wide programs and modifying the school schedule to allow for collaboration among the instructional staff.
- Establishing intensive, year-long teacher training for all teachers and the principal in a Title I elementary school in corrective action or restructuring status in order to train teachers to use a new reading curriculum that aggressively works on improving students' oral language skills and vocabulary or, in some other way, builds teachers' capacity to address academic achievement problems.

You can review the entire memo along with allocations to eligible districts at <http://www.state.nj.us/education/arra/>

State Board of Education

At a special meeting on April 2, the Board voted to approve Dr. Donnie W. Evans as the new state superintendent in the state-operated district of Patterson. Dr. Evans comes to New Jersey from Providence Rhode Island where he served as Superintendent of Public Schools for three years.

<http://www.state.nj.us/governor/news/news/2009/approved/20090331d.html>

Later in the month, the board discussed resolutions and proposals dealing with Interdistrict School Choice, School Ethics, Adult Education, Student Residency, and the Special Review Assessment.

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