

NJASL

New Jersey Association of School Librarians

Legislative and Agency Update December 2007 – March 2008

New Funding Formula for New Jersey's Public Schools

In December 2007, Governor Jon S. Corzine unveiled a new school funding formula that provides a new approach to calculating state aid to public schools in New Jersey. The new formula will allocate similar resources to similarly situated students no matter which school or district they attend or where they live. In his statement, the Governor emphasized that the new formula will give all children in every community the chance to succeed. Corzine said that the new formula "...is balanced, unified and equitable and it provides significant relief to local property taxpayers, who for decades have shouldered the important yet growing cost of education."

The legislature approved the bill to establish the new formula on January 7, 2008 and the bill was immediately signed into law by Governor Corzine. The law expands the definition of "needy" students to make sure that those children who face multiple obstacles are fully funded regardless of where they live. State aid will be allocated based on what each district should spend to allow each student to attain the New Jersey Core Curriculum Standards. Under the new law, the base amount of aid is set for elementary students and will be increased for middle, high school, and vocational students. Additionally, districts will receive increased aid for each student who is deemed to be at-risk, students with limited English proficiency, and students enrolled in special education.

In communities where there is a high concentration of poverty, the law provides for an increase in the at-risk aid. Also, the law acknowledges that the cost of living varies in different parts of the state and the new funding formula will be adjusted by a geographic cost index.

Under the new funding formula, every public school district is expected to receive an increase in state aid of at least 2 percent during FY 2009, and no district will see a decrease in aid for at least three years. Beginning with funding for FY 2012, districts that experience a decline in overall enrollment or in certain enrollment categories such as special education, will have their aid adjusted.

Proposed State Budget for FY 2009

On February 26, 2008 Governor Jon S. Corzine presented his proposed budget to the legislature for the next fiscal year. Corzine began his address by stating, "Today I present a sober and responsible budget. The time is long past for the State, its Governor, and its Legislature to end imprudent spending and borrowing that exceeds our means. This budget ...does just that." The proposal outlines deep cuts in numerous programs and services funded by the state including Higher Education. While overall state funding will be frozen at last year's level, both the state and county colleges and universities will receive significantly less state aid under the proposed budget.

\$11.5 billion is proposed in support of preschool-12 education which is \$600 million above the FY 2008 appropriation and represents 35 percent of the State's total budget. \$530million of the proposed increase to public schools will be allocated to districts under the new funding formula which provides a way to determine the needs of students in each district and apportions state aid accordingly.

The Governor's proposed budget will be carefully scrutinized over the next several months and numerous public hearings will take place before legislation is drafted for the State Senate and Assembly to consider in June of this year.

Information about the new funding formula and the Governor's proposed budget can be obtained through the New Jersey Department of Education at www.state.nj.us/education

New State Standards for Math and Language Arts in November 2008

The State Board of Education adopted revised Core Curriculum Standards in the areas of mathematics and language arts literacy. The change was motivated by a desire for the state's standards to better support New Jersey's participation in the American Diploma Project Network. This national network supports the alignment of state policies, standards, and assessments for K-12 education with those of higher education and the workplace so that students who achieve a high school diploma can succeed in college or work.

The revised standards can be reviewed at www.state.nj.us/education/aps/cccs

School Library Media Center Programs in Abbott Districts and Schools

When the State adopted revised regulations for the Abbott School Districts for the 2007-08 school year, it recognized the importance of school library media

centers as essential to the success of students in Abbott schools by readopting the requirements that:

- all K-3 schools to have a school library media center staffed by a certified school library media specialist and supplied with books that enrich classroom instruction, computers with Internet access, and adequate space and facilities for student and teacher use; and
- all schools grades 4-12 to have a school library media center staff by certified SLMS, with computers, appropriate books, and supplemental materials.

NJASL was instrumental in securing and maintaining the requirements for school libraries staffed by certified school library media specialists in Abbott schools. As the new school funding formula is implemented, it will be important to monitor the state's continued support for school library media services in Abbott schools. Additionally, as other school districts develop and propose their budgets for FY 2008-09 under the new formula the budgets should be carefully reviewed to ensure that school library media services are appropriately funded.

The full text of the regulations can be found in N.J.A.C. 6A:10A at www.state.nj.us/education/code/current

School Library Media Specialist Certification

At the December 2007 meeting of the New Jersey State Board of Education the Board approved an amendment to the certification regulations to permit individuals holding a standard New Jersey Associate School Library Media Specialist (ASLMS) endorsement who have completed a graduate degree program at a regionally accredited college or university with specialization in school library media studies to apply for a n receive a standard School Library Media Specialist Endorsement. The citation for the new provision is N.J.A.C. 6A:9-13.14(1)2.

State Technology Plan

As required by the United States Department of Education the New Jersey State Board of Education adopted the state's revised technology plan in December 2007. The plan entitled *Preparing Today for Tomorrow* documents the role of educational technology in promoting students' academic achievement. When presenting the plan to the Board, the Commissioner noted that, "The richness of educational technology is grounded by professional development, administrative support and vision, high speed and well-maintained infrastructure, school-wide access for administrators, students and staff all leading to increased academic

achievement and global skills.” Strategic Goal 3 in the plan states “ Educational technology will be accessible by students, teachers and administrators and utilized for instructional and administrative purposes in all learning environments, including classrooms, **library media centers**, and other educational settings such as community centers and libraries.” (emphasis added)

Special Review Assessment to be Modified

After almost 5 years of discussion and review, the New Jersey State Board of Education and the Commissioner of Education came to agreement on a plan to modify the Special Review Assessment (SRA) process. The SRA serves as an alternative means of satisfying the state’s graduation proficiency test requirement. The SRA will be replaced by an enhanced alternate high school assessment instrument based on the Commissioner’s recommendations. The Board expects the new alternative assessment system to be implemented with the 2009-10 school year or as soon as the Commissioner determines possible.

The Commissioner’s report to the Board along with her recommendations can be found on the Department of Education’s web site. www.state.nj.us/education

Partnership for 21st Century Skills

The Department of Education announced in February that New Jersey is working to become the seventh state to join the *Partnership for 21st Century Skills*, a leading advocacy organization for infusing 21st century skills into education. As a member of the Partnership, the state will work to establish collaborative relationships among education P-21, business, community, and government leaders. It is expected that Governor Jon S. Corzine will submit the state’s application in the coming months. Once approved, the state will develop a campaign to create awareness among students, educators, and community leaders about the Partnership.

In a national poll of registered voters conducted by the Partnership, respondents expressed concern that students need to be better prepared with the skills they will need to succeed in a global economy. New teaching and learning strategies have been developed by the Partnership to assist students and educators to achieve greater global literacy, problem solving skills, and innovation and creativity.

The Partnership has also developed several web-based resources for education leaders and state policy makers to use to implement 21st Century teaching practices and learning outcomes.

Information on the Partnership for 21st Century Skills is available at www.21centuryskills.org

Paid Family Leave Legislation

On March 3, 2008, the state Senate passed S-786/A-2082 by a vote of 22-15. This legislation would allow school employees and other workers to take up to six weeks of paid family leave to care for a sick family member or a new child. The bill would permit an employee to collect two-thirds of their salary while on leave. The bill has not yet been considered by the Assembly and therefore has been referred to the Assembly Appropriations Committee for review.

Change in State Board Education Meeting Schedule

At its meeting on February 20, the State Board changed its calendar for the remainder of the year and adopted the following revised schedule:

PUBLIC BUSINESS/WORK SESSION MEETINGS 2008

March 19	May 21
April 16	June 18

PUBLIC TESTIMONY MEETINGS 2008

March 19	May 21*
April 16	June 18

* denotes Open Topic Session

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3/13/08

Vol. 1 –11/07-3/08