



Legislative and Agency Update

February 2010

Governor's News

School Aid Frozen

On February 17, Governor Christie issued Executive Order 14, which freezes \$475 million in current-year state school aid. The freeze may have a direct impact on unexpended funds for current programs; however, local school districts can use funds held in reserve to cover the funding gap. Lowering reserves to cover the cut in school aid will adversely impact local school budgets and programs for the 2010-2011 school year as districts struggle to restore reserves needed for unanticipated emergencies.

Budget Reductions to Public Library Programs Announced by Governor Chris Christie

Governor Christie announced \$721,000 in reductions to library programs in the FY10 budget. According to New Jersey Library Association, the reductions are in the following areas: NJ Library Network Aid - \$373,000; New Jersey Knowledge Initiative - \$231,000; and Virtual Library Aid - \$117,000. With previous budget cuts, library programs have been reduced by over 19% in the state budget this fiscal year.

Legislative News

Proposed Changes to Public Employee Pensions and Health Benefits

A package of three bills to reform pension and health benefits for public employees was approved in the state Senate by a vote of 36-0. The pension bill, S2, will reduce pension benefits for new hires by 9 percent, change the calculation for the benefit to the average of the employee's highest five years of salary, and eliminate pension benefits for part-time workers. The health benefits bill, S3, will require all public employees to contribute 1.5 percent of the salary for health benefits. S4 proposes to cap payment for accumulated sick leave at retirement at \$15,000 for new hires and makes changes to the disability insurance program. These bills now move to the Assembly for consideration.

Assembly Education Committee Speaks with Acting Education Commissioner Schundler

The Assembly Education Committee invited Acting Commissioner Schundler to provide a report on the Department of Education's priorities for the coming year. During the discussion, Schundler outlined the following priorities:

- Success for all students regardless of where they live. Provide flexible ways for local school districts to help students achieve and meet state standards.
- Avoid cutting school aid for 2010-2011 if at all possible. However, he urged school districts to draft budgets with projected cuts in state aid of 5%, 10%, or 15% noting that once the Governor announces his budget, the department will have better data for districts. Schundler speculated that savings from pension and health benefit reforms could help to mitigate possible cuts in school aid.
- Move forward on the recommendations of the Governor's Transition Committee.
- Correct the funding disparity to Charter Schools and support relationships between local school districts and charter schools in space sharing and other arrangements.
- Address the rules governing consolidation and shared services among public school districts to provide cost savings to local property taxpayers.

Department of Education News

New Web site for Core Curriculum Content Standards

Acting Commissioner Bret Schundler announced that the Department of Education has launched a new web site to assist with the implementation of the newly revised Core Curriculum Content Standards (CCCS). Tools on the interactive site provide information for curriculum development and mapping, instruction, assessment and professional development. <http://njcccs.org/>

State Board of Education

Freeze on Changes in Regulations

Governor Christie has asked the State Board of Education to postpone action on pending amendments to the regulations governing education until his administration has the opportunity to study and respond to changes currently proposed.

Common Core Standards

Acting Commissioner Schundler invited the public to submit comment and to testify before the Board on the draft Common Core Standards in English Language Arts. The Board must adopt a Resolution in favor of the standards for New Jersey to continue as a participant in the National Standards Project with the US Department of Education. Nina Kemps, Chairperson of NJASL's Standards Committee presented testimony to the Board. The testimony can be reviewed at www.njasl.org

Submitted by:

Peg Lawlor peg812@verizon.net

NJASL Government Relations Consultant

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