

**Government Relations Report to NJASL  
July 24, 2006**

**Department of Education: The Education Law Center sued the Dept. of Education seeking the release of a 2003 costing out study paid for by the department.** The department has refused to release the study claiming it is “deliberative” in nature and not subject to disclosure under New Jersey’s Open Public Records Act. According to a Star Ledger report, the study concludes that more funding is needed to properly fund the state’s public schools and that what is spent, is unevenly distributed among the state’s districts with middle income schools suffering the most. For more information go to [http://www.edlawcenter.org/ELCPublic/elcnews\\_060718\\_NJDOE\\_RefusestoReleaseStudy.htm](http://www.edlawcenter.org/ELCPublic/elcnews_060718_NJDOE_RefusestoReleaseStudy.htm)

In an editorial published on July 21, the Star Ledger strongly endorsed the release of the report to the public. <http://www.nj.com/search/index.ssf?/base/news-1/115347131474910.xml?starledger?oed&coll=1>

The NJ DOE announced on July 20 that **twelve New Jersey teachers had achieved national certification.** For more info, go to <http://www.state.nj.us/njded/news/2006/0720nbct.htm>.

**State Board of Education:** The July 19 State Board Meeting was a rescheduled Public Business meeting due to the flooding in Trenton on July 5. Elections were held during the meeting, with the members of the State Board electing their officers for 2006-2007. **Dr. Hyndman was reappointed to the presidency unanimously and unopposed. Arcelio Aponte, appointed to the board in 2005, narrowly defeated Debra Casha for Vice President.**

At the June 7 meeting, Commissioner Davy asked the board to defer a decision on the request by the so-called Bacon districts for Abbott - like funding pending the development of a new state wide school funding formula. The commissioner did submit a report relevant to the needs of the Bacon districts but the board ruled it insufficient and ordered the commissioner to file a supplemental report by the State Board Public Business Meeting on September 6.

The next meeting of the board will be its public business meeting on Wednesday, August 2, 2006.

**State House: Governor Corzine is scheduled to address the opening of the special legislative session on Friday, July 28 at 11 a.m.** The address can be heard over the internet by going to [www.njleg.state.nj.us](http://www.njleg.state.nj.us) and clicking on “View or listen to live proceedings.” As previously reported, the special session is expected to create joint committees to focus on four specific issues:

1. local government and shared services
2. school funding

3. employee benefits reform and
4. a constitutional convention.

The governor has recently signaled his expectations for the special session interviews with the press. His agenda reportedly includes reduction of total property tax bills by 20%; revision of the school funding formula so that middle income districts get more state aid, while holding the Abbott districts harmless, at least during a transition period; tightened caps on education spending statewide; and acceleration of consolidation of towns, schools and services.

The four joint and bi-partisan committees are also expected to be announced on Friday, and will begin work in August. It is hoped that legislative proposals might be forthcoming by year's end.

There are other proposals that may also appear in the special session. Assemblyman Lou Manzo's SMART bill has received a positive reception in some quarters, notably the NJEA, the state's largest teacher's union. The bill (A3335) is aimed at lowering property tax costs in New Jersey. Currently, 60 percent of the state's property tax revenue is used to fund schools. Lower and middle-income families shoulder a heavier burden than wealthier taxpayers to support schools.

The SMART Act would redistribute this unbalanced tax burden from local property taxes onto broader state taxes -- namely the income and sales tax -- resulting in a near 50 percent reduction in school property tax rates.

**On July 19, the Joint Committee on Public Schools got an earful from superintendents of Abbott districts about ongoing problems in completing school construction projects and other program cuts required by flat Abbott funding.**

Legislators acknowledged the difficulties as several legislators stressed that these problems were not limited to Abbott districts. While it was not specifically addressed at the hearing, it is not clear what if any role the Joint Committee will play in the school funding reform debate to take place in the special session.

**Around the State: Lawyers for public school children at "failing" schools filed a class action lawsuit on July 13 in Essex County seeking state funding for those children to attend out of district or private schools.** The lawsuit argues that it should be a constitutional entitlement for the per-pupil funding in their home districts to be applied to tuition at schools of their choice.

The lawsuit is supported by the Alliance for School Choice, a Phoenix-based group; the Black Minister's Council of New Jersey; the Latino Leadership Alliance of New Jersey; and Excellent Education for Everyone. For more information, go to [www.nje3.org](http://www.nje3.org).