

## **Government Relations Report to NJASL September 2007**

### **State Board of Education**

#### **DOE Announces Results of Annual Survey of Teacher Content Expertise**

On Sept. 5, Commissioner Davy reported to the State Board on the status of “highly qualified” teachers in New Jersey as required by NCLB. According to the commissioner, 99 percent of New Jersey teachers meet the “highly qualified” designation while only 1.2 percent do not meet the definition in every core subject that they teach. Commissioner Davy also reported that dramatic gains were made in closing the gap between the number of classes taught by highly qualified teachers in high poverty schools and low-poverty schools. The size of the gap has narrowed from 10 percent in 2004-05, to just 1.6 percent in 2006-07. [Read more.](#)

### **Department of Education**

#### **NJ Department of Education announces NJ fourth grade readers among top readers in nation.**

Fourth-graders in New Jersey showed strong gains in reading and math and are among the highest scoring readers in the nation. This is according to a study released on September 26 by the National Center for Educational Statistics. While reading scores were largely flat nationwide, the percent of New Jersey's fourth-graders found to have at least basic skills jumped almost 10 percentage points, from 68 percent to 77 percent. Overall, 34 percent were at the "basic" level in reading, 31 percent were deemed proficient and 12 percent advanced. Twenty-three percent were still below basic. [Read more.](#)

**Arts Education Census results released.** On Sept. 17, Education Secretary Davy and Secretary of State Nina Mitchell Wells announced the results of the New Jersey Arts Education Census Project. The report includes findings and recommendations for five major areas including policies, students, teachers, resources and the community for schools across New Jersey. The full report, summary and individual school and district arts index scores are available at [www.artsednj.org](http://www.artsednj.org). Among the conclusions in the report is the assertion that “school size, along with professional and personal influence of educators and parents – not socioeconomic factors – impacts the level of arts in the schools.” [Read more.](#)

### **State Legislature**

#### **Education Law Center files suit against state legislature to force needed funding for school construction projects.**

On October 2, the Education Law Center filed a law suit on behalf of children attending dilapidated and overcrowded urban public schools asking the NJ Supreme Court to set December 31st as the deadline for the Legislature to provide needed school construction funding. According to ELC, the law suit follows an ongoing failure to provide funding for numerous school construction projects. Over a year ago, the State school construction agency requested \$3.25 billion in "stop gap" funding from the Legislature and, last May, the Supreme Court indicated that it expected action to provide new construction funds by June 30th.

Despite these requests, and the urgent need, Governor Jon Corzine’s administration and the Legislature have taken no action to secure the additional funds, and no action is planned for the foreseeable future. [Read more.](#)

## **Governor's Office**

### **Governor signs bill requiring transfer of community college credits.**

On September 13, Governor Corzine signed legislation providing for the transfer of college credits from two year associate's degrees earned at the state's 19 community colleges to four year state colleges and universities. [Read more.](#)

### **Beefed-Up Detection, Screening Part of New Jersey's New Autism Effort**

On September 12, Governor Corzine signed a package of bills into law that would address the high rate of autism in New Jersey. The laws provide for teacher training in the detection of autism, and doctors will be required to screen for it. Also included in the package are a panel to study issues like housing and job placement, funds for new research and establishment of an autism registry. According to the Centers for Disease Control, New Jersey has the highest rate of autism in the nation. [Read more.](#)

**Corzine administration continues to prepare school funding formula.** Gannet News Service reported that Governor Corzine said at a press conference on Wednesday, Sept. 26, that he hopes to have a new school funding formula ready for debate before discussions begin on a new state budget. This would result in the policy debate on this issue starting soon after November's general elections, a debate with far reaching effects on education funding, allocation of scarce resources among school districts and property taxes. Several lawmakers had hoped the formula would have been part of the Legislature's effort to reduce property taxes in 2006 and early 2007, but the Department of Education said it needed more time to work on the long-festering issue. [Read more.](#)

## **Other Local Issues**

**NJ Judge dismisses lawsuit of parents seeking school vouchers.** Superior Court Judge Neil Shuster dismissed a lawsuit on October 4, in which parents and voucher advocates had demanded the state pay for school vouchers. The parents argued that students in failing schools were entitled to state assistance in attending nonpublic schools. The judge rejected that argument, relying in part on the NJ Supreme Court decision in Abbott v. Burke, that where the state's school funding system was unconstitutional, the remedy was left to the legislature. [Read more.](#)

**Judge rules in favor of school uniform protest buttons.** On September 20, a federal judge in Newark ruled that two students in the Bayonne School District were allowed to wear buttons that depicted members of the Hitler Youth. The buttons were worn in protest of a school uniform policy. The judge found the buttons to be within the First Amendment right of the students and had not been shown to "materially and substantially disrupt the work and discipline of the school." The boys had been threatened with suspension. [Read more.](#)

### **Rutgers gives 8th-graders a shot at free education**

On Friday, September 28, Rutgers University President Richard L. McCormick announced an innovative plan designed to woo more students from New Jersey urban school districts into his school -- offering free tuition for those showing they can make the grade. Beginning in summer 2009, the university will offer tutoring, mentoring and test-preparation assistance to 200 eighth-graders in those Newark, Camden and New Brunswick as well as Piscataway. All eventually accepted to Rutgers will get the tuition-free ride. "We know many students give up on learning as teenagers because they don't

see college in their future," McCormick told a crowd of some 500 students, faculty, lawmakers and public school leaders gathered in New Brunswick for his fifth annual address to the university. He said the program will focus on students "who otherwise never consider college within their grasp." [Read more.](#)

## **National Issues**

### **"National Report Card Shows Big Gains in Math"**

American students are making strides in math, and slower but still significant gains in reading, according to [National Assessment of Educational Progress \(NAEP\) results](#). Only 32% of 8th graders and 39% of 4th graders were rated proficient in math, but those figures also were record highs. In reading, 4th graders scored higher than ever in reading, but 8th-grade reading scores showed only a slight increase over the last test in 2005. [Read more.](#)

### **Newsweek Magazine reports on the 40 year low of male teachers in k-12 education.**

In its September 17<sup>th</sup> issue, Newsweek explored some of the reasons that so few of our teachers are men and some of the resulting bad effects on students, especially boys, who already lag behind girls in achievement rates in reading and writing and in high school graduation rates. The problem is especially acute in elementary schools where only 9% of teachers are men, down from 18% in 1981. the article posits several reasons for the decline including low starting salary, and social beliefs that men lack nurturing skills. [Read more.](#)

### **Report states that higher investment in education yields lower costs in crime.**

A Washington D.C. advocacy organization released a study in late August stating that states which invest more money in both their K-12 and higher education systems have lower rates of violent crimes and incarceration, and likewise save billions in crime-related expenses. The Justice Policy Institute released its report on August 31. The report argues that increased graduation rates have a significant impact on public safety, as a five percent increase in males graduating from high school produces almost \$5 billion dollars in savings on crime-related expenses. [Read more.](#)

## **No Child Left Behind**

**Presidential politics makes renewal of NCLB a tricky proposition.** With three presidential hopefuls on the Senate Education Committee - Hilary Clinton, NY, Barack Obama, IL, and Chris Dodd, CT, - reauthorization and amendment of No Child Left Behind is, in the words of one Capitol Hill watcher, like "whitewater kayaking, there's a stone under every wave." Senator Kennedy has already floated a few proposals but has not offered a comprehensive reform bill similar to what has already been offered by the House Education Committee. That committee ran into some rough waters itself at hearings on its proposals in early September. The only thing that is clear at this point, is that its reauthorization of NCLB will continue to be a contentious process. [Read more.](#)