



**NJPSA Testimony
On
Sunset of Superintendent Salary Cap (ACR-56 (Jasey / Wolfe))
Before the
Assembly Education Committee
June 20, 2016**

Thank you for the opportunity to share the perspective of the statewide membership of the NJ Principals and Supervisors Association on ACR-56 (Jasey / Wolfe) which urges the Commissioner of Education to suspend regulations on school district superintendent maximum salary amount or caps and not re-adopt said regulations upon their sunset.

School Leadership Hierarchy

NJPSA represents the principals, assistant principals and supervisory employees who lead our schools at the school building level. We are responsible for setting the education goals of our school, working directly with teachers to enhance instruction, managing school level operations, student safety and discipline issues and the establishment of a positive school climate for learning.

In contrast, superintendents and assistant superintendents provide leadership at the district level, having responsibility for the educational vision and goals, finances, facilities and overall operations of **all** schools in the district. Together, superintendents, district level and school level leaders make up the administrative team of a district with the superintendent serving as the chief executive of the system.

The Importance on Educational Leadership and Strong Leadership Policy

New Jersey's educational policies concerning school leaders are critically important. Strong leadership preparation programs, licensing standards, mentoring, ongoing professional development requirements and accountability systems have created a high standard of preparation/ performance for school leadership candidates in our state that has served us well. Our public schools have a solid track record of success and strong, effective instructional leadership has been directly correlated with that success in educational research.* New Jersey's public schools consistently outperform other state systems on multiple performance measures, yet we understand that not all students currently receive the high quality of education they deserve. Although New Jersey has made significant strides in closing achievement gaps among some student populations, we still have significant disparities in achievement, resources and opportunity in our communities.

This is why it is so important to attract the best and brightest school leaders to serve as superintendents and principals to lead among these challenges and perform this important and complex work. This is particularly true now as New Jersey schools strive to implement heightened education standards, prepare our students for new digital assessments and continue to put new educator evaluation systems in practice in every school.

The Impact of Superintendent Salary Caps

It is in this context, that we share the impact of the superintendent salary caps on the work of our members at the school level. Since the enactment of the superintendent salary cap in 2011, principals and supervisors have experienced the negative impact of this salary cap policy in several key areas:

High Superintendent Turnover Rates

Since the enactment of the salary cap policy, there has been a significant increase in the mobility rate of experienced superintendents in many districts – either to retirement or out-of-state positions. It is true that superintendent mobility and its impact on the continuity of school leadership has been a growing problem since superintendents lost their tenure protections in 1991; however, in our experience, the salary cap instituted in February 2011, has significantly exacerbated this problem.

Superintendents facing a major drop in their compensation at the end of their employment contract are choosing to leave their districts and even New Jersey all together in search of market rate compensation in our tri-state region. Since neighboring New York, Connecticut and Pennsylvania superintendents do not work under a stringent salary cap and reciprocity rules soften the pathway to new positions, many of New Jersey's talented and experienced superintendents have left our state for greener educational pastures. In our view, this talent drain is a high cost to our state in exchange for limited long-term fiscal savings (a fraction of 1% of state education spending) to our state. (The Star Ledger, September 14, 2014, *Superintendents Cap Does NJ Harm*).

Over the past four years, our members have experienced first-hand, a revolving door at the top echelon of our educational leadership ranks due to the imposition of the cap. This has led to inconsistency in the educational vision of a district and inefficiency when new instructional programs/strategies are established and shortly thereafter scrapped when a new superintendent comes on board. Individuals are being promoted to the superintendent role early in their careers, bringing more novices to the role at a time of major educational reform. It can also lead to an unhealthy confusion of leadership roles where boards of education lose their focus on their statutory policy-making role and instead, become over-engaged in educational, personnel and operational decisions beyond their mission. As an Association, we have represented rising numbers of members who were denied renewal to their positions by boards of education who rejected the positive evaluations and hiring recommendations of the instructional leader of the district, the superintendent.

Our members have also experienced the unintended consequences of a related phenomenon – the over-reliance by boards of education on the hiring of interim superintendents, estimated at over 40% of current sitting superintendents. Interim superintendents are usually retired superintendents who are hired on a temporary basis with an initial contract term of up to one year with option to renew for one additional year in a district (*N.J.S.A. 18A:66-53.2*). The rationale for this law, which has been in effect since 2001, is to afford the board sufficient time to search for a permanent superintendent when a vacancy occurs. By virtue of their limited contract term, an interim superintendent generally does not have the continuity in the district or strength of position to impact the growth of a district on a long-term basis. This can have an impact on long-term planning, performance and reform. This practice promises to be even more troubling to our members this school year, when the new principal evaluation system will go into effect. Principals may be evaluated by interim superintendents with limited knowledge of the district, the community or the principal's track record of accomplishment. If an interim superintendent recommends a corrective action plan for example, he/she will likely not be there to provide the professional support needed to assist that principal's growth in performance. Since strong instructional leadership correlates with student success, this approach to school leadership policy needs to be re-examined.

For all these reasons we wholeheartedly support this legislative attempt to call on the Administration to 'sunset' this cap and its impact. But, the direct impact of the cap on the stability of districts is just one reason to support this resolution.

Negative Impact on Leadership Career Ladder

In addition, the proposed salary cap has had a negative impact on the educational career ladder by deterring successful principals, school business officials and other educators from seeking promotional opportunities to the superintendency. New Jersey needs individuals who have had successful careers as instructional and district leaders with the depth of experience in school operations, instruction, staff evaluation/management, assessment, school finance and New Jersey school law to lead our schools in the highest field level position in our system. Our members can attest to the chilling effect of the salary cap on a key promotional pathway for school leaders.

Moreover, the salary cap policy is inconsistent with New Jersey's policy goals, as evidenced in our federal educational plans (e.g. Race to the Top application, Elementary and Secondary Education (ESEA) Waiver). New Jersey's federal education plans specifically focus on creating attractive career ladders for educators as a positive human resources tool and recognized factor of school success. The disincentive of the current salary cap, which is arbitrarily based upon a single criterion (enrollment), and fails to address regional cost differences in our state, has had both a negative impact on recruitment and promotion to the superintendent role.

NJPSA Recommendation

Based upon the reasons detailed above, NJPSA recommends that New Jersey re-focus its educational leadership policies on the recruitment and retention of top-notch educators to lead our schools. We support ACR-56 (Jasey / Wolfe) as a way to strongly signal to the Administration the importance of closing the door on this regulatory structure.

Eliminating the superintendent salary cap in New Jersey is an important step towards re-energizing a strong educational leadership structure in our state.