



Capitol Update

New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association
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www.njpsa.org

Education Community Opposes Constitutional Convention before Governor's Task Force

On Friday October 29, 2004, the education community had its first real opportunity to voice its serious concern about the proposed constitutional convention. At a special meeting of the Property Tax Convention Task Force, the education community went on record opposing the establishment of a constitutional convention as the appropriate mechanism for statewide property tax reform.

Prior to that date, NJPSA, along with other statewide education groups including the NJEA, the Education Law Center, NJ Association of School Administrators, NJ Association of School Business Officials, NJ School Boards Association and the Garden State Coalition of Schools, had advocated for the school community's representation on the Taskforce and the opportunity to be heard on the appropriateness of a constitutional convention to reform our property tax system.

The Property Tax Convention Taskforce was established by state law in July as part of former Governor McGreevey's three-pronged plan to reform property taxes. The FAIR plan (Fair and Immediate Relief) included short-term property tax relief in the form of increased property tax rebates that resulted from the passage of the Millionaire's Tax and restrictions on school and municipal government

spending through spending caps and restrictions on the budget process (S-1701 for schools, S-1702 for municipalities). The third prong of the plan focused on providing long-term property tax relief through the mechanism of a constitutional convention. Legislation was signed into law that established the Property Tax Convention Taskforce whose role is to develop recommendations regarding the process of conducting a constitutional convention in New Jersey by December 31, 2004. Its recommendations will be presented to the State Legislature for future action.

Taskforce Composition

Governor McGreevey and leaders of the Senate and Assembly appointed the 15 Taskforce members this past summer. **Not one of the Taskforce members represents the K-12 school community, despite the fact that school taxes are a critical component of local property taxes.** Instead, the

Taskforce is comprised of five legislative representatives, mayors and representatives of local municipalities, representatives of the higher education community, a taxpayer organization, a labor organization and other constituencies. While NJPSA respects the background and caliber of the individuals appointed to the Taskforce, we do believe that the K-12 education community should be part of the composition of this critical state Taskforce.

Taskforce Mission

The Taskforce's mission includes the development of recommendations on the method to select delegates to a constitutional convention, the appropriate scope of the convention's inquiry, the method for consideration of the convention's recommendations, the specific issues or questions the convention should consider, and a cost estimate for a constitutional convention.

continued on p. 2

Maintain the Momentum!

Help NJPSA Lobby to Change Budget/Administrative Cap Law!

In recent weeks, educators, parents and school boards have been contacting state legislators throughout New Jersey with a single message: REPEAL CHAPTER 73! Through letters, telephone calls, and e-mails and in public meetings, New Jersey citizens who care about their schools have begun to speak out and demand change in the newly enacted law that:

- imposes restrictive school spending caps;
- skims needed surplus funds from schools and re-appropriates the money to property tax relief;
- weakens school leadership at a time when student performance, accountability and safety are in high demand;
- rigidly prohibits budget transfers during the school year to meet student/school needs;

- bypasses community decision-making and support for local schools by restricting second questions on the ballot;
- endangers student safety by jeopardizing hazardous route busing; and
- threatens the quantity and quality of educational programs.

As you recall, former Governor James E. McGreevey signed S-1701 into law as Chapter 73 in July 2004. During the budget debate, NJPSA and other statewide education associations strongly opposed this legislation, but lawmakers bent on passing the so-called Millionaire's Tax proposal and enacting a balanced budget, did not hear our concerns.

continued on p. 2

Inside

Legislative Update	4
Codey is Acting Governor	4
Advocacy Members	5
NJQSAC	6
Legislative Action Center	7
Mort Reinhart Column	8
Legislative Conference	8



Ed. Community Opposes Constitutional Convention (cont. from p. 1)

(NOTE: past legislation, introduced several years ago, calling for a constitutional convention included a cost estimate of \$15 million.)

With respect to these issues, NJPSA believes that the Legislature is the appropriate entity to grapple with the tax structure of our state. The Legislature is elected by our citizenry for the purpose of governing our state and providing needed government services, including education. The State Constitution specifically grants the Legislature the authority to pass taxes, develop and pass a state budget, the power to incur state debt and the like. Further, our State Constitution specifically charges the Legislature to "provide for the maintenance and support of a thorough and efficient system of free public schools for the instruction of all children in the state between the ages of five and eighteen years."

NJPSA believes that the State Legislature has the necessary broad public representation, constitutional authority and expertise to credibly enact property tax reform. In fact, in other states that have enacted property tax reform in recent years, most often that reform has resulted from a special session of the Legislature. The mechanism of a constitutional convention is rarely, if ever, used for this purpose.

Further, a constitutional convention opens a Pandora's Box of related issues which could threaten the funding and operation of schools:

- NJPSA and the school community are concerned that by opening up our State Constitution, the thorough and efficient clause of our Constitution, which guarantees a strong quality education to **every** New Jersey student, could be at risk. The NJ Supreme Court's decisions in the *Abbott v. Burke* cases, which guarantee adequate funding for poor, urban schools, are based upon this constitutional promise and could be at risk.

- The scope of the convention could exceed the questions of state revenues via our tax structure and include the spending side of our state budget.

As we have seen this past July through the school spending caps of S-1701, P.L. 2004, Chapter 73, the Legislature is quite capable of enacting legislation to address school spending is-

sues. NJPSA is concerned that delegates to a constitutional convention that are likely to be publicly elected, but inexperienced in state government and school spending, will be called upon to decide complex issues of school finance.

- Similarly, other legal protections and fundamental rights, including a ban on school segregation contained in our State Constitution could be subject to modification and/or elimination; hopefully, the Taskforce will structure the mission of any convention to safeguard current constitutional protections.

- NJPSA further believes that the product of any constitutional convention must be revenue neutral. The convention process itself must not be used as a mechanism to enact spending cuts from one state interest such as schools to reallocate the funds to another.

- The convention process itself will not lead to prompt property tax relief. If the Legislature chooses to put a ballot question out to the public to call for a constitutional convention, that question will not be on the ballot until November, 2005. Delegates must then be elected statewide on either that election date or a future date. The earliest estimates of any property tax relief via a constitutional convention are for final action by 2007! This assumes that the convention's decision-making process moves along smoothly without any potential confusion, delay or even deadlock.

The Legislature, with all its reservations and political issues, can surely beat this elongated timeline! Such delayed reform will not assist local property taxpayers now and could potentially damage the ability of local school districts, which have been flat funded for several years, to pass local school budgets that meet student needs and state/federal mandates now and in the future. NJPSA has submitted testimony to the Task Force detailing our perspective as noted above.

The Taskforce will continue to take public testimony on these issues until Dec. 1, 2004. Anyone interested in participating in these discussions or submitting testimony can contact Debra Bradley, Esq. in NJPSA's Government Relations Dept. NJPSA will keep you advised of developments. ▼

Maintain the Momentum (cont. from p. 1)

Since that time, the reality of the law has come home to schools and legislative districts across the state. Its impact is only beginning to be understood, as school districts contemplate their 2005-06 budgets within the framework of this damaging new law. Further, the Commissioner of Education, who has been charged with the development of regulations to implement the law, only recently (11/15/14) issued those regulations to school districts.

New Legislation Introduced

The good news is that lawmakers are hearing from constituents, including school leaders, about the impact of this law on their schools. **If you have not yet contacted your lawmakers, today is the day to act!**

As a result of letters, calls, and meetings from concerned citizens, thoughtful legislators are listening and even introducing legislation addressing all or some of the issues raised in Chapter 73. NJPSA supports these lawmakers and applauds their desire to change a bad law. To date, the following bills have been introduced and are awaiting a hearing:

Bills filed in the Assembly:

- A-3362 (Greenwald, D, Camden County; Cryan, D, Union County)**

This legislation indirectly responds to the plight of school districts under Chapter 73 by appropriating \$18.3 million more in FY 2005 to the NJDOE to fully fund extraordinary special education costs. In the recently enacted state budget, the Legislature only flat funded the NJDOE fund that reimburses districts for extraordinary special education costs. This legislation seeks to address actual district costs for such placements over \$40,000. If enacted, the legislation does mandate that the district must use any funds received to achieve property tax relief in the 2004 or 2005 local tax year.

- A-3431 (Azzolina, R, Thompson, R., Middlesex, Monmouth Counties)**

This legislation amends the courtesy busing provisions of Chapter 73. Under Chapter 73, the allowable cap adjustment for courtesy busing (nonmandated transportation) was reduced from the entire

continued on p. 3

Maintain the Momentum (cont. from p. 2)

amount spent by the district to the increase in the amount spent on courtesy busing from the prior year, indexed by the Consumer Price Index CPI or 2.5%, whichever is greater. A-3431 would provide that all courtesy busing services provided along hazardous routes would be permissible to use as a cap adjustment.

•A-3470 (Greenwald, D, Camden; Cryan, D, Union; and Van Drew, D, Cape May, Atlantic and Cumberland)

This legislation proposes cap relief to local districts by expanding the cap adjustments available to districts under the law.

1. The bill proposes a cap adjustment for special education costs that would equal the increase over the previous budget year in the total cost of providing special education programs and services as required by state and federal law.

2. It also offers a cap adjustment for courtesy busing services, but phases the amount of the adjustment available over several years. Ultimately, for the 2009-2010 school year and thereafter, the cap adjustment for courtesy busing would equal the increased cost of providing these services from the prebudget year, indexed by 2.5% or the CPI, whichever is greater (the current provisions of Chapter 73).

3. The bill creates a new budget cap adjustment for utility costs (gas, electric, water, sewer, etc.)

4. The bill makes permanent several existing cap exemptions that are only temporary under current law. Cap adjustments for costs associated with liability insurance, workers' compensation insurance, and domestic security would become a permanent fixture in New Jersey's budgeting laws.

•A-3382 (Azzolina, Thompson, R, Middlesex and Monmouth counties)

This legislation addresses two negative provisions of Chapter 73, the restrictions placed on the submission of second questions to the voters and the reduction of surplus. The bill provides that for 2005-06 and thereafter, the acceptable level of surplus for schools will be 3%. The bill also removes from law the restrictions placed on a local districts' ability to go to the local vot-

ers to support additional programs and services. Chapter 73 currently provides that districts cannot go to the voters with second questions on the ballot for any programs and services that already exist and can if their administrative costs are in line with as-yet-to-be-determined state standards.

•A-3491 (Greenstein, D, Mercer and Middlesex)

This legislation proposes significant changes to Chapter 73 including:

1. a restoration of the 3% or CPI (whichever is greater) budget cap beginning in 2006-07;

2. raises the threshold of allowable surplus that a district may maintain to 4.5% or \$100,000, whichever is greater;

3. revises the administrative costs cap by adjusting the calculation of the cap to the greater, not lower of a district's prior year administrative costs or regional administrative costs.

4. eliminates the county superintendent's authority to disapprove a school district's 2005-06 budget based on a determination that the district has not implemented efficiencies in the administration operations of the district.

5. restores a district's ability to bank its cap for up to two years;

6. eliminates restrictions on second questions to the voters; and

7. restores a district's ability to transfer funds between line items throughout the school year.

•A-3431 (Baroni, R, Middlesex, Mercer counties)

This legislation completely repeals Chapter 73. Although highly desirable, it is unlikely to pass until strong public support (and a Democratic sponsor) demands it.

Bills filed in the Senate:

•S-1945 (Adler, D, Camden; Kyriillos, R, Middlesex, Monmouth)

This legislation revises the calculation of the cap adjustment for courtesy busing for hazardous routes as set forth in A-3431 above.

•S-1994 (Coniglio, D, Bergen)

This legislation restores the 3% or CPI overall budget cap. It also eliminates the restrictions in Chapter 73 on the submission of second questions to the voters; however, it creates the new requirement of a "performance management audit" of any

district that seeks to submit a second question to the voters. Lastly, the bill revises the special education cap adjustment to include all special education costs above the prior year's spending levels for all mandated services, (not only placements above \$40,000.)

Future Action

The mere filing of these bill proposals does not mean anything will happen to amend or repeal Chapter 73. It does signify that legislators are hearing from constituents and seeking to help.

Please note that only two pieces of proposed legislation address the issue of administrative costs! A-3431 (Baroni) which totally repeals Chapter 73 and A-3491 (Greenstein).

This means that administrators must continue to voice their concerns with Chapter 73!

Here is how you can help:

1. **Use NJPSA's new cyber lobbying service.** Visit the NJPSA Legislative Action Center to email your local legislators today! It is easy and quick. In five minutes time you can help change the status quo of Chapter 73! (see page 7)

2. **Circulate a petition urging the repeal of Chapter 73.** Visit the NJPSA website, www.njpsa.org, to download your copies of the petition. Share the petitions with your PTA/PTO, school staff and other appropriate community groups. It is critical to get broad support from both inside and outside the school community! Mail your completed petitions to NJPSA, Government Relations Department, 12 Centre Drive, Monroe Township, NJ 08831-1564.

3. **Join the NJPSA Legislative Network.** You will be asked to contact your local legislator and build a solid working relationship. Just click onto Legislative Network on our website for an application.

4. **Urge your county association to address this issue and act!** Invite local legislators to your county meetings. Or, schedule a direct meeting with your county leadership at your legislator's office. NJPSA Government Relations staff will be happy to assist.

5. **Attend one of the following regional meetings of educators, parents, and communities to**

Legislative Update

The following is a list of some of the bills that NJPSA is currently tracking. We will continue to provide updates on these and other bills that impact upon our membership.

•**A-200** – This bill provides for the annual selection of six school facilities demonstration projects under the State's school construction law.

Status: Passed by the full Assembly and Senate Education Committee. Awaiting a vote by the full Senate.

•**A-662** – This bill provides immunity from civil liability for school personnel who use reasonable force or restraint to stop fights between students.

Status: Passed by the full Assembly. Awaiting a vote by the Senate Education Committee.

•**A-2404** – This bill requires each public school to observe a period of silence on September 11 of each school year.

Status: Passed by the Assembly Education Committee. Awaiting a vote by the full Assembly.

•**A-2657** – This bill establishes the Safe Schools Resource Officer Training Academy. The academy would provide local law enforcement agencies and public school districts with an optional State-administered training and certification program for safe schools resource officers and for school district liaisons to law enforcement.

Status: Passed by Assembly Education Committee. Awaiting a vote by the full Assembly.

•**A-3196** – This bill establishes certain restrictions concerning foods sold to pupils at public elementary and middle schools. This bill is similar, although not as restrictive, as the School Nutrition regulations which were drafted, but never officially proposed, earlier in the year.

Status: Passed by the Assembly Education Committee. Awaiting a vote by the full Assembly.

•**A-3231** – This bill would revise the calculation of budget caps and increase the allowable surplus for public school districts. This would repeal the provisions of the administrative cap law signed in July.

Status: Awaiting a hearing by the Assembly Education Committee.

continued on p. 5

Senate President Richard Codey is Acting Governor

Senate President Richard J. Codey became New Jersey's acting governor on November 15 of this year. He will serve as the state's chief executive until New Jersey's next elected governor is sworn in on January 2006.

Governor Codey, 57, is one of the state's most senior legislators. At the age of 26, he first won election to the state assembly in 1973. At that time, he was the youngest person ever elected to the New Jersey legislature. Eight years later, he became state senator for the 27th legislative district in Essex County, the district he continues to represent. From 1998 to 2002, he was Senate Minority Leader and served for several days during that period as Acting Governor. Since January of this year, he has been Senate President.

Despite a career in politics that spans more than three decades, Governor Codey is not well known outside his district. He has not sought out the spotlight, preferring instead to work closely with colleagues on both sides of the aisle to craft legislation and build bipartisan consensus.

Governor Codey has initiated or sponsored an extensive number of bills on a wide range of issues. But, over the years, he has become identified with several legislative tracks and high-profile bills. He played a significant role in the 1970s in sponsoring legislation to create New Jersey's casino gambling and simulcast horseracing industries, initiatives that have benefited the state's senior citizens. Governor Codey is also known as a strong sponsor of gun control initiatives. He sponsored the nation's first statewide ban on assault weapons as well as the first child-proof handgun law.

The Governor may be best known for his advocacy of laws to reform New Jersey's health and mental health care systems. Most famously, Governor Codey assumed the identity of a deceased criminal in 1987 and succeeded in passing a hospital employee screening process and being hired as an attendant at Marlboro Psychiatric

Hospital. His subsequent firsthand observations of patient abuse and neglect led to legislative investigations of the mental health system and to tightened employee screening protocols. Governor Codey continues to advocate strongly for improved inpatient and community psychiatric services.



He was also a key sponsor of New Jersey's Health Care Reform Act to restrain health care costs while protecting the quality of care offered New Jersey's citizens. And he helped establish New Jersey's Charity Care program, which sets the cost sharing formula for paying the medical costs of uninsured citizens.

Governor Codey has also taken the lead on several important education issues. Most notably, he sponsored a law to prevent harassment and bullying in schools. He also sponsored legislation providing community college scholarships to high school seniors graduating in the top 20% of their class. He additionally is working on a measure to make community service a requirement for high school graduation.

Governor Codey has become a leader in the effort to reform the Division of Youth and Family services. When sworn in as Senate President, he announced his intention to make child protection a cornerstone of his legislative agenda.

A Fairleigh Dickinson University graduate, Governor Codey is a member of a family that has long been prominent in Essex County politics and business. He is president of the Olympic Agency, an insurance brokerage, and resides in West Orange with wife Mary Jo and their two sons. ▼

Maintain the Momentum (cont. from p. 3)

learn and advocate for our schools:

•**November 30, 2004**, Millville High School, Millville, NJ

•**December 9, Glen Ridge**, Upper Elementary School, Ridgewood Ave. in Glen Ridge at 7:30 p.m.

•**February 10, 2005**, Mount Laurel, time and place to be determined.

(For more details, contact the NJPSA Government Relations Department.)

6. Write to our new Governor.

Governor Richard Codey has just begun his term as our Governor. He needs to hear from you about the impact of Chapter 73 as he prepares for a difficult budget year and the competing demands of many constituencies.

Write to: Richard Codey, Governor, 125 West State Street, PO Box 001, Trenton, NJ 08625 or www.state.nj.us/governor.

In closing, if you are upset about the passage of Chapter 73, TODAY is the time to ACT on your beliefs. It is only through collective action that we can affect change in the difficult budget year ahead. ▼



Join the NJPSA Legislative Network

Call 609-860-1200
for information

BECOME INVOLVED IN OUR GRASS ROOTS NETWORK!

By joining our network, you will have access to up-to-the-minute information on legislation and important issues, the chance to participate in meetings with legislators and government officials to promote your school, and complimentary attendance at the interesting and informative NJPSA Annual Legislative Conference. ▼

Advocacy Members of the Month



The NJPSA Legislative Committee monitors and analyzes bills, and makes recommendations and provides testimony on critical legislative issues that impact upon schools and school leaders.

Legislative Committee members have a direct voice in setting NJPSA legislative policy. They develop recommendations for association policy on pending legislative issues and examine and analyze legislation and code proposals. The Committee spends time examining each issue and recommends positions to be taken by the Association. The Committee makes responsible decisions, mindful of how their decisions impact upon school success and the professional leadership needs of school administrators. The Committee believes that it can play an important role in meeting the challenges facing schools and communities today. For their dedicated work on the Legislative Committee, we salute them as Advocacy Members of the Month.

Members of the Committee include:

John Furgione, Chairperson, Constance Bauer, Dorothy Phyllis Becker, Carmen Holster, Joseph Kruczek, John Lichtenberg, Barbara McMorrow, Don Merce, Robin Moore, Cheryl O'Brien, Kristin P. O'Neill, Susan Peters, Jean Marie Pugliese and Leonard Stanziano. ▼

Legislative Update (cont. from p. 4)

•**S-496** – This bill requires school districts to notify DYFS of certain pupil absences. If any child enrolled in a school district has an unexcused absence for five consecutive school days, the attendance officer of the district would investigate the absence and notify the district superintendent of the absence. The district superintendent then notifies DYFS.

Status: Passed by the Senate Education Committee. Awaiting a vote by the full Senate.

•**S-705** – This bill establishes a subcommittee of local emergency councils to develop school crisis response action plans and appropriates \$3 million.

Status: Passed by the Senate Education Committee. Awaiting a vote by the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee.

•**S-1431** – This bill establishes the New Jersey Quality Single Account-

ability Continuum (NJ QSAC), a new State monitoring system for public school districts. (For a more detailed description on this legislation, please see the article on NJQSAC in this edition.)

Status: Passed by the Senate Education Committee. Awaiting a hearing by the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee.

•**S-1598** – This bill would establish a three-year community service pilot program for juniors in high school beginning in the 2005-2006 school year.

Status: Passed by the full Senate. Awaiting a vote by the Assembly Education Committee.

•**S-1942** – This bill authorizes boards of education to extend the school day by one hour to make up for canceled days.

Status: Awaiting a hearing by the Senate Education Committee. ▼

NJ QSAC UPDATE

(New Jersey Quality Single Accountability Continuum)

Over the last several months, NJPSA has been closely following a piece of legislation that could have a major impact on schools and the way the State measures progress and performance in a district.

NJQSAC - NJ Quality Single Accountability Continuum

The New Jersey Quality Single Accountability Continuum – also known as NJQSAC – was developed after a lengthy study performed by the Joint Committee on the Public Schools. Since its introduction in late March, this legislation has undergone a lengthy process of hearings and amendments before the Education Committees in both houses of the Legislature. NJPSA has worked closely with the Department of Education, the Legislature, and the other education associations to suggest improvements to this bill. Our hope is that the final result will accomplish the Legislature's intention of creating a more flexible, less bureaucratic monitoring system that recognizes improvements in performance and strives for a more appropriate balance between the NJDOE's dual roles in the areas of accountability and supporting teaching and learning.

What to Expect from this Proposed New System

Under this proposed new system, school districts will provide an annual report to the Department of Education on their progress in complying with quality performance indicators. The quality performance indicators are the standards to be met in five key components of school district effectiveness: instructional and program; personnel; fiscal management; operations; and governance. Based on the district's compliance with the indicators, the Commissioner of Education will assess district effectiveness and place the district on a performance continuum that will determine the type and level of oversight and technical assistance and support the district will receive.

High Performing Districts

A performing district that implements its improvement plan and is able to attain 80% to 100% compliance with the quality performance indicators will be designated as a high performing district and certified for a period of seven years, contingent on continued progress in meeting the quality performance indicators.

Performing Districts

A district that is found to be 50% to 79% compliant with the indicators will be considered a performing district. This type of district will be required to develop and submit to the commissioner for his approval an improvement plan which will address the quality performance indicators with which the district has not complied.

Noncompliance

If a district is less than 50% compliant with the quality performance indicators, the district will be placed under partial or full State control, depending upon how many of the five key components of school district effectiveness are implicated in the district's noncompliance.

In the case of a district under partial State control, the commissioner may appoint highly skilled professionals (HSPs) to provide direct oversight in the district regarding

the quality performance indicators with which the district has failed to comply. These HSPs will have authority in the areas of oversight that the commissioner designates and they will work with the superintendent and the board of education to address areas identified in the improvement plan. The cost of the HSPs would be shared, with the local district assuming two-thirds of the salaries and other costs, and the State picking up the rest.

Also in districts under partial or total State control, the commissioner will have the authority to appoint up to two additional members to the district's board of education. The local municipality may appoint up to one additional member. These new members will serve two-year terms and have all the rights, powers and privileges of a member of the board.

NJPSA's Concerns

As the bill had originally been introduced, NJPSA was concerned with a number of provisions, including the ability of the commissioner to appoint not two, but three members of a district board of education, and for those members to serve at the pleasure of the commissioner. NJPSA argued that such an arrangement would allow the commissioner to, in effect, stack a board of education and remove and appoint members at will. Appointing members for a specific term allows those new members to perform their duties without interference from the State. However, a recent amendment to this legislation changed these members from non-voting to voting members. We do not support this change.

We also have concerns and questions regarding the HSPs. The legislation states that the "commissioner, in consultation with the local board of education" will appoint the HSPs. Since the local district is covering two-thirds of the cost, NJPSA believes that the local board, in consultation with the Department of Education, should have greater control over these appointments. NJPSA submitted amendments to this effect to the sponsors; however, they have not been included at this point. In addition, in our testimony we stated that we strongly believe that the HSPs should have certification in the educational areas they are evaluating. It is important that evaluations are done by individuals who are familiar with the subject area and can make appropriate and effective suggestions for change.

The legislation is only the first step in the process of implementing NJQSAC. Once the legislation is signed into law, regulations will be developed and proposed by the Department of Education. The regulations will then be reviewed by the State Board of Education and move through the regular review and approval process. It is expected this process will take around nine months.

On the whole, NJPSA is supportive of this legislation. We believe the final result will be an improvement over the current system and will result in long-term improvement in our schools. However, we will continue to work with the Senate and Assembly Education Committees, and the sponsors, to address our concerns and create the best possible legislation. ▼

NJPSA Adds Online Legislative Action Center to List of Ongoing New Services for Members

Budget cuts. Administrative spending caps. School choice. Student assessment. Professional standards.

These are just a few of the major issues that affect public education and the ability of school leaders to successfully guide their schools, staff and students to maximum levels of achievement and performance.

In an effort to strengthen the legislative power of school leaders, NJPSA has joined forces with Capitol Advantage, the nation's premier provider of grassroots solutions for corporations, nonprofit groups, associations, educational institutions and other organizations, to create a customized online Legislative Action Center at www.njpsa.org.

The NJPSA Legislative Action Center is powered by CapWiz, a database driven, online information portal, where members can take action on issues affecting the school leadership profession and the quality of public education. **The Center promotes e-advocacy for public education in a user-friendly environment where you basically only need to know your NJPSA membership ID number, home and/or school zip code and basic computer keyboarding.**

LEGISLATIVE ACTION CENTER SHOWS EARLY SUCCESS

NJPSA launched this new service with an invitation for members to take action for the repeal of school budget and administration spending caps in response to the quick passage of Chapter 73 (S-1701/A-99). To date, NJPSA members sent nearly 500 e-mail messages to 98 New Jersey legislators using the NJPSA Legislative Action Center. **We urge you to send your letter today if you have not yet done so!**

NJPSA hopes to continue the success with this online e-advocacy system, not only with action regarding Chapter 73, but also with future legislative action.

All members are encouraged to respond quickly to alerts in order to ensure the quality of their professional lives and public education system.

HOW THE ONLINE SERVICE OPERATES

Taking action through the NJPSA Action Center is quick and easy. The entire process takes only several minutes and is user-friendly. Below are the simple steps on how to take action on a legislative bill.

-Go to www.njpsa.org

-Click on **NJPSA Legislative Action Center**

(or you can enter from **Members Only**)

-Enter your **Member ID#** and **Name** in ALL CAPS

-Choose **Legislative Action Center** from the alphabetical list of NJPSA services

-From the **Action Alert** area at the top, click on the **TAKE ACTION** button

-If you haven't already visited, enter your **demographic information** (name, address, zip code)

-You can **choose from the recommended following options:**

Remember me (please be sure to check this box)

Send me a copy

Sign me up for Action e-List

-Enter your **name in the closing** after "Sincerely"

-Click the **Send Message** button

The beauty of this Legislative Action Center interface is that the system will automatically generate your national, state and local legislators based on your mailing zip code. You can choose to use your home and/or school mailing address.

Once you have entered your demographic information and chosen the "Remember me" option, your information is saved in the database and you can easily generate legislative action in the future when you return to the Action Center.

BONUS FEATURES OF THE ACTION CENTER

There are additional features of the NJPSA Legislative Action Center that provide extensive information which is valuable to your professional and personal interests. You should be sure to explore these components. These sections provide e-mail and web site links to assist you with contacting important players and entities in the both legislative and media arenas.

-My Elected Officials: This area provides professional and demographic information about elected officials in your area including the Governor and United States Senators.

-NJ Officials and Agencies: This section includes links to New Jersey officials, lawmakers and agencies such as the New Jersey Department of Education and the state legislative directory.

-Search Local Government: Members can locate local elected officials in New Jersey by simply entering a zip code or city name. This will generate a list of links to local information, web sites and e-mail addresses of key people within your area.

-Issues and Legislation: Legislative alerts, key votes, updates, pending bills, the State Constitution, legislative basics and Capitol Hill basics are located in this section.

-Congressional Delegation: This area contains biographical, contact, term, election and committee information about New Jersey Senators and Representatives.

-Media Guide: Members can contact New Jersey and major national media organizations including newspapers, television and radio professionals.

-Election 2004: Results from the election are posted in percentages nationally and by state. You will also find additional interesting data such as battleground states, balance of power and US Congress facts.

NOW IS THE TIME TO GET POLITICALLY ACTIVE! The NJPSA Legislative Action Center provides a quick and easy way to do so. Welcome Aboard! ▼



New State Dental Plan

Some Retirees Left Out

by Mort Reinhart



The State Health Benefits Commission has announced the establishment of a dental plan for retirees that will be administered by Aetna Dental. The plan, called the Retiree Dental Expense Plan, will be implemented on January 1, 2005, and it will cover retirees regardless of where they reside. The cost of the program will be paid by retirees through a deduction from their retirement checks. (An article in last month's NJPSA Today spelled out the details of the new plan.)

However, the plan, as it is now constituted, will **not be available to all retirees** because coverage in the retired dental program will *only* be offered to eligible retirees whose hospitalization, medical, major-medical and prescription coverage is provided by the State Health Benefits Plan (SHBP).

Eligible retirees, according to the information provided by the SHBP, are (1) retirees, including survivors, enrolled in a *medical* plan in the Retired Group of the SHBP or (2) retirees, including survivors, eligible for enrollment in the *medical* plan of the SHBP who elected to waive the *medical* coverage because of other SHBP coverage or coverage through another public employer.

Educators in this eligible group are those who receive free health coverage (they retired with 25 or more years of pension credit or retired on a disability retirement). Also included in this eligible group are educators who retired with fewer than 25 years from a board of education that was a participating employer in the SHBP who chose to remain in the State's SHBP retired group and pay for their retired coverage by having the premium deducted from their pension checks.

This eligibility definition leaves retirees **who were 60 years of age or older and had fewer than 25 years of retirement credit at the time of retirement and whose former boards of education were NOT members of the SHBP medical plan** without access to the new dental plan.

continued on p. 9

ANNUAL NJPSA LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE

MARCH 11, 2005

Trenton Marriott at Lafayette Yard

Acting Governor Codey is already facing a \$4 billion dollar deficit over the next 18 months and has asked all departments to trim spending by 10%. Codey also indicated that additional cuts will be considered.



NOW is the time to meet with your state legislators and colleagues for a day of discussion and debate about important educational issues including **school funding**, administrative spending caps, the proposed constitutional convention and a host of other important educational issues.



OUR LEGISLATORS NEED TO HEAR FROM YOU DIRECTLY. Get involved and bring a colleague with you to this once a year important conference.

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8:30 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.

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New State Dental Plan (cont. from p. 8)

Under the law governing retiree health insurance, educators fitting the description in the previous sentence are permitted to continue their health benefits (hospital, medical, out-patient care, and major-medical insurance) through their former boards of education's insurance program *as long* as they are willing to pay the coverage. But they are not eligible for the new dental plan during this period because their medical coverage is not through the SHBP. [Boards of education are not required to offer dental coverage beyond the limits (18 months) contained in the federal COBRA law.]

According to sources at the Division of Pensions and Benefits, there is good news for this group when they reach age 65. Legislation passed in 1993 (Chapter 8, P.L.1993) requires the Division of Pensions and Benefits to invite any retiree (1) who has maintained retired health insurance coverage through the plan of the local board and (2) who enrolls in Medicare Parts A and B upon reaching age 65 to enroll in the SHBP medical plan. If the offer to enroll in the SHBP at age 65 is accepted, a retiree switching to the SHBP will be offered the opportunity to join the new dental plan at the time of enrollment. ▼

Professional Development for School Leaders

Information and Technical Support Sessions

FEA and NJPSA are offering Information and Technical Support Sessions regarding the New Professional Development Initiative for School Leaders. A team of professional development experts will guide you through the entire Professional Development Initiative process – from assessment and design to implementation and documentation. FEA and NJPSA will repeat each different session on three dates in northern, central and southern locations.

Dec. 3, 2004, 9:00 am – 1:00 pm, Technical Assistance: Self- Assessment and Plan Design, Any **North** Jersey Administrator, College of Saint Elizabeth

Dec. 6, 2004, 9:00 am – 1:00 pm, Technical Assistance: Self- Assessment and Plan Design, Any **Central** Jersey Administrator, NJPSA Headquarters

Dec. 7, 2004, 9:00 am – 1:00 pm, Technical Assistance: Self- Assessment and Plan Design, Any **South** Jersey Administrator, Stockton College Carnegie Library Center

Jan. 20, 2005, 9:00 am – 1:00 pm, Technical Assistance: Collaboration and Review, Any **Central** Jersey Administrator, NJPSA Headquarters

Jan. 21, 2005, 9:00 am – 1:00 pm, Technical Assistance: Collaboration and Review, Any **North** Jersey Administrator, College of Saint Elizabeth

Jan. 24, 2005, 9:00 am – 1:00 pm, Technical Assistance: Collaboration and Review, Any **South** Jersey Administrator, Stockton College Townsend Residential Life Ctr.

Feb. 23, 2005, 12:30pm – 3:30 pm, Technical Assistance: Implementation and Documentation, Any **North** Jersey Administrator, College of Saint Elizabeth

Feb. 24, 2005, 9:00 am – 1:00 pm, Technical Assistance: Implementation and Documentation, Any **Central** Jersey Administrator, NJPSA Headquarters

Feb. 25, 2005, 9:00 am – 1:00 pm, Technical Assistance: Implementation and Documentation, Any **South** Jersey Administrator, Stockton College Townsend Residential Life Center ▼

**Visit www.njpsa.org to register
or call Karin Marchione at 609-860-1200.**

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