

# NJPSA Questionnaire for NJ Legislative Candidates of the 2023 GENERAL ELECTION

Thank you for your dedication to public service and for your interest in what is on the minds of the members of the NJ Principals and Supervisors Association (NJPSA).

NJPSA represents over 7,000 active school leaders in New Jersey's public schools. Our members serve in the positions of principal, assistant principal, director, and supervisor. We are dedicated to providing a high quality education to every student in New Jersey schools.

The following questionnaire is designed for you to share your perspectives on issues of concern to the NJPSA membership. NJPSA will publish your responses on our special NJPSA Election Center website in October to inform our members in their Election 2023 decision-making process.

Thank you for taking the time to share your perspectives with us!

Candidate's Name: \*

Paul Eschelbach

Office Sought: \*

☒ NJ General Assembly

☐ NJ State Senate

☐ Other: .....

Party: \*

- ☒ Democrat
- ☐ Republican
- ☐ Independant
- ☐ Other: .....

Legislative District #: \*

13 ▼

Campaign Email Address: \*

pj07740@comcast.net .....

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**Safe Schools**

School principals and supervisors are directly responsible for creating a safe, secure, and supportive learning environment for our students. A student's feeling of safety and security is at risk where school buildings are not up to health and safety standards, where the risk of gun violence can threaten our schools, and where school buildings are not fully equipped with current security staffing and equipment.

**If elected to the State Legislature, what will you do to address school safety and security in the broadest sense, not only to upgrade the physical structures and equipment in our schools, but also to safeguard our students from the threat of gun violence or other threats to their safety?**

I taught for 41 years in public schools. Throughout my life I have seen needs for school safety change. As a child I remember drills having to deal with the Cold War. As a professional, I have seen a change from 2 fire drills a month to practicing evacuations and procedures to shelter in place. The definition of school safety must change as society changes. Additionally, I believe minorities, specifically LGBTQ+ students must be protected from bullying. Me and my running mates in LD13 are also very concerned about gun safety as a campaign topic. As President of Long Branch School Board Association, I was extremely concerned with staff safety, and made sure administration took steps to keep teachers and students safe. One suggestion our superintendent took was to insure teachers could lock classroom doors without having to open them up. School districts must also ally with local police departments to prepare and protect.

## Student Mental Health

Even before the pandemic, school leaders grew concerned with the rising mental health needs of students. Post-pandemic, students have returned to school with a broad range of needs including mental wellness and academic needs. A recent CDC study found that the number of young adults with depression more than *doubled* from 2011 to 2021. School leaders and their staff do all they can to provide appropriate student support, but the inconsistent range of services and current case overload on service providers, mental health professionals, and outside mental health services is a great barrier. This school year, the Murphy Administration is launching a new network system called NJ4S to provide preventative and referral service options for schools. This, as yet untried, system is designed to replace the highly effective School-Based Youth Services Program, which provides direct funding to some school districts to offer mental health and related services directly in school.

**As a state legislator, how will you prioritize, support, and fund student mental health issues in our schools? Will you advocate for continued funding for existing School-Based Youth Services programs in next year's budget discussions, as well as expansion for these tried-and-true SBYS programs?**

During much of my career I was a guidance counselor, and I have an MEd in Pupil Personnel Services. Naturally, student mental health services are important to me. I was a middle school counselor on 9/11/01. We were prepared to help any student who was affected at that time. Staff professional development must include mental health concerns for students. As a guidance counselor in Long Branch, I came to depend on our SBYS program. This important asset is necessary, and state funding should not be abated, but expanded. This combination of medical, social work and education is a worthwhile and necessary program. Minority, handicapped and LGBTQ+ students also need counseling and consolation often. Staff must be available to help. Gay-Straight Alliances must be operating.

## Staffing Shortages/Educator Pipeline

One of the top concerns of NJPSA members is fully staffing their schools in all school roles, including teachers. Once again, the pandemic exacerbated a rising problem in our schools - the dwindling number of young people entering the education profession as teachers, counselors, and other critical school staffing positions. The State Legislature has been working to address barriers to the teaching profession within the licensing code and teacher preparation system.

### **If elected/reelected, what new ideas will you bring to this issue to ensure that our schools are fully staffed with well-qualified and prepared teachers and education service professionals?**

I am fully aware of staff shortages through legislative programs offered by the NJEA. I know there are not enough substitutes. I know there are not enough competent candidates out there. Much of these problems date back to 2011 when the state devalued our pension and health benefits. Currently there are five different levels of pension benefits. Young professionals are not certain that their pension and health benefits will be intact when they retire. They see that their generation has been deprived of benefits. The profession needs to be respected and rewarded with proper health benefits and salary. Too many young teachers are abandoning the profession for other higher paying professions. As an NJEA PAC endorsed candidate I believe there needs to be a change at the state level.

## Social Media Impacts on Students

The U.S. Surgeon General recently reported on the “profound risk of harm” that social media poses to the mental health and well-being of children and adolescents. Recent tragedies in New Jersey, including the suicide of several young students, amplifies this danger. Social media frequently plays a persistent, negative role in bullying incidents both at and away from school. Principals face impenetrable roadblocks placed by social media companies in addressing these issues.

**If elected/reelected, how will you work with NJPSA to develop legislation that protects the online safety, privacy, and welfare of our students; requires social media companies to develop safer products for student use; and requires social media companies to work with schools and law enforcement in cases where students are harmed by social media use?**

I am aware of how negative peer pressure in social media, especially with LGBTQ+ students is harmful. Content blockers on school computers is not enough as most students access social media at home. Social media sites, such as Facebook, have a legal authority to ban inappropriate posting, especially regarding student bullying, LGBTQ+ issues and racist content. NJ laws must be enacted to protect our vulnerable children from malicious postings, and inappropriate postings.

## **Learning and High Stakes Testing**

NJPSA believes that student assessment is an integral part of the instructional process that is inextricably linked to a viable curriculum and strong instructional practice. Constructive and well-designed assessments provide on-going, actionable, and timely information to students, parents, and educators concerning what students know, understand, and can do in relation to our learning standards. Currently, New Jersey students are assessed in English Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science via standardized tests according to federal and state requirements during their elementary, middle and high school careers.

NJPSA believes that New Jersey must streamline its testing requirements to avoid over-testing, duplicative testing, and tests that students do not consider relevant to their futures, especially at the high school level.

**What role do you believe standardized testing should play in a student's academic life? How would you assist educators in streamlining current requirements and eliminating unnecessary testing?**

A test is a snapshot of any particular day in school. Testing procedures do not take into account events such as student mood, problems in school or society on that day, or any number of factors. High stakes testing is an abomination. It is culturally unfair, and principal and teacher evaluation must not be determined on these tests. The tests are over-rated, and take up all attention during the school year. They are particularly unfair to staff and students in poor and urban areas.

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## Learning and High Stakes Testing

Will you vote in support of [S-3308/A-4639](#), legislation that would eliminate New Jersey's high school graduation exit test, a requirement that serves as a potential barrier to graduation for many students?

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I don't know/prefer not to say
- ☐ Other: .....



## School Funding

New Jersey schools are reliant on state, federal, and local funding to support our programs and services. Many districts are facing higher costs to operate, staffing shortages with negative fiscal impacts, health care cost increases, and new costs resulting from health and safety needs post-pandemic. Federal funding has assisted districts in meeting some of these challenges, but those funds must be used by 2024. Additionally, some districts have faced significant additional cuts in state funding due to changes in the law which redistributed state aid (S-2).

### How will you work with NJPSA and other education stakeholders to address these funding concerns moving forward?

Part of the problem is that most school funding is provided by property taxes. Robinson v Cahill and Abbot v BOE attempted to challenge this practice. The state and Federal government must enact a fair and consistent funding formula that must be fully funded. At the same time local concerns should also be addressed. School districts must also be encouraged to share services, and personnel. Eventually funding must become less dependent from property taxes. Property tax caps must be removed.

## School Funding

Would you vote to eliminate or modify the 2% tax levy cap on school budgets in certain situations?

☒ Yes

☐ No

☐ I don't know/prefer not to say

☐ Other: .....

## School Funding

How would you work to address the funding needs of the S-2 districts since the fiscal world has significantly changed since that legislation was enacted in 2018?

S-2 districts have found themselves in a difficult position. It was not their fault that for many years NJ did not update data on these districts. Freehold Regional is an S-2 district in my legislative district, so I have a personal interest in making sure they are taken care of. S-2 districts have lost student population over the years, but they have also developed excellent programs and a quality staff. They should not be fiscally punished but held harmless. The programs and staffing that voters have become accustomed to should be maintained.

## The Right to Read – Book Bans

NJPSA is proud of New Jersey's strong student learning standards which have been highly rated across the country. A key component of all our learning standards is the goal of developing critical thinking and the analysis of multiple resources. Our members work hard to support student learning by working with our teachers to provide a rich curriculum aligned to these standards and the use of high-quality books and materials as support. We also partner with our parents to be part of their child's learning process. NJPSA is concerned about the rising incidence of demands to ban certain books from school libraries and the curriculum. While parents can surely direct the reading choices of their children, they should not be able to direct what resources and books are available to other students.

**Will you commit to protecting a student's right to read and learn according to New Jersey's student learning standards (NJSLS) by opposing any legislation designed to infringe on those student rights? As a state leader, how can you assist educators in communicating this message to parents and community stakeholders?**

Our schools should not be censoring books. As an elementary school guidance counselor, I made sure I had gender affirming books available, such as "Heather Has Two Mommies." Teachers' librarians and school resource personnel can not be denied access to these materials. As an aside there are several school districts around me (some in my legislative district) that are attempting to enact mandatory parental notifications for LGBTQ+ students. These policies must be abolished. Also, I recently participated in a "Banned Books" read-a-thon to challenge banning books.

## Pension Funding

In recent years, New Jersey has honored its obligations to make the full actuarially required annual payment to the Teachers Pension and Annuity Fund (TPAF) and Public Employees Retirement System (PERS) under a schedule or repayment established by state law.

**Will you continue to honor this obligation moving forward and fight to ensure that the public pension system for school employees is fully funded in next year's State Budget Process?**

- ☒ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I don't know/prefer not to say
- ☐ Other: .....

**The End.**

**Thank you for sharing your perspectives with NJPSA members statewide!**

Is there anything else that you would like our members to know about you or your candidacy?

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**NJPSA**  
NEW JERSEY PRINCIPALS  
AND SUPERVISORS ASSOCIATION

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