

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: *

Elizabeth Graner

Office Sought: *

☒ NJ General Assembly

☐ NJ State Senate

☐ Other: _____

Party: *

☒ Democrat

☐ Republican

☐ Independant

☐ Other: _____

Legislative District #: *

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Campaign Email Address: *

elizabethgraner@gmail.com

Campaign Phone Number: *

201-988-1126

Campaign Website:

https://ld21nj.com/

Campaign Mailing Address:

387 Penns Way, Basking Ridge, NJ 07920

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?

In order to ensure the safety of students, the NJ state legislature must uphold our current common sense gun legislation. We must also fully fund our schools so that each district may have safe and positive learning environments.

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?

I applaud Governor Murphy’s commitment to strengthen adolescent mental health by prioritizing prevention, reducing stigma, increasing access to care and supporting caregivers -- if elected, I vow to support any legislation that will further this initiative.

I will advocate for continued funding as well as expansion of funding for existing School-Based Youth Services programs.

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/re-elected, 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?

As an educator, I am already seeing evidence of the looming teacher shortage crisis. This year, several science teachers have taken on extra classes for stipends and class sizes in the English and history departments are very large due to decisions not to replace retirees. The legislature must acknowledge this crisis and seek ways to recruit and retain quality educators to the profession, such as proposing legislation to address closing the teacher pay gap, fully funding the teacher pension system, ensuring that health benefits remain affordable, providing service scholarships for teacher preparation programs, and student loan forgiveness.

In order that the teacher population reflects New Jersey’s rich diversity, lawmakers must support legislation to diversify the state’s teaching profession. The State Legislature must strengthen and expand minority educator incentive programs that focus on loan forgiveness and grant opportunities for teacher preparation programs. Districts should be incentivized to work collaboratively with local colleges to engage in high quality teacher residency programs with a focus on teachers of color. There should be state funding for intensive teacher preparation support programs that offer mentoring, tutoring, and job placement to make sure that teachers of color successfully complete preparation programs.

If elected, I will sponsor, co-sponsor, or support legislation that will address this crisis-level issue.

I applaud the recent Assembly passage of A5416, which would require the State Board of Education to authorize alternate route to expedite teacher certification of persons employed as paraprofessionals in school districts. I also applaud Assembly members Wimberly and Reynolds-Jackson for co-sponsoring A3254, which would establish a program in DOE to support school districts in developing grow-your-own programs for hiring of teachers of students with disabilities.

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/re-elected, 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 applaud the recent passage of Assembly bill A5069, which prohibits social media platforms from using certain practices or features that cause child users to become addicted to various platforms. I also commend Senator Vitale for sponsoring Senate Bill 3493, which concerns social media privacy and data management for children and establishes the New Jersey Children’s Data Protection Commission -- if elected, I will sponsor, support, and vote for any Assembly effort which assists in this legislation.

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?

As an educator, I have long believed that there is entirely too much focus on high-stakes testing in our schools. Standardized testing should only be used as a snapshot of data at any given time. This data (which would be more useful if tests were competency-based) can be used to determine instructional needs in order to help students master academic skills. They should not be used for graduation requirements or teacher evaluation purposes.

If elected, I would proudly support legislation or initiatives that would update the teacher evaluation system and would absolutely support the elimination of the high-stakes high school exit exam.

I applaud proposed Assembly Bill A4639 from Assembly members Caputo, Jasey, McKnight, and Wimberly, which would eliminate the high school graduation proficiency test. Although I am running on a slate opposite Assemblywoman Michele Matsikoudis, I applaud her sponsorship of A4906, which would prohibit the State Board of Education from requiring student growth objectives to evaluate teachers.

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 (\$-2).

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

If elected, and as a career public educator, I vow to sponsor, support, and vote in favor of any legislation that addresses the crisis-level funding concerns faced by our great public schools.

In terms of educator retention, the legislature must enable school leadership to improve teacher working conditions through minimizing administrative paperwork (SGOs), providing enough budget for sufficient instructional materials and resources, and ensuring enough staff to allow for collaboration and preparation time.

The legislature must also make sure that Chapter 78 relief is just that. I was happy to see Chapter 78 relief signed in 2020, as it lowered the cost of health insurance for school employees while also lowering costs for school districts; however, public employees saw over a 15% increase in our premiums this year, which also impacts our school budgets and taxpayers. While some lawmakers raised the alarm about this last summer, I am disappointed that the governor and the legislature allowed this to happen -- and it happened because they did not stand up to Horizon BCBS, which initially promised to lower costs but then raised them by a whopping 24%.

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I also support:
A4689: Establishes teacher certification route for candidates with Montessori teaching credentials.
A5427: Prohibits Commissioner of Education from approving certain tests for teacher certification candidates with extended retake waiting periods.

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?

In order to address budgetary pressures due to inflation, staff shortages, and increased costs due to COVID, the state legislature must act to make up for the impending loss of federal COVID funds. Although New Jersey’s public schools are closer to being “fully funded” by the state than they have been in years, our legislature has never prioritized fully funding its schools according to the state aid formula set in law. We must go further to build a more equitable school funding system.

I believe that the federal government must do everything it can to support schools -- currently, funding for K-12 schools comprises less than 3% of the total federal budget. I believe that the feds should expand the parameters of qualification for Title I funding -- expansion of Title I could eliminate spending caps between districts.

In order to help S2 districts make up for the loss of state aid and local fair share, I support the efforts of Senators Gopal and Zwicker and several Assembly members, who sounded the alarm with the Governor’s office and cut a deal to restore 66% to those districts affected by the drastic change in aid.

I agree with moving additional district costs outside the 2% cap.

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 (NJSL) 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?

I unwaveringly, passionately, and loudly support a student’s right to read and learn.

If elected, I VOW to fight for this right and will immediately support the efforts of Assembly members Jasey, Carter, Stanley, Quijano, Danielsen, McKnight, and Conaway in their efforts to pass Assembly Bill 5499, which prohibits book banning in public libraries and schools, authorizes withholding of State Aid for non-compliance.

In order to communicate this message to parents and community stakeholders, we have to quiet the noise from extremists pushing messages of hate and intolerance. As a teacher, I believe the best way to achieve this is to educate. In particular, I have seen the strain that family expectations have placed on LGBTQIA+ youth, but I have also seen parents come around with the loving guidance and understanding of mental health and educational professionals.

We can do this.

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?

It is an honor to be considered for this endorsement. Tell John Farinella I said hey!

Thank you!

