

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: *

Shama A. Haider

Office Sought: *

☒ NJ General Assembly

☐ NJ State Senate

☐ Other:

Party: *

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

Legislative District #: *

37 ▼

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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?

First and foremost, I will support providing schools with adequate funding to ensure they have the means necessary to protect students. Such funding enables each individual school to make the upgrades and additions they are in need of and to maintain such security measures.

I support putting an end to gun violence through policy that regulates such weapons and keeps them out of our schools. We continue to lose innocent lives to gun violence and no student, parent, or school official should have to live and work in fear for their child's safety.

Finally, in order to remain aware of threats to student safety as well as that of educators and school officials I will continue to strengthen the relationships I have begun to forge during my first term in office. It is so valuable to be able to turn to experts when I have policy questions that impact the education sphere. Additionally, such a relationship allows educators and leaders to come to me with issues as they arise so we can try and find a policy solution together if need be.

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 my first term in the legislature, our office heard countless testimony to the success of New Jersey's School-Based Youth Services programs. It quickly became apparent that this was a critical resource for the mental well-being of our students. I will continue to advocate for funding of SBYSP. Furthermore, should opportunity for expansion arise I would fully support that as well.

I stand behind additional investment into new programs as well. Bolstering mentorship programs, after school programs, sports, etc. is critical to the mental health of students in our schools. Our kids must have people and places they can turn to.

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 would propose allowing educators and staff that reside out of New Jersey to be employed as staff in our schools. Current requirements demand that such individuals be Garden State residents, severely limiting the pool of qualified applicants that could fulfill such open roles. If we allow candidates from outside of New Jersey to fill vacant positions, we will greatly reduce such staffing shortages.

I also support policy that lowers barriers to entry within the educational field. For example, I was a cosponsor of A677 which worked to remove the requirement of performance-based assessments as a condition of eligibility for certification. Furthermore, the state can do more to take some of the weight off the shoulders of educators and staff. For example, lowering costs such as the expense of classroom supplies with tax deductions (A2227) can encourage more individuals to pursue careers in the field.

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 would propose scheduling quarterly meetings with myself and NJPSA. This provides a regular forum for representatives to not only alert me to the problems they are seeing day to day, but allows a platform for proposed policy solutions. It will keep myself as a legislator accountable as I will have to provide regular updates to any proposed or introduced policy.

It is important that legislation works to limit the impact of social media on students, particularly our youngest students. There must be protections in place that shield youth from harmful advertising and marketing campaigns, false information, and bullying. Additionally, legislation must work to hold not just companies accountable but also the individuals using these platforms to harm others.

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?

Standardized testing, when created and administered appropriately, serves as a helpful metric of a student's understanding and needs. I believe it is an important part of a child's education. That being said, over testing and the high-stress environment of some exams can negatively impact students and their perception of education.

It is important that legislation protects schools, educators, and students from testing companies that do not keep their best interests in mind. On the other hand, it is just as important that the state doesn't develop overly complex testing requirements. Key here is making sure the process is clear enough for students, parents, and teachers to understand. As a legislator, I would not support unnecessary testing requirements and would work with educators and leaders in the educational community to further understand the testing landscape.

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?

I support schools and educators. During my time in office, I would be happy to meet with any organizations or institutions that have funding concerns in order to work towards a solution. The state can find various ways to alleviate costs where possible as we did with staffing shortages for example. This will take some of the strain off of our schools and teachers.

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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:

It is important we strike a balance between increasing property taxes and the importance of our school budgets.

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?

Prior to the enactment of this legislation, schools in my legislative district (37) were severely underfunded. With the reapportionment of aid, we have seen a marked improvement in school funding across our municipalities. It is important that with rising costs and inflation, we continue to take into account higher costs overall for our schools.

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?

I strongly oppose any and all legislation intended to limit the rights of students. A student's right to read and learn is powerful, knowledge is powerful. Banning books and other materials for personal or political reasons is a form of censorship that will severely harm the learning potential of our students.

In my leadership role, I will continue to publicly vocalize my opposition to such limitations and infringements. I would be proud to support initiatives to protect such rights as well.

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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