

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: *

Gordon M. Johnson

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?

I was a cosponsor of P.L.2022, c.131 which strengthens New Jersey's gun laws in the wake of the Bruen Supreme Court Decision. I have also been certified as a Mom Demand Action Gun Sense Candidate and endorsed as a Gun Safety Champion by Brady PAC in recognition of my longtime advocacy for stricter gun control measures. I am proud that New Jersey has among the strictest gun control laws in the nation.

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 fought against the Department of Children and Families' plan to defund school-based youth services and move exclusively to NJ4S. Along with my legislative colleagues, we were successful in forcing the Department to back off from the plan and maintain current funding for the existing school-based youth services programming. I also supported additional funding for school-based youth services in the fiscal year 2023 and 2024 budget and will continue to support further increases in funding.

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 will leave it to experts and my legislative colleagues to create the proposals and support their efforts. Below are some bills that I support that work to address staffing shortage:

A5420/S3886-Establishes New Jersey Student Educator Stipend Program

A5422/S3798-Permits teacher, and professional staff member who provides special services, who retired from TPAF to return to employment for up to two years without reenrollment in TPAF if employment commences during the 2023-2024 school year.

A5419/S3884-Removes obstacles to teacher certification for certain teachers

A5418/S3891-Establishes Teacher Certification Reimbursement Fund in DOE to reimburse certain teachers for costs associated with certification

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?

My door is open, and I look forward to meeting with your members to discuss legislation to ameliorate the effects of social media use and abuse on young people and their behavior in schools.

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?

Each child should take a standardized test, but it should not be a requirement for graduating. A one-time standardized test does not fully measure a student's skills and aptitude. Test scores are vulnerable to many challenges that weaken their objectiveness, such as limited English skills or having an individualized education plan. Also, test scores are not immediately available, so any feedback attributed to the scores will not come in time to help a teacher be more effective in the classroom.

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 fully funding the school funding formula, which we have made great progress toward. I also support additional state funding for special education. One issue that should be addressed is an enhanced geographic cost adjustment in Bergen County, recognizing that prices are different depending on where you are in the state. I am open to listening to experts and my constituents about their ideas on how to solve these problems.

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:

I would support a targeted change to the 2% levy cap law for specific costs that are rising very quickly in our current inflationary environment.

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?

District 37 school districts were underfunded for years and had to overly rely on property taxes instead of their rightful amount of state aid. S2 brought tens of millions of dollars to the school districts I represent, I strongly support continuing with the re-balancing contained in that law.

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?

Yes, and I will continue to support our school librarians as they face unwarranted attacks and criticisms for doing their job.

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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