

# 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: \*

Tennille McCoy

Office Sought: \*

☒ NJ General Assembly

☐ NJ State Senate

☐ Other: .....

Party: \*

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

Legislative District #: \*

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Campaign Email Address: \*

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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?**

If elected to the State Legislature, my primary goal is to ensure the safety and security of our schools. I will advocate for increased funding to upgrade and maintain school buildings to meet health and safety standards including addressing lead contamination, asbestos removal, mold / water damage, and other hazards. I will support initiatives to improve accessibility for students with disabilities to ensure equitable access by improving ramps, secure funding for elevators through surplus streams at no cost to taxpayers.

As gun violence threatens schools across America, I will support bills that ensure our schools have security staff and equipment in our schools that can safeguard our students from a school shooting, but will try to fight for preventative measures such as mental health staff/ counselors/ mediation coordinators. I want to make sure schools are a safe environment for all.

## 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?**

There is a growing concern with mental health across the country. A recent CDC study found that the number of young adults with depression more than doubled from 2011 to 2021. Mental health support is proven to prevent violence and improve the overall health and performance of students. I will work to advocate and support bills that implement and fund mental health programs in schools as well as push for expansion of SBYS 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/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?**

Great teachers are vital to the education system. There are plenty of professionals who could make excellent teachers who do not know where to begin. If elected to the legislature, I will introduce a bill, "Professionals to Educators Act" which will create a pathway to connect the talent pool with Teacher Preparation Courses through accredited universities to fill the gaps. This will also provide paraprofessionals, support staff, and instructional aides with the ability to secure credits for their instructional time, and pursue their degree to become a full-time teacher. Funding should be secured to incentivize top talent to hold these positions. A sign-on bonus should be offered to attract top professionals who may already have the background to be a subject matter educator. An example of this is a scientist who has worked as a chemist for a large corporation. They already know elements, chemical compounds, how they synthesize and the importance of working with formulas to understand chemical reactions. This professional could transition into an educator by taking teacher preparation courses and fill a vital role with their experience. Another way to attract talent should be through a marketing campaign that highlights all the benefits of being a teacher. Many jobs today do not have a pension and this along with great benefits add value. For candidates that want to make education their profession, I will support programs that provide financial support to acquire advanced degrees to put them on track to become an administrator or fill other post-secondary degree roles in the education system. I believe this will address the current shortage and bring in some very talented professionals.

## 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?**

If elected, I will work with NJPSA to develop legislation that protects online safety, privacy, and the welfare of our students. We should work with the social media companies to develop a task force that has a representative from each company, law enforcement, a psychologist, and cyber security experts to discuss and develop safer products for students and to create a process that requires social media companies to cooperate with school and law enforcement in cases where students are harmed by social media use. I would work with a Judge to explore ways to soundly create a law that does not infringe on our rights, but allows for cooperation from social media companies in these circumstances.

## 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 student's knowledge is much more complex than what a test can measure. I value education and everything it can provide a student; however, many standardized tests have only hindered the potential of students who are passionate and very much capable of learning and growing through other subjects that are not being tested. There are other types of intelligence and disciplines that are missed when measuring the standardized test against the student's intellect and academic life. I believe it is important to streamline current requirements. I believe in selecting what is necessary for elementary, middle, high school, and college. For high school students, it would be advantageous to have a guidance counselor assess what talents or career opportunities students would like to explore and have them take the specific subject test that corresponds with their career goals. This could make the case for students who are talented in other subjects than those normally tested and to demonstrate their potential for a particular major at their chosen college or trade school.

## 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 would support/ introduce bills to increase funding to our New Jersey Schools where it is needed. This funding was allocated to cope with the pandemic and it was reviewed to allocate less funding with S-3732/ A-5328 since there were less expenditures post pandemic. If it appears that this funding needs to be increased due to challenges associated with its origin, then I will advocate to increase the funding where it is needed.

## 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 2018 there was a hefty cut to S-2 districts. I support increasing funding to S-2 schools responsibly to ensure they operate without having to make any drastic cuts and have the staff they need to properly educate students.

## 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 am committed to protecting student's rights to read and learn according to New Jersey's Student Learning Standards by opposing any legislation infringing on student rights. If elected I will create a bill to prevent the censorship / banning / burning of books and anything that suppresses history. This will protect the rights of students, school libraries, and the curriculum. This attempt to silence historical events and atrocities that have occurred in the past would set a dangerous precedent. The critical study of history, society including sensitive and controversial topics are important to help students develop a well-rounded perspective. I will assist educators in communicating this message by holding town halls discussing various topics.

## 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?

Thank you so much for inviting me to complete this questionnaire. I am passionate about education and care about students, teachers, staff, and the administrators who work hard to educate and inspire. Feel free to read more about my candidacy on my website: <https://www.tennillemccoyforassembly.com/>



**NJPSA**  
NEW JERSEY PRINCIPALS  
AND SUPERVISORS ASSOCIATION

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