

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: *

Luanne Peterpaul

Office Sought: *

☒ NJ General Assembly

☐ NJ State Senate

☐ Other:

Party: *

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

Legislative District #: *

11 ▼

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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?

As a product of the New Jersey public school system, I personally know how impactful an educator can be in a student's life when provided the right tools and support. Unfortunately, the requirements of teachers and administrators today have increased tenfold since I was a student. We rely on teachers to break up fights in halls, and recently, be ready to act as a human shield as the gun violence epidemic worsens. In the Assembly, I will prioritize getting educators and administrators the proper funding to make sure they are set up for success and have enough staff so they are not overburdened by crowded classrooms. Our community tasks them with teaching our children in an ever-changing environment, so this funding is important to ensuring success. It is vital to make sure both our educators and students are provided critical resources to receive mental healthcare, as our students are navigating many mental health crises, and our educators are dealing with new dangers every day in their profession. I would also push for common sense gun control legislation that keeps guns out of our schools.

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?

As someone who helped write New Jersey's 'Anti-bullying Bill of Rights,' which was passed with Republican support and signed into law by a Republican governor, I know how important it is to support our kids, especially those in need. In 2010, in the midst of a teen mental health crisis I worked with individuals and organizations to draft the Anti-bullying Bill of Rights. In the aftermath of the unfortunate and devastating suicide of Tyler Clementi, parents, children, and teachers called on the state legislature to act. I helped lead that charge and I worked with legislators from both parties to pass the legislation. It earned near-unanimous bipartisan support because it addressed a real need of the community. Thirteen years later, those school- and mental health-related needs have changed and I will be at the forefront of addressing them for students and schools.

In the Assembly, I will support programs and create legislation similar to what my running mate Senator Gopal recently sponsored with S2416, which helps children of low-income families on Medicaid get the support they need by adding reimbursement requirements for companies for certain treatments. I am proud to be running with Senator Gopal, who has been at the forefront of securing a historic \$40 million dollars for mental healthcare funding in this year's state budget.

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?

We are in a teacher shortage crisis in this state, and that continues to grow every year. I support increasing wages for our educators and believe we should be exploring incentives for new and veteran teachers to retain talent in our education system like offering Educational Service Professionals (ESP's) credits and providing payment to student teachers. I am proud of the results my running mate Senator Gopal has achieved fighting to solve these problems with legislation like S3941, which was signed into law this summer and waives the certification and credentialing fees for education professionals for one year. This is a great start, although I acknowledge there is much more to be done. Furthermore, schools need to provide teaching environments in which teachers can thrive and want to stay. That cannot happen if legislation like cameras in classrooms becomes a reality. We need to find solutions to help those who want to join the profession, not dissuade them from staying with legislation that will hurt them.

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 support my running mate Senator Gopal's legislation that was recently passed (S715), which establishes a commission to study the effects on adolescents of social media usage in and out of school. This is a necessary first step in taking action to protect the welfare of students on social media. The commission will help provide initial findings and feedback for legislators to be able to come together and figure out how best to go about creating legislation to protect students' privacy when using social media. It is important to also collaborate with law enforcement and education stakeholders on this issue, so we can figure out the best, most sustainable course of action for protecting students.

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?

New Jersey has always landed at the top of education rankings, even with the trials and tribulations that Covid-19 presented. While I think standardized testing is appropriate for a specialized subject like an Advanced Placement course, I believe a standardized test with an abnormally high weight, like graduation requirements, is only to the detriment of students and 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 (S-2).

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

We need to find bi-partisan solutions so that smaller school districts or school districts where a large share of students enroll in private education, don't suffer. I applaud my running mate Senator Gopal's efforts to pass legislation that would help these smaller districts consolidate resources, in addition to securing \$102 million in additional funds to make up the loss from S2. However, I think flexibility is needed so that each district can handle funding problems at a local level, as each district has different priorities and problems. I would welcome conversations with local municipalities to find solutions that work for their districts and address the need to find a solution to S2, including reassessing the 'adequacy' budgets, as they do not take into account extra costs that local municipalities must take on.

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 believe New Jersey's funding formula needs to be thoroughly revised and discussions about cap flexibility should be included in that revision effort. However, if the Legislature declines to undertake a full review of the formula, I will support more cap flexibility for school districts for essential services such as student mental health and school safety.

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?

The school funding formula should be regularly reviewed in its entirety and I support my running mate Senator Gopal's decision as Chairman of the Education Committee to create a task force to examine the current formula and find a more permanent solution.

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, I will commit to protecting a student's right to read and learn, according to the NJSLS. We need to ensure that teachers, administrators, and elected officials are working together to ensure that the potential loud minority who might attempt to influence book options for all can't succeed. This includes passing legislation that protects school districts and making sure that any attempts to persuade entire school districts to ban any book in total are stopped by educating the community on NJSLS.

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?

I was integral in creating New Jersey's 'Anti-bullying Bill of Rights' to help our most vulnerable kids, and know all too well how the vocal minority can often overtake the majority's views if left unchecked. With my running mates, Senator Gopal and Margie Donlon, we will make sure that we are making decisions for New Jersey students and educators based on facts, not partisan politics, and will make sure we find solutions to help you be able to focus on what you do best – prepare the next generation of leaders.

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NJPSA
NEW JERSEY PRINCIPALS
AND SUPERVISORS ASSOCIATION

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