

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: *

Baramdai "Alicia" Sharma

Office Sought: *

☒ NJ General Assembly

☐ NJ State Senate

☐ Other:

Party: *



Democrat



Republican



Independant



Other:

Legislative District #: *

24



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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?

NJ has one of the strictest gun laws and I will ensure it stays that way and if possible look for other areas to improve gun safety regulations. I will also vote for a ban of assault weapons and high capacity magazines. Mental health is often times the reason for gun violence so I would propose more resources to fund mental healthcare for our students, to help identify and treat those who are struggling with mental health.

In addition, I believe that we all need to work together to create a culture of respect and tolerance in our schools since bullying and harassment can lead to gun violence. I will collaborate with school administration and other organization to help create a environment where all students feel safe and respected.

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?

First, I believe we need to destigmatized mental health so that everyone feels comfortable talking about this issue. We need to make it clear that mental illness is a real medical condition that affects people of all ages, races, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

As a legislator I will propose we invest in school based mental health services such as school psychologists, social workers, and counselors.

Yes, I will advocate for continued funding for existing School-Based Youth Services (SBYS) programs in next year's budget discussions, as well as expansion for these tried-and-true SBYS programs. We need a crisis prevention program to provide immediate support to students who are experiencing a crisis, a prevention program to teach coping skills and a treatment program to provide therapy and other services to students.

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?

Create a new state grant program to support teacher residency programs. Teacher residency programs are a proven way to prepare teachers for the classroom. They provide aspiring teachers with intensive training and mentoring from experienced teachers.

I would also propose a loan forgiveness program for anyone who wants to become a teacher in NJ with a caveat that they will have to work x-number of year for the state.

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 first of all have a meeting with NJPSA to discuss and brainstorm some ideas of how to achieve this. What are some strategies that was used in the past, what work and what didn't and then make a new plan based on facts and then get inputs from the various schools around the state and parents to see how they feel about the new policies /legislation.

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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?

I believe that standardized testing can play a valuable role in a student's academic life, but only if it is used appropriately. Standardized testing should not be the only measure of student success. There are many other factors that contribute to student learning, such as the quality of instruction, the resources available to students, and the students' home environment. I would encourage educators to review the current testing requirements to see if they still applies and make recommendation on alternative methods to measure a student learning.

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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 am committed to working with NJPSA and other education stakeholders to advocate for policies that support public education. This includes policies that protect public education funding. In addition, I will work with my colleagues in Trenton to ensure that public education is a priority in the state budget. I also believe the state's school funding formula needs to be reform. The current formula is unfair to many school districts, and it does not take into account the rising costs of education. I think the federal government can play a role in helping to support public education by providing more funding to the state. When it comes to healthcare cost, this is a major burden on school budgets. Therefore, I will support efforts to reduce health care costs for schools by negotiating better rates with the insurance companies and expand access to preventive care.

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 vote to modify if there is a dire need and funding from the state or federal is not available.

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?

To address the funding needs a comprehensive appraisal of financial strategies and resources would be required for all S-2 districts. This can be done through engaging in open dialogues with stakeholders and conducting thorough research on current funding models to provide valuable insights in developing innovative solutions tailored to the evolving needs of the districts .

This could also include analyzing the potential impact of new technologies or educational approaches on budget allocation and identifying opportunities for collaboration with other districts or organizations. By continuously evaluating and adapting financial strategies, districts can ensure they are maximizing resources and providing the best possible education for their students.

When it comes to the State, I believe that the state has a responsibility to provide additional funding for S-2 districts to help them offset the cuts they have faced. I will work to increase state funding for S-2 districts so that they can continue to provide a high-quality education to their 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?

Yes, I will protect a student right to read and learn according to NJSLS and I will oppose any legislation that would infringe upon this right. As a state leader, I would collaborate with educators and education organizations such as NJPSA to develop awareness campaigns that educate parents and community stakeholders about the significance of these rights and the positive impact they have on students' education.

NJPSA has a strong network of educators and parents, and they can help to get the message out to a wide audience.

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 am honored to be running for state office and I am committed to working with educators to ensure that all students have access to a high-quality education. I believe in the power of open and transparent communication, and I would prioritize creating opportunities for dialogue and collaboration between all parties involved in the education system. Together, we can ensure that every student receives the support they need to succeed.

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NJPSA

NEW JERSEY PRINCIPALS
AND SUPERVISORS ASSOCIATION

This form was created inside of NJPSA/FEA.

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