

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: *

Shirley K. Turner

Office Sought: *

☐ NJ General Assembly

☒ NJ State Senate

☐ Other:

Party: *



Democrat



Republican



Independant



Other:

Legislative District #: *

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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?

It is unfathomable that we must now be concerned about gun violence and mass shootings in our schools. The problem of school violence is multi-faceted; however, greater awareness and support of mental health needs must be provided. I sponsored the bill that established a task force to examine public school programs and services designed to address student mental health so that the legislature can begin to make informed decisions about student mental health and school safety and security. I am hopeful that more information will be available to us soon so that we can prioritize addressing those needs. I also support designing and upgrading schools to incorporate safety features that will better protect students and staff in the event of a threat from violence. I also want to ensure that our schools provide a healthy environment for students and staff. However, I have a strong record on gun violence prevention and have voted to help make New Jersey's gun laws among the strictest in the nation.

Throughout my legislative career, I have worked with the county prosecutor to encourage gun buy back programs and fought to increase law enforcement presence by the NJ State Police, DEA, and ATF to help fight against gun violence in my district. I am a member of the Mercer County Advisory Committee for the Reduction of Gun Violence, which prioritizes interventions and suggest strategies for at-risk violent offenders. Supervision, employment, mental health counseling, education, addiction services through government partnerships are being utilized. I supported the following bills, which were signed into law during the 2022-2023 legislative session:

- A1765/S1893, allows the Attorney General to bring cause of action for certain public nuisance

violations arising from the sale or marketing of firearms;

- A1302/S2903, regulates sale of handgun ammunition and develops system of electronic reporting of handgun ammunition sales;
- A1179/S1204, requires firearm owners who become New Jersey residents to obtain firearm purchaser identification card and register handguns acquired out-of-state.
- A4367/S2846, upgrades certain crimes related to manufacturing firearms from a third degree to a second degree;
- A4366/S2905, revises definition of destructive device to include certain .50 caliber rifles;
- A4370/S2906, requires training for issuance of firearms purchaser identification card and permit to purchase handgun under certain circumstances; provides that firearms purchaser identification card include photograph and thumb print and remain valid for ten years.
- A4368/S2907, requires firearm retailers to sell microstamping-enabled firearms upon determination of availability by AG;
- S3214, makes various revisions to requirements for obtaining a firearm purchaser identification card, permit to purchase a handgun, and permit to carry a handgun; codifies sensitive places in which firearms and destructive devices are prohibited;
- I copprime sponsored S513, which establishes rebuttal presumption of pretrial detention for defendants who commit certain firearm offenses under the Graves Act.

I am also the sponsor of the following bills, which I intend to continue pursuing in the next legislative session:

S1432, establishes rebuttal presumption that person charged with certain firearm offenses be detained prior to trial

S1434, establishes "gun-free" and "weapon free" zones around certain school and public properties

S1435, establishes a Gun Court Pilot Program in Mercer County

S3001, requires pretrial services to recommend pretrial detention of defendants charged with certain firearms offenses

S3003, upgrades certain crimes related to manufacturing firearms (ghost guns) from second to first degree

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?

The youth mental health crisis is at a tipping point and our students and staff need support to ensure that our schools are providing healthy and safe environments that promote success. I am extremely concerned about the state of education and the future of our students and believe that funding for student mental health and existing SBYS programs must be prioritized. I have actively supported SBYS and will continue to expand 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?

Teachers do not get paid enough and while I support increasing teacher salaries, those decisions are made on the local level. I am open to reforms, including ensuring that our schools receive more funding, that will help to provide higher compensation that will make teaching competitive with other careers. I am proud to have sponsored the bill to eliminate the edTPA as a requirement for teacher certification in New Jersey, which I hope will increase our state's pool of teachers. I believe that changes to high stakes testing requirements would help to retain more teachers in the profession. I recently introduced S3912, to establish the Teaching Scholars Loan Redemption Program in the Higher Education Student Assistance Authority as an incentive to attract more educators to the profession. I am also a sponsor of S3887, which revises the New Jersey College Loans to Assist State Students (NJCLASS) Teacher Loan Redemption Program, which will expand eligibility to the program. The purpose of the program is to address the current and projected critical shortage of educators in the State by providing an incentive for the State's top high school graduates to pursue a career in teaching. The program will provide loan redemption to finance the undergraduate or graduate study of program participants in exchange for full-time employment as an educator at a public school in the State. I sponsored S3798 to permit TPAF retired teachers and professional staff member who provides special services to return to employment for up to two years without reenrollment. I am a sponsor of the bill S904, to temporarily eliminate the requirement for State residency of public school employees

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 believe that this is an issue that must be tackled, and I am open to recommendation on next steps that we can take to better protect our children from the harm posed by social media. I voted to support S715, which establishes a commission to study the effects on adolescents of social media usage in and out of school, and I look forward to the outcomes of the study and recommendations for pursuing legislation.

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 tests should be used in terms of measurement, to evaluate growth and development and to inform instruction in the classroom. It should not be used as a graduation requirement, or presented in a way that causes extra stress and anxiety for students. As it stands, standardized testing is not on a level playing field for all students. Students that come from underprivileged households may not have the same access to technology as their suburban counterparts in their homes or at schools – this was evident during the pandemic. Some schools do not have the infrastructure in place to accommodate the number of computers needed for every student to have access. Students that do not have technological skills are likely to perform poorly and experience stress trying to adapt to a computerized test.

Teachers have no control of the outside influence in a child's learning. Other factors outside of the teacher's control can also affect scores, such as the child's home environment and parental influence, changes in school leadership and class assignments, high rates of absenteeism, learning loss due to the pandemic, as well as other factors. Student test scores should not account for such a high percentage in teacher evaluations. I have been in the forefront of efforts to eliminate unnecessary testing. My bills include: S3308, which eliminates the high school graduation proficiency test; S2164, eliminates use of standardized assessments as measure of student growth or progress in evaluations of teachers, principals, assistant principals, and vice-principals.

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:

YES, I am the prime sponsor of the bill. The exit test will cause more students to dropout of school, which contributes to the school to prison pipeline.

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 consider moving additional school district costs outside of the 2 percent cap. I voted against the legislation that enabled the 2 percent cap because I felt it was too restrictive. School districts deserve to have some discretion as to what costs will be considered outside of the 2 percent cap.

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 the 2018-2019 legislative session, I voted to support S4289, which the Governor absolute vetoed, to allow for districts impacted by S2 funding cuts to raise property taxes above the 2 percent cap without voter approval. I believe that this legislation needs to be revived and reconsidered.

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 support the First Amendment's right to freedom of speech, which includes an individual's right to receive information on a wide range of topics from varying viewpoints. Recognizing the wide breadth of diversity in our state and country is important for teaching ourselves and others about tolerance, empathy, and acceptance. I do not support censorship of library materials and will support efforts to continue making books and other learning materials available in our schools and community libraries

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:

YES. In 2007, I was the first legislator to sponsor legislation to require a constitutional amendment to require payments by the State to the public retirement systems and to establish the Constitutional right of public employees to a pension benefit. My bill, SCR97, provides for enforcement of funding obligations and benefits right. I voted against the 2011 pension and benefit reforms in part because it required partial payments to the pension funds for several years until reaching 100 percent funding in year seven. However, even after enacting the partial payment requirement, Governor Christie and the legislature reneged on the commitment and let down our public workers and retirees again. More recently, I proposes S2588 to appropriate a supplemental \$1 billion to the public retirement systems which would have been in addition to the full pension payment. The goal I had in mind was to take advantage of the buying opportunity that existed in the stock market in 2022 in order to decrease the state's unfunded accrued liability more quickly. Since the state had such a budget surplus, it would have been timely to make extra payments to make up for nearly three decades of reduced or missed payments.

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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