**DKGNJ Legislative Update**

**February 12, 2024**

The following information was received from the Government Relations department of NJEA.

The 221st State Legislature was sworn in at the beginning of January and has only met five time since then. However, many committees are having hearings, rather than moving bills out of their respective committees.

The Assembly and Senate Education Committees held a join hearing which lasted over three hours on virtual instruction (**A-5874/S-4233)**. NJEA members, Jennie Paulino from Robbinsville and Theresa Fuller from North Plainfield along with NJEA Government Relations Director, Deborah Cornavaca testified about virtual instruction in their districts. Also testifying were representatives of principals, school boards, superintendents, and the private companies providing virtual instruction. Administrators reported they need virtual instruction due to staffing shortages. Legislators agreed that there is a need for more data on what is happening in our schools. This hyper link provides more information: <https://newjerseymonitor.com/2024/02/05/new-jersey-lawmakers-eye-rules-for-remote-instruction/> The bill is currently scheduled for a hearing on February 15th.

There will also be a hearing on the 15th for bill S-2421 – the Right to Read Bill. What started as a bill to ban book bans, has now become a bill that protects both school and public librarians in the event of challenges to books and other materials. Read here for more info: <https://www.njspotlightnews.org/2024/01/sen-andrew-zwicker-book-bans-librarian-harassment-north-hunterdon-high-school-martha-hickson/>

# The new State Commissioner of Education, Kevin Dehmer, was sworn in on Wednesday, February 6th. Commissioner Dehmer worked for the Department for over 15 years and most recently served as Executive Director of the John J. Heldrich Center for Workforce Development at Rutgers University.

# At the State BOE meeting, two new members were also sworn in – Mary Bennett and Jeanette Pena. Both women are educators.

# Also at the February 6th meeting, the Board heard a presentation from the DOE about its efforts to end the school staffing crisis. The Board asked the DOE for hard data. For more information on the presentation click on this hyper link:

# <https://www.njspotlightnews.org/2024/02/nj-education-dept-working-attract-more-teachers-state-board-members-want-data/>

The Governor’s State budget address is scheduled for February 27th. He has begun to spell out his plans which include a full pension payment and additional state aid for schools. One of his initiatives is to increase literacy. For more information, click on this hyper link: <https://www.njspotlightnews.org/2024/01/gov-phil-murphy-state-of-state-address-will-announce-phonics-based-reading-initiative-raise-literacy-levels/>

**Legislative results from January 25th:**

* **S787** - Provides supplemental transportation aid to certain districts participating in interdistrict public school choice program. (Reported out of committee, Referred to Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee.)
* **S1410** - Eliminates use of census‑based funding of special education aid in school funding law. (Reported out of committee, Referred to Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee.)
* **S1812** - Establishes requirements concerning methods for determining whether student has specific learning disability under federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. (Reported out of committee with committee amendments, Referred to Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee.)
* **S2008** - Establishes Grow Your Own Teacher Loan Redemption Program in Higher Education Student Assistance Authority. (Reported out of committee, Referred to Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee.)
* **S2082** - Establishes New Jersey Educator Evaluation Review Task Force; clarifies collection of student growth data. (Reported out of committee with committee substitute, 2nd reading in Senate.)

**Results from February 1, 5 & 8:**

* **A2784** Authorizes school districts that moves its annual school election to November to submit separate proposals for additional spending for budget year and subsequent budget year. (Reported out of committee with committee amendments, 2nd reading in Assembly.)
* **A3451** Revises law concerning family leave to extend protection by reducing, over time, employee threshold from 30 employees to five employees in definition of employer. (Reported out of committee, referred to Assembly Appropriations Committee.) Seeking Amendments
* **ACR105** Reconstitutes the "Joint Committee on Economic Justice and Equal Employment Opportunity." (Reported out of committee with committee amendments, 2nd reading in Assembly.)
* **S198** Prohibits investment by State of pension and annuity funds in, and requires divestment from, 200 largest publicly traded fossil fuel companies. (For discussion only.)
* **S2038** Requires public institution of higher education to post certain information on institution's website. (Reported out of committee with committee amendments, 2nd reading in Senate.)
* **A3451** - Revises law concerning family leave to extend protection by reducing, over time, employee threshold from 30 employees to five employees in definition of employer. (Reported out of committee, 2nd reading in Assembly) Seeking amendments
* **S1425** - Expands culpability requirements for firearms trafficking offenses and violations of regulatory provisions relating to firearms. (Reported out of committee with committee amendments, 2nd reading in Senate) Support
* **S2367** - Extends validity of and eliminates issuance fee for temporary instructional certificate issued to military spouse; requires expedited processing of military spouse application for NJ instructional certificate and eliminates fee to obtain certificate. (Reported out of committee, Referred to Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee)

**Respectfully Submitted,**

**Donna R. O’Malley**