

## New Jersey School Boards Association – January 9, 2024

### Legislative Update: Governor Acts on Education-Related Measures; Several Others Land on His Desk as Legislative Session Closes

On Monday, Jan. 8, both the Senate and General Assembly convened for their final voting sessions of the 2022-2023 legislative session and sent over a dozen education-related measures to the governor. In addition, over the last week, the governor signed into law or conditionally vetoed several other items affecting school districts. A full rundown of recent legislative activity follows below.

#### **Bills Signed Into Law**

***Grief Instruction*** S-3330/A-5015 (P.L.2023, c.201) requires the State Board of Education to adopt, and districts to implement, New Jersey Student Learning Standards pertaining to grief in the Comprehensive Health and Physical Education content area at its next required update of the standards. The standards will be included in grades 8 to 12 and would address the physical, emotional, and behavioral symptoms of grief; coping mechanisms; and resources available to students. The New Jersey Department of Education is required to provide districts with age-appropriate resources to support implementation of the standards.

***VETeach Pilot Program*** S-2764/A-4361 (P.L.2023, c.215) establishes the “VETeach Pilot Program” in the New Jersey Department of Education designed to help address the educator shortage by helping facilitate teacher certification for the state’s veterans. Under the pilot program, up to four four-year public institutions of higher education selected by the commissioner of education would enroll in a 36-month teacher preparation program catering to veterans who served in the armed forces on or after Sept. 11, 2001. The program would lead to a baccalaureate degree and completion of the requirements necessary to apply to the NJDOE for a certificate of eligibility with advanced standing in certain endorsement areas. The bill is modeled on legislation that established a similar program at Stockton University in 2012 (P.L.2012, c.2).

***Providing School Meal Info to Parents*** S-530/A-5164 (P.L.2023, c.530) revises the type of information that must be sent to parents or guardians at the beginning of the school year regarding the district’s school meal programs.

Under legislation signed in September 2022 (the “[Working Class Families Anti-Hunger Act](#)” P.L.2022, c.104), school districts are required to provide, in paper or electronic format, parents with a school meals application form. P.L.2023, c.530 amends that requirement to

specify that the application must be provided as a hard copy. The new law also adds that districts must include a notice that an application to apply for school meal programs may be submitted at any time during the school year and is required to be submitted annually.

In addition to modifying the school meal information that must be provided to parents, the law establishes a new requirement that school districts ensure parents either apply for school meal programs or submit a signed card provided by the district indicating that they have received the application and are not interested in participating. If a district does not receive an application or signed card, the district will be required to make at least one attempt to contact the student's parent and request that the application or card be submitted. This legislation goes into effect in the 2024-2025 school year.

***Emergency Bonding Authority*** S-1892/A-4501 (P.L.2023, c.211) authorizes Type II school districts without boards of school estimate, excluding those districts that are classified as New Jersey Schools Development Authority districts, to issue bonds to finance costs relating to repairs to school facilities and other furnishings and equipment that were damaged due to a natural disaster. Under the new law, the bonds may be issued without the approval of the voters of the district of a Type II school district without a board of school estimate. The bill requires that a district may only issue bonds if the repairs are deemed to be necessary to provide a thorough and efficient system of education.

***Security Drills and Students with Disabilities*** A-1174/S-2057 (P.L.2023, c.212) requires certain documentation of the needs of students with disabilities during school security drills and emergency situations, as well as in school security plans. The bill also requires staff training on the needs of students with disabilities in emergency planning. More specifically, the bill will require:

- All students and staff to fully participate in each emergency drill conducted to the greatest extent practicable and, when appropriate, utilize procedures for assisting in the rescue of persons unable to use the general means of egress to ensure that participation does not pose a safety risk.
- That school safety and security training provided to school employees under current law address the unique needs of students with disabilities in the event of a fire drill, security drill, or actual emergency. Schools will be required to make employees aware of the anticipated supports – such as those for mobility, medical and communication needs – that will be required for these students, and any services that must be provided under students' individualized education plans, individualized health care plans and 504 plans.
- That the building security drill guide and training materials developed by the commissioner of education and New Jersey Office of Homeland Security include

information on the unique needs of students with disabilities, including protocol for accommodating those students.

- School districts and nonpublic schools to ensure that a student’s unique mobility, sensory, medical, social, communication, emotional, regulatory, and decision-making needs in the event of a fire drill, school security drill, or actual emergency is maintained in the student record. Such a record shall indicate whether or not the student is able to safely and fully participate in drills without additional supports, or if any accommodations are needed.

This bill goes into effect in the 2024-2025 school year. In 2019, the NJSBA participated in a Summit on School Safety convened by the New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities, which informed the council’s report, “[School Safety Issues Affecting Students with Disabilities: A Call to Action](#).” That report recommended that schools include all students with disabilities in all school safety drills, and to include the needs of those students in school safety planning.

***School Safety and Security Task Force S-3079/A-4977 (P.L.2023, c.2018)*** establishes a School Safety and Security Task Force “to study and develop recommendations to improve school safety and security, and to ensure a safe learning environment for students and employees.” The task force will consist of 17 members, including representatives of various government agencies, education advocacy groups (including NJSBA), and members of the public with expertise in school security. The task force will be charged with developing recommendations regarding several school security issues, including but not limited to hardening the school perimeter and building entryways; strategies to ensure the needs of students with disabilities are reflected in all areas of emergency planning and response measures; and standards for architectural design for new construction.

***Transferring of County College Credits to Meet EPP Requirements A-5417/S-3890 (P.L.2023, c.251)*** prohibits educator preparation programs from restricting the number of accredited county college professional education credits that may be used to meet the teacher certification requirements of an educator preparation program, except as may be required by the EPP’s accrediting organization. The law also prohibits the NJDOE from restricting the number of accredited county college credits in professional education that can be accepted toward meeting teacher certification requirements, provided that the credits are accepted by an EPP (in April 2023, the State Board of Education adopted amendments to its certification regulations that removed the six-credit limit on courses in professional education completed on the two-year college level). The bill was part of the [legislative package](#) spearheaded by Assembly Education Committee Chairwoman Pamela Lampitt to address the ongoing teacher shortage..

**QPA Award of Certain Contracts A-5501 (P.L.2023, c.252)** permits certain school district contracts to be awarded by a qualified purchasing agent. Specifically, the bill amends public school contracts law to stipulate that a contract having an anticipated value in excess of \$17,500, but below the applicable bidding threshold, is not required to be awarded by a board of education and may be awarded by a purchasing agent that holds a qualified purchasing agent certificate.

## **Bills Sent to Governor on the Final Day of Session**

The following bills received final legislative approval on Monday, Jan. 8. As they were passed less than 10 days before the end of the two-year legislative session, as per the state constitution, the governor has only two options: He can sign them into law as is or allow them to expire without acting. This latter action is known as a pocket veto. Since the legislative session has ended, he cannot return them to the Legislature via conditional or absolute veto. He has until Jan. 16 to act on the following education measures:

**FAFSA Graduation Requirement A-1181/S-2054** requires students to complete financial aid applications as part of high school graduation requirements. The bill provides that, beginning with the 2023-2024 grade 11 class and for two years thereafter, a board of education or a board of trustees of a charter school shall require a student to complete and submit a financial aid application in a form prescribed by the Higher Education Student Assistance Authority. This requirement would serve as a prerequisite to the student receiving a high school diploma. However, a student would be exempt from this requirement if the student (if at least 18 years of age) or the student's parent or guardian (if the student is less than 18) submits a waiver form to the school district or charter school. In addition, if the waiver form cannot be reasonably obtained from a parent, the student's school counselor may authorize the waiver.

The NJSBA testified in opposition to the bill and expressed concerns about imposing a nonacademic requirement to graduate from high school. The NJSBA urged the Legislature to consider a more incentive-based, resource-backed approach to increase financial aid application completion rates. A copy of the NJSBA's position statement on the bill can be found [here](#).

**Mentoring Male Teachers of Color A-3945/S-1660** would establish a three-year, \$95,000 "Male Teachers of Color Mentorship Pilot Program." Under the program, the New Jersey commissioner of education would select 19 male students of color from state higher education institutions to work with 19 male teachers of color from participating schools. In that way, each student would be paired with a current teacher who would serve as the student's mentor through the candidate's last year of his educator preparation program and the first two

years of the student's teaching career. The teacher would receive a stipend of \$5,000, funded by the state, for each year of participation in the program.

**State Review of APSSD Audits** A-4396 would prohibit the commissioner of education from issuing an adverse finding, adjustment, or penalty on the annual independent certified audit of an APSSD more than seven years following submission of the audit.

**Revisions to School Facilities Law and SDA Operations** A-4496 would make various changes to the laws governing school facilities projects and the operations of the New Jersey Schools Development Authority. Since it was last [passed](#) by the General Assembly on Dec. 21, the bill has been further amended in part to:

- Remove provisions of the bill requiring school districts to include capital improvement plans in their long-range facilities plans.
- Provide that the SDA may permit the project design of an SDA school district school facilities project to include features that are considered excess costs provided that the design features do not exceed the lesser of 15% of total estimated project costs or \$4 million.
- Provide that the governor will appoint certain public members to the SDA board, and may suspend or remove those members, with the recommendation of the Senate president and speaker of the General Assembly.
- Provide that the EDA will work in consultation with the Department of Education in considering the critical need of school facilities project applications submitted under the loan program established by the bill.

**Nonpublic School Transportation Consortiums** A-5412/S-3850 would establish a nonpublic school transportation program to provide funding to consortiums of nonpublic schools that will assume responsibility for mandated nonpublic school busing. Under the program, nonpublic schools in one or more counties would be authorized to form a consortium to assume responsibilities from participating school districts to provide transportation to and from the nonpublic schools or aid-in-lieu. If a school district chooses to participate in the voluntary program, the district would disburse to the consortium an amount equal to the aid-in-lieu of transportation amount for each nonpublic school student for whom the school district would otherwise be required to provide transportation or aid-in-lieu. If signed into law, the bill's provisions will expire three years from its effective date. Also, the commissioner of education, in consultation with the oversight committee established pursuant to the bill's provisions, would be required to submit a report to the governor and the Legislature on the implementation of the program.

***Term-Limited Expansion of Free School Meals*** A-5684 would require school districts and nonpublic schools participating in the National School Lunch Program to provide free lunch, during the 2024-2025 school year, to students who are federally eligible for free or reduced price school lunch, as well as to students who are federally ineligible for free or reduced price school meals, but who have an annual household income of not more than 224 percent of the federal poverty level. The bill would additionally amend existing law to clarify that both public and nonpublic schools offering school breakfasts to students in the state, pursuant to the federal School Breakfast Program, will be required to provide such breakfasts, free of charge, both to federally eligible students and to students who are federally ineligible for free or reduced price school meals, but who have an annual household income amounting to not less than 186%, and not more than 224%, of the FPL.

The bill would require the state to provide funding to each school district and nonpublic school that participates in the National School Lunch Program, as may be necessary to reimburse the costs associated with the provision of free lunches thereby, in school year 2024-2025, to students who are federally ineligible for such meals, but who satisfy the bill's expanded, state-level income eligibility requirements for that year. The bill would further require the Department of Agriculture, in consultation with the Department of Education, to establish a standardized means by which to review the state reimbursement amounts being allocated under the bill, and under the existing Working Class Families Anti-Hunger Act, in order to determine whether, and the extent to which, participating school districts and nonpublic schools are receiving adequate reimbursement, from the state, sufficient to account for each participating school's actual costs of meal delivery, including, but not limited to, food, labor, and other related costs.

The bill would require each report that is annually submitted, to the governor and Legislature, on the state's school lunch and breakfast programs to identify, as appropriate, for each participating school district and nonpublic school in the state: (1) the total number and percentage of students receiving subsidized school meals who have been determined to be, respectively, federally eligible for free school lunch or breakfast, federally eligible for reduced price school lunch or breakfast, income-eligible for free school lunch or breakfast on the basis of state-level income eligibility requirements, or neither categorically eligible nor income-eligible for free or reduced price lunch or breakfast; and (2) the number and percentage of such students who reside, respectively, in low-income families and in middle-income families, as defined under the bill.

The bill would require school districts and nonpublic schools that participate in the National School Lunch Program or the federal School Breakfast Program to take steps to minimize or offset program costs, to the extent that such costs can be minimized or offset without compromising the ability of the district or nonpublic school to comply with minimum nutritional

standards and other program requirements. To facilitate such legally compliant cost minimization activities, the bill would require the Department of Agriculture, in consultation with the Department of Education, to: (1) monitor, inspect, and oversee school meals programs operating in the state to ensure that school meals served thereunder continue to satisfy minimum nutritional standards; (2) develop and publicize best practices, protocols, and model plans to help participating school districts and nonpublic schools effectively minimize and offset program costs without compromising the nutritional value of meals being served; and (3) work cooperatively with each participating school district and nonpublic school to review the program costs being expended thereby, identify various means and methods by which those program costs can be reduced, curtailed, or eliminated without sacrificing nutritional value or legal compliance, provide relevant financial recommendations, and undertake or recommend other appropriate actions to prevent the state's school meals programs from becoming overly bloated with unnecessary expenses and from otherwise becoming financially burdensome.

Finally, the bill would require the Office of the Food Security Advocate to establish a Working Group on School Food Security to identify and develop best practices, policies, and plans, and to take other appropriate action, to promote and facilitate the effective functioning of the state's school meals programs and the expanded provision of free school meals to students in the state. Within one year after its formation, and on a regular basis thereafter as deemed by the food security advocate to be appropriate, the Working Group on School Food Security would be tasked with: (1) conducting a study on school food security issues, in accordance with the bill's provisions, and recommending further State-level action to facilitate the provision of free school meals to enhanced numbers or categories of students in the state; and (2) developing and publishing a plan to facilitate and promote the adoption, by the United States Congress and president, of federal legislation authorizing the nationwide provision of free school meals to all students in the country, and providing federal reimbursement for all such meals served by schools and school districts in the states.

**Youth Suicide Prevention** A-3526/S-1662 would require the New Jersey Youth Suicide Prevention Advisory Council to prepare a report regarding suicide prevention instruction in public schools. The report would include, but not be limited to:

- Identifying the suicide prevention instruction currently provided to teaching staff members and students.
- Reviewing the effectiveness and sufficiency of such instruction.
- Identifying methods public schools may use to identify students who may be at risk for suicide or self-injury.
- Identifying best practices in public schools for the prevention of youth suicide and self-injury.

- Identifying opportunities to enhance access to mental health treatment in public schools.
- Findings and recommendations, including legislative and regulatory proposals.

In preparing the report, the council will develop a survey to collect data from local school districts, approved private schools for students with disabilities, and charter and renaissance school projects. The council would be required to submit the report to the governor and Legislature within 12 months following enactment of this legislation.

***Innovation Dual Enrollment II Pilot Program*** A-3319 would establish in the Department of Education a three-year Innovation Dual Enrollment II Pilot Program. The purpose of the program would be to offer participating students in grades nine through 12 a guided start to postsecondary coursework, through the provision of targeted supports and low-cost courses in which students may simultaneously earn high school and college credits.

Under the bill, the commissioner of education would be required to select districts representing each of the southern, central, and northern regions of the state to participate in the program. The commissioner is required to select districts impacted substantially by the COVID-19 public health crisis which have a high proportion of economically disadvantaged students. The commissioner is to provide a grant to each of the pilot districts to finance costs associated with offering the pilot program, including the cost of tuition charged to the district under the bill.

The bill requires a school district that wants to participate in the pilot program to submit an application to the commissioner. The application may include (1) a partnership agreement with an institution of higher education which includes a commitment from the institution of higher education to apply any enrolled student's credits; (2) a commitment from the school district to apply any credits earned by the students in the Innovation Dual Enrollment II Pilot Program toward the student's secondary school graduation requirements; (3) a commitment from the school district to provide student support and counseling services necessary to ensure the academic success of participating students; (4) a commitment from the school district to provide free transportation to any courses on the college campus, as needed; and (5) a commitment from the school district to provide program and student data, disaggregated by demographic subgroups, to the department including, but not limited to, data on program enrollment, student completion, college credit attainment, student grades, and post-program college entrance rates.

Under the bill, a school district selected to participate in the pilot program is to require participating students to: (1) enroll in no less than one academic credit at the postsecondary level, and no more than 15 academic credits at the postsecondary level, in each semester;



and (2) maintain a 2.0 grade point average for the student's secondary and postsecondary coursework in order to continue participation in the program.

The bill requires an institution of higher education that enters into a partnership agreement with a participating school to provide a program of six or more academic credits in each semester. The program is to offer students an opportunity to earn academic credits directly applicable to a credential or degree awarded by the institution of higher education. The institution is required to waive student fees and charge the partnering district no more than \$100 per academic credit for each participating student. The institution is to provide reports each semester to the district, at a minimum, on the academic progress of the district's students enrolled in the program.

Also under the bill, a public institution of higher education is required to accept and apply towards an applicable degree program all credits earned by a student during the pilot program established pursuant to this section, in accordance with the institution's credit transfer policies. An independent institution of higher education may accept the credits earned by a student during the pilot program established pursuant to this section.

The bill also requires the commissioner to submit a report to the governor and the Legislature. The report is to contain information on the implementation of the pilot program and is to include, but not be limited to, the commissioner's recommendation on the feasibility of implementing the program on a statewide basis.

The bill requires the department to, in collaboration with the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education, determine allowable uses for funds prior to accepting applications to participate in the program, and is required to describe the allowable uses in a Notice of Grant Opportunity. The department is to, in collaboration with the office, prioritize pilot program investments in school districts that partner with New Jersey institutions of higher education.

***Student Civic Engagement*** S-2304/A-1271 permits, beginning with the 2023-2024 school year, excused absences for students who attend civic events. This bill would permit public school pupils in grades six through 12 one excused absence to attend a civic event each school year. School districts would also be permitted to provide additional excused absences for such purposes. Excused absences taken under this bill would not be reflected on student attendance records. Parents or guardians of pupils who wish to use an excused absence under this bill would be required to provide signed written notice at least five school days in advance of the intended excused absence and such other documentation as the school district deems necessary to prove that the pupil meets the requirements for an excused absence. The bill would require the commissioner of education to provide guidance to

districts regarding excused absences for civic events, and the State Board of Education would adopt implementing regulations.

***Eliminating April Budget Vote*** S-4209 would eliminate the required public vote on school budgets below the tax levy growth cap for Type II April districts. The bill would also create start and end dates for board member terms of 1/1-12/31 for November districts and 5/1-4/30 for April districts, rather than terms starting and ending at an organization meeting. The NJSBA successfully advocated for amendments to address concerns that defining specific start and end dates for board member terms could create a gap between term end dates and organization meetings during which a board would not have a full complement of members. These amendments ensure that in a Type II school district, the school board may not conduct a meeting, other than for the organization meeting, between January 1 and the organization date in districts with a November school election and May 1 and the organization date for districts with an April school election. An exception is provided if a meeting is needed in order to deal with a matter of urgency and importance as set forth in the Open Public Meetings Act, and if all newly elected members present are sworn into office prior to conducting business.

***Montessori Teacher Certification Pathway*** S-3172 would establish a pathway to teacher certification for holders of a Montessori teaching credential. Specifically, a person would be eligible for a certificate of eligibility with a preK through grade three endorsement, or an elementary school (K-6) endorsement, under this route if they:

- Hold a Montessori teaching credential issued by the American Montessori Society, the Association Montessori Internationale, or an institution accredited by the Montessori Accreditation Council for Teacher Education.
- Hold a bachelor's degree in any field from an accredited institution of higher education.
- Meet the applicable test requirements for a certificate of eligibility.

Furthermore, in order to obtain a provisional or standard certificate, the candidate would not have to complete:

- 50 hours of pre-professional experience or credits of preschool through grade three pedagogy.
- 350 hours of credits or coursework after employment if the candidate is seeking an elementary school (kindergarten through grade six) endorsement.
- 24 credits after employment if the candidate is seeking a preschool through grade three endorsement.

Candidates eligible for a certificate of eligibility under this pathway would not be required to complete a state-approved educator preparation program. However, they would have to

complete a Montessori teacher preparation program that requires a minimum of 200 academic hours and 400 practicum hours. For five years, or as long as the NJDOE deems necessary, boards of education would be required to report annually to the NJDOE the number of teachers hired by the board who possess a Montessori teaching credential and a certificate of eligibility established by the bill, and NJDOE will be required to conduct a study on this certification pathway.

During committee deliberations on the bill, the NJSBA testified, expressing appreciation for the committee's continued focus on addressing the educator shortage but noted that the range in teacher preparation standards across different accrediting bodies may cause concern regarding the readiness of these educators to teach in public, non-Montessori school settings.

***Youth Disconnection Prevention A-398/S-3080*** would establish the position of Youth Disconnection Prevention and Recovery Ombudsperson in the NJDOE and establish the "School Disconnection Prevention Task Force." The ombudsperson would be appointed by the governor, serve at the pleasure of the governor, and report directly to the commissioner of education. The duties of the ombudsperson would include:

- Collaborating with school districts to develop and implement a statewide strategic plan of action.
- Collaborating with a variety of governmental agencies to address the challenges facing student dropouts.
- Developing best practices consistent with the recommendations of the School Disconnection Prevention Task Force.
- Advising the commissioner on ways to prevent students from disconnecting from school and strategies for reengaging students who have disconnected from school.

The bill would also establish the "School Disconnection Prevention Task Force." The task force would consist of 25 members including: the Youth Disconnection Prevention and Recovery Ombudsperson, who will serve as the chair of the task force; the commissioners of the Departments of Education, Corrections, Labor and Workforce Development, Human Services, and Children and Families; the secretary of higher education; the executive director of the Juvenile Justice Commission; and 17 members appointed by the governor. The duties of the task force would include:

- Examining current data on disconnected youth.
- Researching programs and initiatives addressing school disconnection.
- Examining possible contributing factors for students leaving school.
- Identifying effective ways to reduce the number of disconnected youth.

- Advising the Youth Disconnection Prevention and Recovery Ombudsperson on the task force’s findings.

The NJSBA supports the bill.

## Conditional Vetoes

The following bills passed both houses and were sent to the governor in December but were returned to the Legislature via conditional veto with recommended changes. On Monday, the Senate and Assembly adopted the governor’s recommendations and returned them to his desk for his final signature.

***School Audit Delay*** As reported in NJSBA’s Dec. 12, 2023 *School Board Notes* article [“Legislative Update: Lame Duck Session Continues,”](#) the Legislature first sent A-4011 to the governor’s desk on Dec. 11, 2023. At that time, the bill would have extended the deadlines for completing and filing a school district’s annual audit by two months. On Jan. 8, the governor conditionally-vetoed that bill, the legislature agreed with the governor’s recommendations, and sent the amended bill back to the governor’s desk. As amended to conform with the governor’s conditional veto, the bill would now pilot a temporary, two-year extension of the audit completion/filing deadlines by approximately six weeks. Under the amended bill, the deadlines for completing and filing the 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 audits will be pushed back to Jan 10 and Jan. 15 respectively.

***Expedited Certification Route for Paraprofessionals*** As reported in NJSBA’s Jan. 4 *School Board Notes* article [“Legislative Update: Electric School Bus Program Funding and Food Composting Bills Signed; Legislature Sends Several Other Bills to Governor”](#) the Legislature first sent A-5416/S-3883 to the governor’s desk on Dec. 21, 2023. At that time, the bill would have required the New Jersey State Board of Education to authorize an alternate, expedited route to teacher certification for paraprofessionals and instructional assistants. The expedited route would have been required to include a formula for applying direct classroom service to any student teaching requirements, a formula for a GPA waiver, and “a requirement that the school district in which the candidate is currently employed make every reasonable effort to permit the candidate to perform any required student teaching in the school district while, if possible, continuing employment as a paraprofessional or an instructional assistant.”

On Jan. 8, the governor conditionally vetoed the bill, the legislature agreed with the governor’s recommendations, amended the bill accordingly, and sent it back to the governor. In response to concerns expressed by the governor that, contrary to the goal of the bill, “an alternate route as contemplated under this bill may cause significant confusion to prospective candidates in the application process” in part because the NJDOE already expedites certain

steps of the certification process for paraprofessionals, and that therefore “[i]nstead, efforts should focus on addressing obstacles facing education support professionals when seeking teaching certification, including by providing supports towards degree attainment,” the amended bill would establish a “paraprofessional educator pathway” rather than an “alternate route” to certification. The pathway would include and expand on provisions contemplated by the initially passed bill for counting certain paraprofessional classroom service towards clinical practice requirements and for encouraging districts to place the candidate in a classroom matching the paraprofessional’s desired endorsement area.

**Virtual Instruction** ACR-192/SCR-152, a nonbinding concurrent resolution, urges the New Jersey Department of Education to collect data concerning the utilization of virtual or remote instruction in the public schools of the state.

### **Passed Senate Only**

The following measures were approved by the full Senate, but did not receive consideration in the Assembly before the end of the session:

**Fire Academy Course Credit** S-3901 requires school districts to award students high school graduation credits in health, safety and physical education for completing a county fire academy course under certain circumstances. This bill would permit those students who have completed coursework at a county fire academy to be eligible under Option II to receive health, safety and physical education credits toward graduation based on that experience.

**Universal School Meals** SCR-121 urges the United States Congress to provide for a permanent universal school meals program.

### **Passed General Assembly Only**

The following measures passed the full General Assembly, but did not receive the approval of the full Senate:

**November Election 2<sup>nd</sup> Questions** A-2218 gives November districts the opportunity to ask a second question in one fiscal year but spend the money in a subsequent budget year. The bill, an NJSBA priority set by the May 2023 Delegate Assembly, aids November districts by permitting them the opportunity to implement a program over an entire fiscal year after the approval of a second question, if needed.

**Online School Lead Testing Reporting System** A-4128 would require the Department of Education and the Department of Children and Families, within one year after the bill is

enacted into law, to establish online reporting systems for schools and child care centers to report lead testing results electronically.

Under the bill's provisions, each school and child care center that was previously required to test for lead, pursuant to law or regulation, would be required, within 90 days after the DOE and DCF establish the online reporting systems required by the bill, to submit or resubmit the lead testing results, as well as any other required information, via those online reporting systems. The DOE and the DCF would be required to compile the test results on their respective internet websites for access by the public.

The bill also would require the DOE and the DCF, within two years after the bill is enacted into law and in consultation with the Department of Environmental Protection, to prepare and submit a report to the governor and the Legislature outlining the extent of lead contamination in the drinking water of schools and child care centers, the associated need for assistance with remediation activities, and recommendations for how the state can assist schools and child care centers with remediating lead in drinking water.

***Evaluation Review Task Force and Temporary SGO Relief A-5877*** would establish the New Jersey Educator Evaluation Review Task Force to study and evaluate the educator evaluation system established pursuant to the TEACHNJ Act and implemented in New Jersey public schools.

The task force is to examine the educator evaluation process, gather data, evaluate the data, and make recommendations concerning the annual evaluation process for teachers, principals, assistant principals, and vice principals established pursuant to the TEACHNJ Act. The task force is to consist of 12 members who have a background in, or special knowledge of, the legal, policy, and administrative aspects of educator evaluation in New Jersey. The members are to include:

- (1) one member appointed by the president of the Senate.
- (2) one member appointed by the speaker of the General Assembly.
- (3) one member appointed by the governor.
- (4) three representatives of the New Jersey Education Association, at least two of whom are to be employed as full-time teachers in a public school in the state.
- (5) three representatives of the New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association, one of whom is to be employed as a principal in a public school in the state and one of whom is to be employed as a vice principal in a public school in the state.

(6) one representative appointed by the New Jersey School Boards Association.

(7) one representative appointed by the New Jersey Association of School Administrators.

(8) one representative appointed by the Garden State Coalition of Schools.

The task force is to consider the law in the current context of the state's schools, identify areas for improvement, and make any recommendations regarding any appropriate changes or updates to the law or regulations implementing the law. The task force is to issue a final report of its findings and recommendations to the governor and the Legislature no later than July 31, 2024. The department is to make the final report available to the public on its Internet website.

Additionally, the bill clarifies that student growth data used for the purposes of educator evaluations is data collected in the most recent year in which an educator completed student growth objectives. Under the bill, teachers are not to collect new student growth observation data in the 2024-2025 school year, and are instead to use, for the purposes of educator evaluations, existing student growth objective data from the most recent year in which the educator completed student growth objectives. For any teacher in their first year of employment in a district, any teacher without a record of pre-existing student growth objectives, or any non-tenured teacher, the teacher is to set student growth objectives and collect data pertaining to these objectives during the 2024-2025 school year. Beginning in the 2025-2026 school year, school districts are to implement guidelines for the collection of student growth objective data consistent with any law, rule, or regulation enacted as a result of the findings of the task force.