

New Jersey School Boards Legislative Update

March 7, 2023

Forwarded by Vicki Shoemaker

Last week, the Task Force on Public School Staff Shortages in New Jersey released [a detailed report](#) highlighting its initial recommendations to address teacher and education support professional shortages in school districts throughout the state.

Gov. Phil Murphy announced at the annual New Jersey Education Association convention on Nov. 10 [executive order No. 309](#), which established the task force to help address the challenges facing our educational workforce.

The task force was asked to develop short- and long-term recommendations to increase the quantity of K-12 school staff – including teachers and support staff.

Dr. Timothy Purnell, executive director and CEO of the New Jersey School Boards Association, was among 25 individuals to serve on the task force. The group was chaired by Dennis Zeveloff, chief policy adviser to the governor, and included a cross section of leaders from the K-12 community, higher education, the State Legislature and the Department of Education.

“During my service on the task force, I advocated relentlessly for greater flexibilities surrounding the 2% cap, which I believe is one the single biggest obstacles that impedes local school district abilities to raise employee compensation and packages, address aging facilities, continue innovative programs (e.g., mental health), and can, if not addressed, contribute to morale issues,” Purnell said. “Providing tax cap flexibility is particularly necessary during this period of record inflation and as many districts continue to experience reductions in financial support from the state. It was imperative that this recommendation be included in the report, and I urge state policy makers to take swift action to implement it.” When asked about his fellow task force members, Purnell responded, “It was an honor to serve alongside such a talented, diverse think tank. All the members worked together to propose these measures, which include innovative ways every level of government can work together to better recruit and retain quality school staff.”

Beginning in December 2022, the task force met five times to address its six objectives:

1. To develop short-term and long-term recommendations to increase the quantity of teacher applicants in New Jersey.

2. To develop short-term and long-term recommendations to increase the quantity of education support professionals in New Jersey.
3. To explore innovative ways the state can recruit and retain the educators and school staff our students need.
4. To identify best practices and resources to increase the pipeline of teacher candidates.
5. To identify best practices and resources to increase the pipeline of education support professionals.
6. To identify best practices and resources to ensure retention of school staff members.

After the series of meetings, the task force established a list of recommendations, which it outlines [in its report](#), that fall into three categories: supporting educators to improve retention, improving recruitment and training and state-funded programs to address educator shortages.

The task force's recommendations are grouped together by a general theme or overarching topic area. Where applicable, special recommendations are expanded on by task force members.

The report includes background information on the scope of staff shortages and 31 specific recommendations that could help ease staff shortages at schools statewide.

[Read the report.](#)

Cap Relief and Other NJSBA Priorities

As a sitting representative on the task force, Purnell was able to personally advocate for many of the Association's advocacy priorities that were included in the task force's recommendations. A few of the more noteworthy ones are listed below:

- Evaluate increasing the 2% local levy cap for local board of education taxing authority. The report explicitly recommends expanding the 2% tax authority for boards of education, while also urging consideration of additional exemptions to the cap.
- Eliminate the New Jersey residency requirement, known as the "New Jersey First Act," to increase the educator candidate pool.
- While acknowledging that the 2020 law ("Chapter 44") establishing new benefit programs for educators that was anticipated to generate savings has had "mixed results," the task force recommended revisiting changes to health coverage for educators. The task force also suggested allowing retirees to return to the

classroom without impacting retirement earnings, which the NJSBA has long supported.

Fiscal Year 2024 Budget Implications

Murphy has made it clear that he hopes to implement several of the task force's recommendations through the fiscal year 2024 state budget. During his budget address to the Legislature on Feb. 28, he stated, "Right now, there is a nationwide shortage of new educators. We feel this ourselves. To pull more qualified folks into the profession, increase diversity, and begin closing our state's educator shortage, this budget will support a total of \$15 million in stipends for student-teachers and waiving of teacher-certification fees."

Additional details on the governor's spending plan laid out over \$20 million in new investments and other supports to help alleviate the staffing shortage:

- \$10 million for stipends for student teachers to help them meet the costs of living while working and studying for their credentials.
- \$5 million to waive teacher certification fees for one year.
- \$2 million for Culture and Climate Innovation Grants to improve educator quality-of-life issues.
- \$1 million to develop local partnerships for paraprofessional training.
- \$1 million for a public media campaign.
- \$800,000 for a teacher apprenticeship program.
- \$200,000 to expand the Teacher Leader Network.

In addition to these new items, the governor's budget proposal also maintains funding for the Men of Color Hope Achievers and the Minority Teacher Development Programs to increase diversity in the educator workforce.