

NJPSA Candidate Questionnaire for 2025 General Election

This candidate questionnaire aims to gather insights into your stance on critical education policy issues affecting New Jersey that impact our association members.

Candidate Name *

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Legislative District Number *

27

Office You Are Seeking *

General Assembly

Party Affiliation *

Democrat

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1. Your Educational Priorities

As the 2025-26 school year gets underway, what do you perceive to be the top three issues and challenges for New Jersey students and schools? As a member of the General Assembly, what would be your educational priorities and how would you work with NJPSA to address these issues?

As the 2025–26 school year begins, I see three urgent challenges for New Jersey schools: funding equity, the educator workforce crisis, and closing opportunity gaps for our most vulnerable students.

1. Funding equity and fiscal pressures. Rutgers’ Education Law Center (Baker & Weber, 2023, School Funding Fairness in New Jersey) has shown that while the School Funding Reform Act was designed to level the playing field, it has not kept pace with inflation, transportation, or health benefit costs. Districts are being forced to cut staff or programs just to balance budgets. That is why I have called for adjustments to the 2% cap law and for formula reforms that let districts meet rising costs without undermining classrooms.

2. The educator pipeline. According to the NJDOE Educator Workforce Report (2024), shortages are most acute in special education, bilingual education, and STEM — areas that directly affect equity. As a prime sponsor of the law eliminating the Praxis Core, I helped remove a barrier that disproportionately excluded first-generation college students and candidates of color (ETS Validity Study, 2019). I also introduced a teacher certification reform bill to streamline endorsements, a reciprocity bill to welcome out-of-state teachers, and legislation to end the NJ residency mandate so districts can hire the best candidates without artificial restrictions. These reforms directly strengthen and diversify the educator pipeline.

3. Student well-being and fair assessment. The New Jersey Youth Risk Behavior Survey (2023) shows alarming levels of student anxiety and depression, with nearly 40% of middle school students also performing below grade level in math (NJDOE, 2023 Student Growth Report). To help, I sponsored legislation requiring teacher candidates to complete youth mental health training, ensuring educators can recognize and respond to these needs. And I continue to oppose high-stakes standardized tests like the NJGPA, because research published in Educational Policy (Papay et al., 2010) demonstrates exit exams increase dropout rates without raising achievement. Instead, I advocate for benchmark assessments and multiple measures of growth, which provide actionable data for teachers while treating students fairly.

As a legislator, principal, and mother, I will keep fighting for policies grounded in research and informed by the voices of school leaders. I look forward to working with NJPSA to ensure New Jersey delivers on its promise of equity, excellence, and opportunity for every child.

2. School Funding

The 2008 School Funding Reform Act, SFRA, and its subsequent amendments determine state aid distributions to New Jersey school districts each year. Schools are funded through a combination of local, state and federal funding sources. School district spending is constrained by state law that imposes a 2% tax levy cap on school district budgets. Over the past few years, New Jersey has made significant investments in our schools, yet some districts face significant financial challenges due to provisions of the SFRA, as amended, inflationary school costs, rising needs in their school community, and the spending restrictions of the cap law.

What changes, if any, do you think should be made to our school funding formula? Would you support changes to the spending cap law to permit cap adjustments to exclude certain high cost areas (transportation, health insurance costs, etc.) from the spending cap or other flexibilities to help districts avoid teacher layoffs and program elimination?

We must fully fund our schools so that every child, regardless of zip code, has access to a high-quality education. While the School Funding Reform Act set an important foundation, it has not kept pace with changing demographics or district needs. I support adjustments to the funding formula and spending cap laws to provide districts with the flexibility they need to meet these challenges without cutting teachers or programs. Our priority must always be protecting classrooms, supporting educators, and ensuring that resources reach students where they are most needed.

3. Educator Shortage

Even prior to the pandemic, school principals and supervisors were grappling with a shortage of teachers and educational service employees (counselors, nurses, etc.) in making their annual hiring decisions. In recent years, the educator shortage has been pervasive, impacting all districts and school staffing needs from physics teachers to bus drivers.

What specific initiatives will you support to strengthen the educator pipeline and promote diversity in the profession?

I am committed to strengthening New Jersey’s educator pipeline and diversity by removing barriers while maintaining high standards. As a prime sponsor of the law eliminating the Praxis Core, I helped open doors for more qualified and diverse candidates who had been unfairly excluded. I have also introduced a teacher certification reform bill that streamlines and modernizes pathways, reduces duplicative requirements, and recognizes real classroom experience. In tandem, my reciprocity bill welcomes experienced teachers from other states, and my bill ending the New Jersey residency mandate lets districts hire the best talent regardless of where they live. I have also supported “Grow Your Own” recruitment programs to prepare local talent for the classroom.

4. Student Assessment

NJPSA believes that student assessment is an important instructional tool that assists educators, students, and parents in understanding a student's progress in school. Teachers use formative tests to determine a student's understanding as material is taught. Principals and supervisors rely upon student testing data to identify areas of needed curriculum change or modification. Student test results on standardized assessments are utilized in the evaluation of teachers, principals and assistant principals, and the state and federal government use standardized test scores as an accountability tool to identify school performance issues for remediation. Additionally, in New Jersey, we require high school seniors to pass a standardized test, the NJ Graduation Proficiency Assessment (NJGPA) to graduate from high school.

What is your view of the appropriate use of standardized tests in New Jersey schools? Do you believe the NJGPA or other statewide assessments should remain a graduation requirement? If not, what alternatives should be considered?

As a lifelong educator and legislator, I oppose using standardized tests like the NJGPA as a graduation requirement and reject their use in evaluating teachers and principals. Decades of research, including studies from the Review of Educational Research and the National Research Council, show that high-stakes exams disproportionately harm English Language Learners, students with disabilities, and those from low-income communities, often reflecting family income or language background rather than true readiness, while increasing dropout rates without improving long-term outcomes. Instead, New Jersey should adopt a multiple-measures approach that includes benchmark assessments to track growth throughout the year, portfolios and performance tasks to showcase mastery through projects and presentations, growth models to measure progress over time, and recognition of coursework, attendance, and career/technical certifications. These alternatives provide richer, fairer insights into student learning, support educators with actionable data, and ensure that graduation reflects real preparation for college, career, and civic life rather than the results of a single test.

5. School Facilities

Every New Jersey school should provide students and school staff with a safe and healthy environment for learning to occur. Yet, the condition of school facilities across the state varies dramatically, particularly where challenging local budgets do not provide for facilities maintenance, necessary expansions or upgrades to meet evolving health and safety standards.

Would you support new state investments in school infrastructure statewide through state funding and/or new bonding initiatives to support school construction and infrastructure needs?

Yes

6. Student Wellness and Support

Schools face major challenges in meeting the health and wellness needs of our students, particularly in the mental health area. Although our schools strive to provide **all** students with a safe and supportive environment to learn, student mental health needs are rising at alarming rates, particularly as specific student populations face new stressors in our divisive world. NJPSA believe that every student needs our support and the opportunity to learn free from threat, discrimination, or abuse.

Will you work with NJPSA to support every New Jersey student? What ideas do you have to assist schools in meeting the mental health needs of our students?

Yes

7. Educator Pensions

New Jersey educators, including principals and supervisors, have spent their professional careers devoted to assisting their students to succeed in life. Our members chose this profession despite the fact that they could have earned more in the private sector. A key part of that choice was the knowledge of a secure pension when they retired. Currently, the public employee pension systems are still significantly underfunded despite record investments in recent years. Additionally, new educators receive a "lesser" pension, based upon pension tiers created in 2007.

Will you support continued strong investments to address the unfunded liabilities of the Teachers' Pension and Annuity Fund (TPAF) and other public employee pension systems?

Would you support a renewed look at the tiered pension system which serves as a barrier to the educator pipeline by providing new educators with a reduced pension?

Yes