

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.

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Legislative District Number *
LD23

Office You Are Seeking *
State Assembly

Party Affiliation *
Democratic, Forward

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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?

1) Getting the trades and occupational skills more emphasized in public schools, 2) Making sure our schools are fully funded, 3) Making sure pensions are fully funded. I believe the NJPSA is already tackling the second two issues, so I would love to hear about what progress has been made on those fronts, and what remains to be done. On the first issue, which taxpaying voters seem to resonate a lot with, I would also be interested to learn what the NJPSA thinks. Parents all over the district would love for their children have a track to a skilled, prevailing wage, local job, through an apprenticeship type program by the time they graduate high school.

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?

I am not in favor of the 2% cap. In fact I had the displeasure of watching a local board of education entertain a vote to "not" raise the levy to less than a percent more - to fully fund a comprehensive, year-long calculated budget, at the last minute. The language used to insist on "not" raising taxes, even at such a low amount, potentially cutting essential resources like teachers themselves, was frighteningly similar to the "DOGE" language of stopping waste, fraud, and abuse. I found that startling, especially when the board members who pushed that narrative were asked what specifically was wasteful, fraudulent, and abusive in the budget and they could not answer. Yet, what I do notice, for years now, is that rural districts like ours are losing funding. Many blame the S2 Funding Formula. I would be interested to know the NJPSA's take on the matter is, and how we can move forward in a more equitable way.

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 agree that making the field of teaching as attractive as possible and keeping experienced educators in the field are crucial goals. Thus, I agree with the NJPSA's multi-pronged emphasis on improving working conditions for better retention, recruitment and training, professional support, and policy and reform regarding school funding.

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?

My short answer is not in favor, and no. However, I do understand the need for objective assessments to correct for underperformance, subjectivity, and bias. Yet the feedback from parents, and teachers, is overwhelmingly against the necessity of the NJGPA. Many parents find it demoralizing, and teachers find it time-consuming and disruptive. They would rather focus on class, and I believe that what "academic achievement" looks like in that respect is more a question of zip code, and environmental conditions, rather than individual student mastery. Along those lines, I do think assessment should be more for general intelligence, unrealized gifts, and special needs.

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, 100%. New Jersey's schools are world class and I will fight to keep it that way. Every child deserves public school facilities that are in tip top shape.

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, absolutely. Every student deserves education, and care. This is currently a major issue in the county that I live in, Hunterdon. The Hunterdon Central BOE voted to cancel mental health care services in August, just days before the start of school. Now, parents are scrambling to understand what the replacement program will be. This is totally unacceptable and I believe the state needs to find a solution. I would love to be a part of that. From what I gather, the in-school services were widely enjoyed, and the outsourced "spoke-and-wheel" model is not.

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?

I am totally against the new tier system. I agree that it is wrong. I would absolutely support a renewed look. As far as funding goes, my running mate and I are looking into innovative ways to create tax revenue for towns and school districts in a variety of ways.