

# 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 \*

Andrew Labruno

Legislative District Number \*

39

Office You Are Seeking \*

General Assembly

Party Affiliation \*

Democrat

Campaign Contact Information - Phone

2013043376

Campaign Contact Information - Mailing Address

**Please do not list if using home address**

Campaign Contact Information - Staff Contact Name

Angeline Sheridan

Campaign Contact Information - Staff Contact Email

ld39volunteers@gmail.com

## 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?**

First, we need to ensure every district has the resources to give students a quality education. That means a funding formula that is predictable and fair, especially for special education, transportation, and facilities.

Second, we must do more to recruit and retain teachers. Too many educators are leaving the profession because of burnout, low pay, and limited support. I would support pipeline programs, loan forgiveness, and stronger professional development to keep great teachers in our classrooms.

Finally, student mental health and school safety cannot be overlooked. We should expand access to counselors and school-based mental health services while working with educators and administrators to ensure safe, supportive learning environments.

As a member of the Assembly, I would work closely with NJPSA to advocate for resources and policies that strengthen our schools, support our educators, and put students first.

## 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?**

New Jersey's current funding formula leaves too many districts struggling with uncertainty and unfair outcomes. One of the biggest gaps is in special education. The state needs to step up with more funding and a better structure so that districts are not forced to make painful trade-offs.

I also believe changes should be made to the spending cap law. Districts should be able to exclude certain high cost areas such as transportation and rising health care costs from the cap. These expenses are often outside local control, and without flexibility, schools are forced into teacher layoffs or program cuts.

As a member of the Assembly, I would work toward a fairer, more sustainable funding system that provides stability and gives districts the tools they need to protect teachers, programs, and students.

## 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?**

New Jersey cannot have strong schools without strong educators. We are facing shortages across the board, and we need to act. I would support expanding teacher pipeline programs that connect high school and college students to education careers, along with loan forgiveness and tuition assistance to make the profession more affordable.

We also need to invest in mentoring and professional development so new teachers and educational service staff feel supported and stay in the profession. Promoting diversity is critical, and that means removing barriers to entry and creating pathways that reflect the communities our students come from.

As a police sergeant and former mayor, I know how important it is to recruit and retain good people in public service. In the Assembly, I would bring that same focus to strengthening the educator workforce so every district has the teachers and staff it needs.

## 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?**

Not all students learn or test the same way. I believe standardized tests should play a role as a guide to help us understand how our students are learning, but they should not be used as the ultimate barometer of success. While assessments can provide useful information, they should not stand in the way of a student graduating.

I would work with teachers, administrators, and their unions to identify fairer alternatives that measure growth, skills, and readiness. Our focus should be on preparing students for life after high school, not reducing their success to a single test score.

## 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?**

As a former Mayor, I understand the challenges of raising taxes and the responsibility of putting those dollars to work for our communities. I would support new state investments in school infrastructure through both grant funding and bonding initiatives. By working with my colleagues in the Legislature, I will push for resources that help districts upgrade facilities, improve safety, and create modern learning environments without placing the full burden on local taxpayers.

## 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?**

As a Jersey City Police Sergeant and father of two, I know how critical mental health is for our students and families. I will work with NJPSA to ensure schools have the funding to create real support systems that include counselors, mental health professionals, and peer-to-peer programs. Just as important, we must continue breaking down the stigma around seeking help so students feel safe and supported. Every child deserves access to the resources they need to succeed both in and out of the classroom.

## 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?**

As a third-generation union worker, former union president, and police officer who was directly affected by the changes in Chapter 78, I will always stand with our teachers and administrators when it comes to pensions, pay, and health benefits. I support continued strong investments to address the unfunded liabilities in TPAF and other public employee pension systems. I also believe we must take a hard look at the tiered pension system, which discourages new educators from entering the profession by offering reduced benefits. Strengthening pensions is not only about fairness but also about keeping the educator pipeline strong.