



Education reform done right, right now

NJEA is pursuing an aggressive, progressive reform agenda

Education reform is too important to get wrong

With so many dubious ideas being floated in the current education reform debate, it has never been more important for educators to take the lead. That is why NJEA is pursuing an aggressive, progressive reform agenda. When legislators return to work for the lame duck session immediately following this month's elections, they will find strong bills, filled with proven, research-based reform initiatives, to support.

Why is legislation needed?

Education reform is on the Legislature's agenda, and it's certainly on the governor's. Several bills, covering everything from vouchers to public charter schools to tenure, have already been introduced. Others are certain to follow. While some of the current legislation is positive and has already earned NJEA's support, other bills and proposals are deeply flawed.

But it is not enough simply to oppose bad ideas. NJEA has an obligation to provide better alternatives that deliver the reform our members and the public deserve. We also must protect our public schools and the people who work in them from the harmful effects that several current proposals would have if they became law.



NJEA has long supported research-based reforms that are proven to benefit students in the classroom. Those are not always the easiest reforms to implement, but they are the only ones New Jersey should pursue. The increased public discussion of education reform, and the legislative desire to address the issue, makes this the ideal opportunity to push for reforms that will work.

NJEA's reform agenda is broad. It addresses issues being discussed by Gov. Christie and other critics of New Jersey's public schools, such as evaluation and tenure. It tackles matters they ignore, such as access to preschool, full-day kindergarten, and parental involvement. It also confronts issues that are important to the public, including greater accountability for public charter schools and protections against the private sector's profiting from public education.

Nurturing a culture of teaching excellence

The centerpiece of NJEA's reform agenda is a proposal to revolutionize evaluations and to tie those evaluations to a better, more efficient tenure system. It addresses the mistaken notion that tenure is "a job for life" while keeping protections in place to ensure that members' jobs are not threatened for inappropriate personal or political reasons that have nothing to do with classroom effectiveness.

Tenure and the pathway to success

The tenure proposal is simple. It adds a fourth year of teaching before tenure is earned. But it does not do so just because four years is longer than three years. Instead, it improves the support and evaluation that new teachers receive during their initial years in the classroom in order to ensure their effectiveness by the time they reach tenure status.

The first year of teaching would involve a residency. Just as novice doctors work under the guidance of an experienced physician, first-year teachers would be partnered with a qualified senior teacher for intensive assistance, support, and guidance. While they would still be responsible for their own classes, they would have a colleague responsible for helping to ensure their successful transition to the profession.

Following the residency year, teachers would be assigned a mentor. That program would resemble the mentoring program already in place in New Jersey, but be reinforced, so that it cannot be ignored as too often happens currently.

And while the tenure process would be lengthened by a year for new teachers, it would be shortened for experienced teachers who choose to change districts. Teachers who give up their tenure to move to another district would be eligible to receive tenure in their new district after just two years.

Once tenure is earned under NJEA's plan, a teacher is entitled to a fair dismissal procedure should the district wish to terminate that teacher. NJEA's plan streamlines the process by taking it out of the courts and putting it before a qualified arbitrator. It also shortens the timelines for preparing, hearing, and ruling on the case. This ensures that decisions are rendered much more quickly and at much lower cost than under the current system, while keeping fair protections in place. It gives districts a better way to remove teachers who are deemed unqualified, while preserving the right of teachers to defend themselves if they believe that the district's judgment is incorrect, or based on inappropriate factors not related to a teacher's professional performance.

Evaluation

NJEA also proposes an improved evaluation system, aimed at better measuring teacher effectiveness and providing better support and access to professional development to address areas of concern.

Nontenured teachers would be evaluated at least four times each year under NJEA's proposal, while tenured teachers would receive evaluations at least twice annually. The evaluations would take into account both student performance and the teacher's professional practice.

Student progress would be determined through multiple measures. One of those measures may be a valid and reliable assessment, such as a well-designed standardized test. However, test scores would not be the only, or even the predominant, measure of student learning. In addition to student performance and a teacher's professional practice, out-of-school factors would also be taken into account, so that districts can fairly and reliably judge a teacher's true effectiveness.

NJEA's proposed evaluation system uses a four-level scale, with ratings of highly effective, effective, approaching effective, and ineffective. Tenured teachers rated ineffective who are unable or unwilling to improve would be at risk of dismissal under NJEA's proposed streamlined tenure system.

Professional development

More than a decade ago, NJEA adopted a new vision of professional development that goes well beyond the traditional seminar and workshop model. Contemporary professional

learning must encompass a range of teacher-led, job-embedded, highly collaborative approaches.

NJEA's professional development proposal builds on the innovative work already taking place in school districts across the state. It would use data obtained from our improved evaluation system to guide ongoing, collaborative learning in each building and district. Professional development would be carefully focused on improving student performance, which must always remain the collective responsibility of the entire school community.

Our professional development proposal builds time into the school day for educators to collaborate and learn together, so that the focus remains on the needs of students. In addition, teachers must be given the resources needed to achieve their specific objectives, as well as the goals of the school and the district.

Teacher Leader endorsement

NJEA's tenure, evaluation, and professional development plans are all dependent on a culture of cooperation and collaborative learning among teachers, led by highly qualified, experienced educators who serve as Teacher Leaders and mentors to their colleagues.

We propose creating a Teacher Leader endorsement on the standard instructional certificate that would codify the skills, knowledge, and requirements necessary to fulfill that role, and allow districts to recognize and reward those who are qualified to lead and choose to do so. Requirements would be high, and only experienced educators who intentionally pursue additional education and training would qualify to earn the endorsement.

To avoid conflicts of interest and disputes among colleagues, Teacher Leaders would not be involved in supervising their colleagues or formally evaluating their work. That would remain the responsibility of administrators. But they would serve as coaches, mentors, and facilitators of professional learning.

Public school choice with real accountability

Public school choice is important to many parents. It is also widely available in New Jersey. In many districts, charter schools, magnet schools, vocational schools, and traditional public schools operate side by side. NJEA supports many forms of public school choice,

with high accountability standards for those schools.

Expansion

NJEA's education reform plan calls for greater access to public school choice options for parents and students across the state. NJEA will support legislation to increase the number of magnet schools available to students. We will also push to expand the existing interdistrict public school choice program, so that more students in more places have the option to attend public schools outside of their own school districts.

In addition, NJEA supports current legislation to expand the number of charter school authorizers to include as many as three four-year public institutions of higher education. They would authorize and oversee charter schools beyond those approved by the N.J. Department of Education. And we support legislation that would allow high-performing private schools to convert to public charter schools, subject to all of the accountability expected of public charter schools.

Accountability

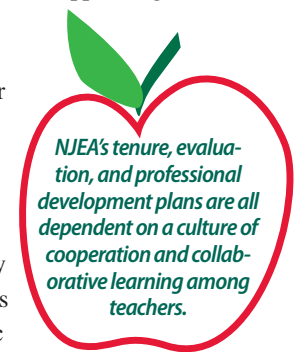
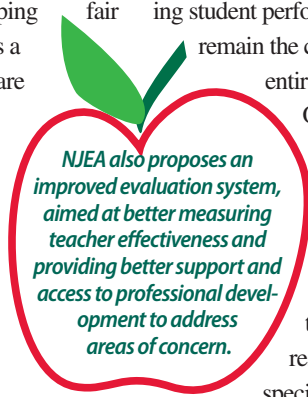
When considering public school choice options, access is important, but accountability is critical as well. NJEA supports legislation already introduced to raise accountability standards for charter schools.

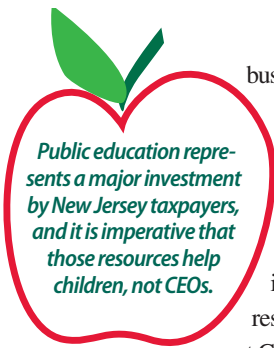
A-3356/S-3001 calls for charter schools to meet the same accountability and safety standards as traditional public schools.

This bill also attempts to provide more students with access to charter schools by automatically enrolling students from across the district and allowing them to opt out, rather than waiting for only a few families who choose to opt in. That change will address the concern that charter schools do not serve populations representative of the districts in which they operate.

Anti-profiteering

NJEA and New Jersey residents share a significant concern over the intrusion of private





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business interests into public education. Public education represents a major investment by New Jersey taxpayers. It is imperative that those resources help children, not CEOs. While public

schools generally have very high financial accountability standards designed to prevent the misuse or misappropriation of education funds, there are areas where those safeguards could be strengthened.

NJEA will support legislation to prevent corporations and private, for-profit interests from fattening their bottom lines at the expense of students. In particular, we will push to outlaw conflicts of interest in which board members of charter schools, or members of their families, have any employment or financial interest in a company that provides education management services to New Jersey charter schools. And we will advocate for more open bidding of contracts, so that taxpayers can see how public funds are used.

Starting early and finishing strong: quality schools for every child

For years, NJEA has been calling for research-based reforms that will raise student achievement. While some of these reforms require additional investment, that investment is proven to pay itself back many times over through a more educated, better paid workforce and lower long-term social costs. These reforms include preschool, full-day kindergarten, and small class size. Sadly, these proven strategies have been stunted in this era of decreased state funding for education.

NJEA advocates for full funding of the school funding formula so that preschool expansion can get back on track. The Association also supports legislation requiring every district to provide full-day kindergarten. And we call for legislation to limit class sizes in all districts so that all students have the benefit of increased individual attention early in their school careers.

Parental involvement

Parental involvement is a critical contributor to student success. Where teachers are able to work cooperatively with parents to help students learn and grow, the results show. Because of the clear link between parental involvement

and student success, NJEA supports efforts to facilitate and increase that involvement.

NJEA supports legislation that would provide parents with up to 24 hours of unpaid leave each year to attend school functions during the work day, including conferences, events, and classroom activities. Though the release time would be unpaid, parents would be protected from adverse employment actions due to taking time off to attend important school functions. This would enable greater parental involvement in schools, particularly for parents with less flexible or more precarious employment situations.

NJEA also supports the establishment of a grant program that would allow schools or districts to apply for state-funded grants to implement or support parental involvement training and programs. The grants could be targeted at schools or districts that fall below certain performance thresholds. Funds should be provided to schools or districts that demonstrate intent and capacity to successfully implement parental involvement initiatives.

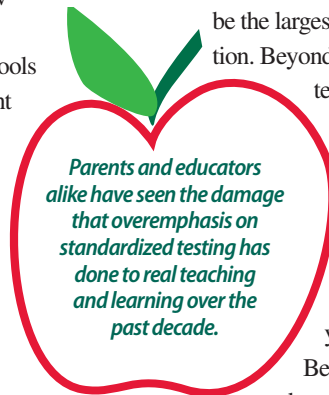
Every student a graduate

Too many students drop out of school legally, as early as age 16, because they lack support or do not have access to appropriate educational options. The cost to society for every high school dropout is high. We cannot allow students simply to walk away from school at age 16, and we should not allow districts to walk away from their responsibility to educate those students.

NJEA will support legislation to make school attendance compulsory until age 18 or until a student graduates. To serve students who might otherwise have dropped out at age 16, schools would be required to make appropriate educational programs available, including opportunities at vocational and alternative schools.

What are the harmful proposals that must be stopped?

The education reform debate is a vigorous one, and it should be. But it must be informed by research experience and common sense. Too often, those elements are missing, and the result is proposals that work better as bumper stickers than as real-world educational policy.



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Overemphasis on test scores

Research clearly shows that using student test scores as a primary measure of an individual teacher's effectiveness leads to woefully inaccurate evaluations. Parents and educators alike have seen the damage that overemphasis on standardized testing has done to real teaching and learning over the past decade. Gov. Christie's proposed changes to teacher evaluation base up to 50 percent of the final rating on measures of student performance. It is clear that he intends for standardized tests to make up much or all of that measure.

The Christie scheme would necessitate an explosion of testing. Every teacher's evaluation would determine both pay and continued employment, and standardized tests would be the largest single factor in that evaluation. Beyond the additional emphasis that teachers would be forced to place on test preparation, schools would have to test far more frequently. Tests would have to be administered at every grade level, and in every subject, multiple times every year. It would be No Child Left Behind on steroids, and it would be educationally disastrous.

Allowing politics into the classroom

The debate over tenure usually neglects any discussion of why tenure exists. When New Jersey passed the nation's first tenure law in 1909, it was not to protect teachers. It was to protect schools and taxpayers from the pernicious influence of politics in the classroom. New Jersey has not become less political over the last century. We still need a fair dismissal process that ensures that teachers can only be dismissed based on poor job performance. Their jobs must not be at risk because they crossed the wrong local politician, or because a political power broker wants to provide a teaching job to a supporter.

The tenure proposals put forth by the governor and others so badly gut the protections against political influence that they put every teacher's career in jeopardy. New Jersey cannot afford for its 120,000 teaching jobs to become political patronage positions. But that is exactly what would happen if some of the proposals to undermine tenure become law.

Public funds for private benefit

Some current proposals would divert hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars—and perhaps more—to private school operators and for-profit education management companies. The so-called Opportunity Scholarship Act, a private school voucher bill, would funnel nearly \$1 billion from the public treasury to subsidize private and parochial schools. Other proposals would increase the role of for-profit school management companies in running public schools in New Jersey, including public charter schools. New Jersey taxpayers deserve to know that the resources they invest in public education are going to benefit students in public schools. We cannot allow a private takeover of public education under the guise of reform or efficiency.

NJEA'S REFORM AGENDA

Nurturing a culture of teaching excellence

- Tenure reform
- Better evaluation
- A pathway to success through residency, mentoring and professional development
- Professional development through collaboration and innovation
- A teacher leadership endorsement

Public school choice with public accountability

- More choice through expanded options
 - More magnet schools
 - More interdistrict public school choice
 - Conversion of private schools to charter schools
 - More charter school authorizers
- More accountability
 - Charters must meet all public school standards
 - Charters must serve the whole community
- No profiteering
 - Resources must go to classrooms, not corporate coffers
 - Financial transparency for all public schools
 - No conflicts of interest between board members and providers of educational goods and services

Quality schools for all students

- More access to preschool
- Full-day kindergarten for all
- Small class sizes in the early grades
- Support for parental involvement
- Every student a graduate: dropout prevention and better options for high schoolers

Why is NJEA's reform agenda so broad?

NJEA's reform agenda goes well beyond most of what is being discussed publicly. It has to. If we focus on one issue—teacher evaluation, for example—at the expense of other things like mentoring, professional development, early childhood education, and family involvement, we will not achieve the results we are seeking.

Others may prefer to promote education reform that addresses only a few narrow issues. They may want to cling to the discredited notion that making teachers solely accountable for student test scores will translate into better results. They may try to pretend that putting more emphasis on testing will somehow increase real

learning. But educators know better, and the research backs us up.

Our agenda looks at all the factors that play into student success. It covers quality teaching, the opportunities provided to students, and the role of families. It makes a real effort to drive improvement in all of those areas. It is ambitious. But when it comes to our students' future, we cannot afford to think small or limit our vision.

Education reform is too important to get wrong. NJEA and its members have an obligation to get it right. 🇺🇸

How to talk about education reform

- New Jersey's educators support accountability, high standards, and reforms that truly help students succeed.
- Educators welcome high-quality evaluations that measure the things that really matter and provide constructive feedback on ways to improve student learning.
- High-stakes tests don't make us work harder or smarter, but they do force everyone to focus on the wrong things.
- Merit pay doesn't work. If anything it puts even more emphasis on test scores. We need educators to collaborate with each other, not compete against each other.
- Tenure isn't a job for life. It only means that teachers can fight back if they are fired for personal or political reasons. Now we are proposing a faster, cheaper, better system that makes it harder to get tenure and easier to remove teachers who cannot or will not do their jobs well.
- Public schools educate every child who comes through the doors. It's not always easy, but we are up to the challenge. We just ask for support from our communities and especially our elected leaders as we do our job.
- The public deserves to know that its education dollars are going to benefit students, not CEOs. We need common sense safeguards to make sure private schools and for-profit companies don't profit at our children's expense.
- Getting a great early start helps a child forever. Whatever we invest in preschool, kindergarten, and early literacy gets paid back many times over a child's life.
- Parental involvement matters. We do our best for every child, no matter what is happening at home. But children whose parents are involved simply do better, and it is our job to encourage and enable that involvement.

EDUCATORS
IN THE LEAD