



THE NEW JERSEY SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION: A LOOK BACK AT 2023-2024

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Our strategic priorities—Content, Connection and Advocacy—have been central to our efforts this fiscal year at NJSBA. As we approach the end of this year, I want to highlight just a few of our accomplishments and reflect on the progress we have made in advancing these core themes.

CONTENT

Our flagship event, Workshop 2023, marked a milestone with record attendance and participation and increased exhibitor engagement. More than 8,200 registrants had their choice of more than 200 training programs, including insightful sessions led by notable speakers such as Carli Lloyd and Gian Paul Gonzalez. Workshop 2023 exceeded expectations in all areas.

The introduction of the Unsung Superheroes Awards, recognizing the dedication of school staff, garnered widespread participation and will see expansion in 2024. Additionally, the reinstatement of the School Law Forum was met with enthusiasm from attendees, highlighting the value of informative programming. New interactive features like the "Jeopardy-style" trivia game and the BOARDWalk enhanced attendee engagement, setting the stage for Workshop 2024, where we aim to build upon these successes.

The launch of the executive director's video podcast, The Boardroom, in January provided members with a platform for transparent, live discussions with me on relevant topics. Featuring senior staff members addressing member inquiries and showcasing our diverse services, the podcast has become an invaluable resource, archived for on-demand access.

A task force made up of NJSBA staff and a group of board members has completed a thorough review of our Governance I training course. NJSBA will be updating this course to keep it timely, relevant and engaging.

We have seen significant expansion in NJSBA's direct services to boards, thanks to strategic staffing additions and restructuring efforts. The Business Administrator-in-Residence, bolstered by additional legal and policy support, has enabled us to offer tailored assistance to local boards, fulfilling a key member need identified in prior surveys.

CONNECTION

NJSBA Connection, established in May 2023, as an embodiment of this priority has rapidly grown into a vibrant community of over 4,200 members. Serving as a platform for idea-sharing, information exchange, and networking, NJSBA Connection has become an essential resource for members seeking to connect and collaborate.

NJSBA is making progress on the development of a new website with a focus on intuitive navigation and enhanced search capabilities. The website team provided a preview demonstration at the most recent NJSBA Board of Directors meeting and expects to roll out the new site by mid-August.

Our training programs continue to provide both valuable content and community engagement among board members. In addition to mandated training initiatives, our county programs have expanded, catering to diverse member needs. Specialized programs such as the Personnel Administrators Association sessions, the inaugural Women's Leadership Conference and our NJSBA Spring Conference have further enriched our offerings.

At a recent Board of Directors meeting, we announced a pilot program, the NJSBA Municipality Affiliate Association, which would permit municipalities to enter our cooperative pricing agreement. It is exciting to explore this new opportunity, as it could provide shared service opportunities and additional revenue for the Association for years to come.

The County School Boards Association programs remain a cornerstone of our outreach efforts, providing invaluable training and networking opportunities. An effort to attract newly elected board members to meetings in late November and December by providing focused training for them forged relationships between members, county associations and NJSBA even before those members formally began their board service. We have also seen increased participation in student-focused county programs; these sessions spotlight our remarkable students and continue to inspire and move our members.

ELFNJ welcomed a new executive director, Dave Hespe. He twice served as the New Jersey Commissioner of Education and has experience encompassing law, policy, government services, and both K-12 and higher education. ELFNJ held a reboot/strategic planning session and is poised to rebirth the organization under Dave's leadership.

Our efforts to lead in transparency and open our innerworkings to all stakeholders through The Boardroom podcast resulted in a Real Leaders™ IMPACT Award for Transparency!

ADVOCACY

This past year has seen notable advocacy achievements, with NJSBA supporting and influencing key legislative initiatives.

From eliminating the April budget vote requirement to advocating for expedited certification routes, emergency bonding authority for boards, and expanded school meal programs, our advocacy efforts have directly addressed member concerns and supported positive change in education policy.

Most recently the governor signed a measure into law that partially restores state aid cuts to school districts and provides tax cap flexibility to affected school districts, as well as authorizing the state education department to provide budget timeline flexibility.

Our ongoing advocacy priorities include ensuring equitable state aid distribution, enhancing transportation and special education funding, and advocating for critical initiatives such as preschool aid and anti-hunger programs. We continue to engage with state legislators and policymakers to advance these priorities and amplify the voice of local boards.

INSIDE NJSBA

Internally, we have prioritized transparency, cross-pollination, collaboration, and staff well-being.

Strategic hiring efforts have bolstered our organizational capacity, bringing in experienced professionals to enhance member services and support staff development. Regular staff meetings have fostered communication and teamwork, with a focus on knowledge, sharing and recognition of outstanding contributions (e.g. achievements, milestones, and starting every staff meeting with a time for “shout outs”).

Our revamped employee evaluation process emphasizes continuous feedback and personal development goals, empowering staff to grow and excel in their roles. Safety and security measures have been reinstated to ensure the well-being of our team, including CPR training (available for all staff), new AEDs, and enhanced emergency preparedness protocols (with regular fire alarms, drills, and panic buttons).

Looking ahead, we remain committed to strengthening NJSBA's impact and serving the evolving needs of our members. As we continue to adapt and innovate, I am confident that our collective efforts will drive positive change and advance the mission of our association.