

**Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee**  
**Dr. Angelica Allen-McMillan, Acting Commissioner**  
**April 18, 2023 – 10:30 a.m.**

Good morning, Chairman Sarlo and members of the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee. It is my pleasure to join you today, along with Acting Assistant Commissioner and Chief Financial Officer Amanda Schultz; Acting Executive Director of the Office of School Finance Allen Dupree; Director of the Office of Budget and Accounting Rob Amon; Chief of Staff Julie Bunt; Chief of Policy Chris Huber; and, Director of the Office of Legislative Affairs Christopher Jones. I look forward to testifying today in support of Governor Murphy's proposed Fiscal Year 2024 budget.

Governor Murphy's proposed Fiscal Year 2024 budget continues his unprecedented commitment to New Jersey's schools, educators, and students. The Governor's spending plan would increase aid to New Jersey schools by \$1 billion over the previous year's levels, for a total of nearly \$20.5 billion to support education. This includes increases in K-12 school aid, increases in preschool funding, and several new and continued programs to further support our educators and to address learning recovery for students. With an increase of \$832.2 million in K-12 formula aid, this budget would usher in year six of the seven-year statutorily required funding formula, designed in partnership with the Legislature, to phase-in districts to their full funding under the School Funding Reform Act, as amended by S2.

Additionally, the Governor recently signed legislation to provide over \$103 million in Supplemental Stabilization Aid to 168 districts, whose funding was adjusted downward through the implementation of S2. School districts began eligibility for this funding in early April, and the Department will continue to review and distribute funds on a rolling basis. Eligible districts are able to use the funds immediately and/or allocate the funds in their Fiscal Year 2024 budget planning to address unique needs.

Governor Murphy's overarching education budget commitment strengthens a compelling narrative that began in 2018 with his first proposed budget and encapsulates the new, targeted initiatives to provide staff and students with needed supports. On December 1,

2022, the Governor announced the creation of the New Jersey Partnership for Student Success. NJPSS is a coordinated series of initiatives designed to assist school districts in addressing learning loss and academic recovery among students, as well as youth mental health, educator empowerment, and universal preschool.

The pandemic has taught us that our educational system reaches far beyond the confines of a singular school building, and great success can be garnered through support from the community. Just as parent groups, community centers, and local churches supported remote learning and served meals to students during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Governor and I now renew that call to action to help educators and students thrive in an endemic world. To that end, a key foundation for NJPSS is the recruitment of caring individuals and organizations to serve as tutors, mentors, student success coaches, wraparound service coordinators, and post-secondary transition coaches.

NJPSS also includes initiatives to increase learning acceleration. The Department has begun to review and identify eligible organizations that can provide High Impact Tutoring services at scale, including school districts that offer tutoring or are considering offering tutoring. Eligible vendors will be required to demonstrate that their tutoring services are grounded in evidence-based instructional practices. High Impact Tutoring will be prioritized for third and fourth grade students, on an individual or small-group basis and will take place no less than thrice weekly, for a 10-week period. The Department's High Impact Tutoring plan will also support school districts that have established tutoring programs already in their school community. The High Impact Tutoring initiative will provide targeted tutoring interventions to directly impact locally identified student needs – which is important, as the program is designed to recognize that educators are in the best position to determine when and how to deliver these tutoring services, but may need additional support of vendor services so as not to overtax current systems.

The Fiscal Year 2023 budget also included \$2 million for the Department's Reading Acceleration and Professional Integrated Development – or "RAPID" initiative. The RAPID program, which will be supplemented by approximately \$700,000 in one-time federal funding,

is specific to early elementary literacy for children from kindergarten to grade three. The Department is in the process of soliciting qualified individuals who and organizations that will be approved to serve as RAPID vendors providing no-cost training to New Jersey local educational agencies or LEAs, and to develop early elementary literacy professional development modules.

Additionally, RAPID-Plus is an opportunity for institutions of higher education to provide professional development targeted to literacy instruction for educators responsible for upper elementary students in grades four, five, and six. RAPID-Plus will be supported by \$3 million in federal American Rescue Plan state set-aside funding. The Department will shortly enter into a series of agreements with colleges and universities that have the capacity to provide professional development to New Jersey educators targeting grades four through six and beyond. The Department is prepared to codify the fidelity of these initiatives and expand on implementation and action through the Fiscal Year 2024 investments.

In addition to meeting the academic needs of our students, the continual necessity to respond to students' mental health and emotional needs cannot be overstated. Any impediments to a student's ability to rectify emotional stresses he, she, or they may experience can provide an undue burden to the focus on educational progress. Governor Murphy and the Department are united in our goal to provide school districts and educators with the ongoing and evolving techniques, resources, and professional-learning opportunities to support students' social emotional and academic recovery. To achieve this goal, the Department has provided myriad grant opportunities to local educational agencies:

- The School Based Mental Health Services grant opportunity provides \$2.9 million that targets communities with higher levels of poverty and the greatest need to expand the number of mental-health professionals working in school districts, simultaneously aiming to diversify the pipeline of professionals who provide school-based mental-health services to students.
- New Jersey's "Mental Health Screening in Schools Grant Program" provides \$1 million to establish depression screenings in schools selected for participation and to assess the success of the program.

The Department has also provided districts with technical assistance and other resources, such as publishing the New Jersey Comprehensive School-Based Mental Health Resource Guide in February 2022. The Resource Guide provides a comprehensive roadmap for schools to evaluate their mental-health services and to establish programs that provide services and interventions to support students. These are all efforts the Department commits to continuing through the fiscal year 2024 with ongoing investments federally and with the opportunity to explore additional resources.

Our youngest children remain one of our State's greatest priorities, and the Governor's Fiscal Year 2024 budget plan continues to demonstrate Governor Murphy's ongoing campaign to introduce high-quality preschool to more communities. The proposed budget would increase preschool funding by \$109.5 million dollars, bringing the total allocation for preschool to \$1.1 billion dollars under our Governor's administration. This includes \$40 million that can be used to expand programs into new districts, as well as supporting other needs for expansion like that of workforce development. The Department plans to provide districts with the framework of the proposed application to allow the opportunity to plan ahead for implementation in their Fiscal Year 2024 budgets, ensuring a seamless integration of preschool education into their educational communities.

Under Governor Murphy's administration, 126 LEAs have received funding for either a new high-quality preschool program, or to expand an existing preschool to a high-quality program. Including the Fiscal Year 2023 funding, Governor Murphy's administration has increased investment in preschool education aid in the sum of over \$310 million and created over 12,100 additional seats. The Department will continue to encourage LEAs to explore high-quality preschool – and to consider non-public and private providers for partnership opportunities when assessing options for increasing preschool seats or opening new programs. The Department recognizes the necessity of partnership through a mixed delivery model, in order to be responsive to the capacity of the State in providing all three- and four-year-olds educational opportunity, and a fiscally solvent solution to early access to education.

It is not only access to education early, it is access to a high-quality education that has remained a hallmark of the Administration. Teachers are the very foundation of our school system, and it is no secret that our educators face a working environment unlike any other. Our educators commit their professional lives to teaching, mentoring, and caring for our children. Governor Murphy and the Department remain steadfastly committed to supporting the efforts of our educators; therefore, the proposed Fiscal Year 2024 budget provides additional monetary investment to further support educator recruitment and retention of a diverse population. For example:

- \$2 million is included for a Culture and Climate Innovation Grant to help address local issues related to educators' quality of life, such as decreasing paperwork and increasing preparation time.
- \$1 million is included to develop local partnerships for paraprofessional training. This program will bolster existing training for paraprofessionals, and it will also fund tuition assistance for paraprofessionals who wish to become teachers.
- \$1 million is included for a public media campaign designed to attract and retain educators in New Jersey.
- \$1 million is in the budget plan to expand the Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate programs in LEAs.
- \$500,000 is included to expand the Teacher Leader Network, a program that currently exists in nine school districts. The additional funding will allow the program to expand and will empower teachers to be leaders in their school communities – increasing morale and improving retention rates.

At the Department, we are striving to better assist those who are interested in joining the teaching profession. As a further example of the Department's commitment to our educators, and to advance our values of being a conscientious, helpful, and forward-thinking organization, are the expanded hours of our certification call center to better assist individuals seeking certification. In May 2022, the Department also launched a new online certification

system that simplifies the certification application process and allows for a more expedited review.

The Department continues to stand ready to support teacher candidates on their pathway to the profession. This is all part of our effort to support local educational agencies in improving access to an educator workforce that meets the needs of each community. In service of this mission, the Governor has proposed a certification fee holiday for Fiscal Year 2024, in which educators seeking to join the profession will be able to apply for certifications without the requisite fee imposed. While these initiatives continue to expand the availability of educators, it is equally important to examine the diversity of the educator pipeline and what prohibitions may remain. Investments codified through the chapter nine regulatory adoption in April, in partnership with the New Jersey State Board of Education, has the propensity to expound on the diversity initiatives we know increase equitable outcomes. Governor Murphy's Fiscal Year 2024 budget additionally provides resource to continue diversity campaigns in securing the educators reflective of the school age population of this great State.

The Department is eager to work with our State's institutions of higher education to implement the 10-million-dollar investment for individuals participating in student teaching, offering stipends to ease student teachers' hardships in employment or tuition. In addition, the Department of Education continues to work with the Department of Labor in the codification of teacher of apprenticeship programs. These are two ways in which educator recruitment is being actualized as a State-wide initiative.

The Department also continues to work with districts to effectively and efficiently draw down the \$4.3 billion of federal Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief, or ESSER funding. Though 90 percent of this funding is provided to LEAs under federal requirements and on the basis of federal methodology, the Department has also developed and carried out a coordinated policy strategy that dramatically expands schools' capacities to identify and address the academic, social, emotional, and mental health needs of their students and staff.

In the first round of ESSER, established under the CARES Act, the Department received over \$310 million dollars. Ninety percent of that allocation was to go directly to LEAs, as required by the federal law and based on a formula that prioritizes lower-income communities. With the remaining 10 percent, the Department supported the digital divide grant; released a \$2.5 million learning acceleration grant; entered into a \$1.8 million agreement with Rutgers University to expand a universal, school-based social-emotional learning program; and provided grants for education entities that otherwise would not receive COVID-19 relief funding, such as non-Title I LEAs and institutions run by State agencies. These funds expired in September 2022. It should be noted that LEAs sought reimbursement for 99 percent of funds allocated to support this program.

In the second round of ESSER, established under the federal Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations act, or “CRRSA,” the Department received over \$1.23 billion dollars. Once again, 90 percent of those funds went directly to LEAs to be used flexibly – following the same federal allowable uses as ESSER funds in the CARES Act, with three additional activities identified to clarify that, for example, ESSER funds can be used for certain school facility needs. With our State set-aside funds, we established a \$75 million learning-acceleration grant and structured a \$30 million mental-health grant. The grants supported by these funds reflected the emerging research regarding content areas most affected by remote learning; for example, by prioritizing academic enrichment in STEM fields. LEAs must expend funds from this tranche by September 30, 2023.

Lastly, in the third round of ESSER, established in the federal American Rescue Plan, or ARP Act, the Department received over \$2.76 billion dollars. Again, 90 percent of those funds are going directly to LEAs to support allowable uses they have identified in their school communities. It included the same allowable uses as the CRRSA act, with an additional reference clarifying that ESSER funds can be used to implement public-health protocols. The Department allocated remaining funds to establish a \$135 million grant to support professional learning for educators on learning acceleration; a \$28 million grant for summer enrichment activities; a \$28 million grant for academic enrichment during out-of-school time such as before- and after-school; and a \$48 million grant to implement multi-tiered systems of supports

that address students' and educators' mental health and social emotional needs, including hiring staff or contracting with service providers. Funds from this tranche must be spent by September 30, 2024.

These investments will yield long-term benefits. As of last week, Department records indicate that LEAs have sought reimbursement for 70 percent of the funds in their ESSER II tranche; and approximately 25 percent of their ESSER III tranche, consistent with expectations. As these funding streams draw to a close, local educational agencies LEAs will continue assessing their evolving needs and crafting evidence-based supports for students and staff that accelerate learning and bolster social, emotional, and mental health.

Finally, the Fiscal Year 2024 budget proposal also includes:

- \$420 million in Extraordinary Special Education Aid to help defray the cost of educating some of our most vulnerable students;
- \$20 million in Stabilization Aid to provide one-time assistance for school districts facing fiscal challenges;
- \$5 million to continue the Climate Change Awareness grant initiatives;
- \$3 million for a Community Schools Pilot Program to explore strategies to expand the community school model in districts throughout the State;
- \$2 million for continuation of the K-12 Computer Science Education Initiative;
- Over \$1 million to waive Advanced Placement fees for low income students;
- \$1 million for continuing grants for after-school and summer activities for at-risk children;
- \$750,000 for the continuation of the High Poverty School District Minority Teacher Recruitment Program; and
- \$500,000 for an Innovation Dual Enrollment Pilot program to be developed with the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education to expand opportunities for high school students to earn college credit.



These continued investments will deliver the resources that students, educators, and local educational agencies need to meet pivotal milestones on the path to recovery and rebound from the COVID-19 pandemic. I am proud to celebrate a budget proposal today that builds on the Murphy Administration's track record of significant and sustained investments in the fiscal, academic, and social-emotional health of our school communities.

Thank you, members of the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee, for your shared commitment to the quality of our schools and the entirety of our educational outcomes. The Administration's commitment to our shared New Jersey priorities, a strong, fair, and affordable New Jersey, is evident throughout this proposed budget and I look forward to continuing working with the Legislature in advancing educational progress in New Jersey, from preschool through post high school graduation. I welcome your questions.