

September
2011

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NJASA Files Suit Challenging Pension & Benefits Changes

On August 31, 2011, NJASA and a coalition of 25 organizations representing public employees in New Jersey filed a lawsuit to halt implementation of portions of the recently enacted health and pension legislation, P.L. 2011, c. 78.

This class-action suit, filed on behalf of retired members who currently receive pensions and active members whose rights and benefits will be illegally impaired by the law, charges 17 violations of state and federal law, as well as violation of both the New Jersey State Constitution and the United States Constitution.

The new law, enacted in June 2011, makes dramatic changes to pension and health benefits for public school employees and other public workers. This law eliminates Cost-of-Living Adjustments for current and future retirees for the foreseeable future; allows a committee established by the State to unilaterally reduce pensions and make significant benefits changes; and increases pension and health benefit contributions for employees including those with fewer than 20 years of service to pay for medical benefits in retirement even though they have had a commitment to them prior to this new law. (See page 9 for related article.)

NJASA Initiates Comprehensive Anti-Bullying Training

Over 1,000 school leaders heard the concise message – “It can be a challenge to separate the true HIB cases from the occasional horseplay or bad behavior....school officials must make sure they stay in touch with parents in a positive way.” – delivered by NJASA Assistant Association Counsel Beth Finkelstein at six regional Anti-Bullying Training sessions organized by NJASA in partnership with NJSBA and EIRC.

Finkelstein and an impressive panel of presenters focused on the legal requirements, policy guidance and safe school bullying prevention programs to maintain a culture of safe schools.

NJASA will be announcing additional training opportunities during the months ahead, including the availability of online training for all individuals required to receive training under the law.



Discussions on out-of-school conduct that can constitute HIB caught the attention of the attendees.



From left, The Press of Atlantic City Education Writer Diane D'Amico interviews EIRC representative Mark Stanwood and NJASA Attorney Beth Finkelstein.



EXECUTIVE VIEW

by Dr. Richard G. Bozza, NJASA Executive Director

NJASA Today: Working to Advance Public Education

Individual commitment to a group effort - that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work. -Vince Lombardi, an American Football Coach

As I was preparing to write this message, I toyed with the idea of expanding the above quote to include the phrase “educational system.” This thought may have rattled Vince Lombardi because soon after the East Coast experienced an earthquake.

I am sure these events are unrelated, however, my analytical process kicked in and I began to ponder where would society and civilization be without an educational system? The answer was simply – “No Where!”

Colleagues, this brings me to the point of my message. NJASA is a professional organization of chief education officers and school leaders who are dedicated, powerful advocates for public education. NJASA is an association not a local union shop.

Over the years, thousands of administrators voluntarily have chosen membership in NJASA because it’s the smart choice for the advancement of public education. NJASA and its members have always had a strong stance in influencing the policy and direction of public education on both the state and national levels. **Thumbs up to all of us!**

We realize life as we know it has changed and today’s economic times are difficult. However, the Association’s efforts to continue to influence and advance public education must remain as vigilant and proactive as ever. So, let me tell you what **NJASA is doing today!**

- Re-engaging with NJDOE on several key aspects from the Common Core State Standards Initiative to the nomination of NJASA representation on the Excellent Educators for New Jersey Stakeholder Advisory Team;
- Developing Anti-Bullying Programs with NJSBA, EIRC and Rowan University to expand resources to assist our members in becoming better school leaders;
- Expanding the Association’s communications vehicles with the debut of *Eyes on the NJ State Board of Education*;
- Joining with CWA, Police and Firefighters, NJEA, NJPSA, NJASBO in legal action regarding the suspension of the Cost-of-Living Adjustments (COLA) from the June 2011 pension and benefits reforms; (See related articles on pages 1 & 9.)
- Continuing to influence members of the New Jersey Legislature and the Governor’s Office regarding the funding and delivery of public education; and
- Providing money-saving educational and training opportunities to hone the skills and techniques needed for consistently superior performances as leaders of public school districts.

On behalf of the school children of New Jersey, I want to commend the efforts of the NJASA members as they continue to work with the Association to advance public education.

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of NJASA, the unifying professional association of school leaders, is to ensure a superior statewide system of education by influencing and effecting educational policy, regulations and legislation; and by maximizing the capacity and effectiveness of school leaders through professional development programs and support services.

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INCOMING PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



by Dr. Andrew Rinko
NJASA President 2011-2012

Colleagues,

In my 35+ years as a school leader, I have seen many changes and challenges. Like every one of my professional comrades, I've been quick to rush to the front lines in the battle for quality education. While American public schools are routinely under siege, we know that education is but one variable in a complex social equation. As such NJASA can serve as a valuable source of strength, consolation, and wisdom, when needed to help us navigate waters that are often uncharted and choppy.

More frequently than ever I am asked, "What will NJASA do for me?" or "What do I get for my dues?"

As the new President, one of my primary goals is for NJASA to be the strong "face" of New Jersey's educational leaders. But that can only happen when we couple the commitment from the organization's leadership with your involvement and voice. So what's in it for you?

- ❖ **Network Opportunities:** For most people, creating professional relationships and joining a group allows you to have a sense of security and camaraderie. With the number of school districts and the diversity reflected in New Jersey, professional contacts are key resources.
- ❖ **Professional Development:** So much is changing at such a rapid pace that high quality, purposeful PD is important to every one of our members. This year, I've encouraged all our Committee Chairs to be in the forefront of programs and services that pique your interest and address your needs. BUT we need you to support these committees, their meetings and their planned activities.
- ❖ **Public Relations:** The web site has become a wonderful natural resource with a broad range of links to PR releases,

policy statements, videos and general information from NJASA, the NJDOE and AASA. All you have to do is visit www.njasa.net.

- ❖ **Legal Services:** For an organization of our size, our legal representation is outstanding, timely and at a very low cost.
- ❖ **Essential Member Services:** We maintain a host of partnerships offering an array of affordable services and solutions to help improve educational programming and resource management.

To add to the face of NJASA, the Officers and Rich Bozza have been working hard to "make our presence felt" within the NJDOE and other professional organizations. In just the past few months, we have been able to seat representation on leadership teams working with PARCC as we ready ourselves for the roll-in of the Common Core State Standards; we have representation on the Advisory Task Force for Assessment and Evaluation; we have a new seat on the NJSBA Educational Foundation Board and the dialogue with the Commissioner and his advisory staff has been steadily improving. Albeit small steps, they are important steps.

I am eager (and humbled) to accept the responsibility for the challenges that we will face in the ensuing year. The Officers, former Presidents, Rich and the NJASA staff are incredibly helpful, but I know I can not do the job without your counsel and your guidance. I look forward to working together.

Sincerely,

Andy Rinko, Ed.D.
NJASA President 2011-2012

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NJASA 14th ANNUAL NEW SUPERINTENDENTS' ACADEMY 2011-2012 SESSION INFORMATION



The NJASA New Superintendents' Academy is designed to prepare new superintendents for success in their positions by orienting them to those relationships, practices and priorities that are critical to early and continued achievement of their goals. It is also aimed at second-year superintendents who wish to expand upon the skills and experiences gained in their first year, as well as superintendents "new" to New Jersey.

Sign up for any or all of the following sessions; however, to get the most out of this NJASA-sponsored professional development opportunity, you are encouraged to attend every session. To assist you in doing so, the cost of registration for all sessions as a package has been deeply discounted over individual registration fees.

The Academy will be comprised of six sessions during the 2011 - 2012 school year. All sessions, except for the *October 24 session, will be held at NJASA Headquarters, located at 920 West State Street in Trenton, New Jersey. All sessions will run from approximately 9:00 am - 2:00 pm.

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Please check ✓ below each session you will attend:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> #1 October 6, 2011 – Leading the Leaders in Your School Community | <input type="checkbox"/> #4 January 10, 2012 – The Critical Work of the Superintendent: Selection, Supervision and Evaluation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> #2 October 24, 2011 – Strategic Thinking Drives the Integration of Resources: Assigning Entitlement and Discretionary Resources to Meet Your Goals | <input type="checkbox"/> #5 February 9, 2012 – The Complexity and Challenges of Special Education Through the Lens of the Superintendent |
| <input type="checkbox"/> #3 December 13, 2011 – What Does the Superintendent Need to Know About School Business Operations? Asking the Right Questions | <input type="checkbox"/> #6 March 15, 2012 – It Is Always About Leadership: Superintendents Impact on Student Achievement |

REGISTRATION FEES

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| <input type="checkbox"/> _____ Individual Session(s) @ \$195.00 | Total = \$ _____ |
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| | Or |
| <input type="checkbox"/> All Inclusive Bundle , which includes: | *Total = \$1495.00 |
| -New Superintendents' Academy (All 6 sessions - \$1000 value) | |
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INCLEMENT WEATHER: Call NJASA headquarters after 7:00 am for information on whether or not the seminar will be canceled or rescheduled. Please call (609) 599-2900.

Please send completed form and payment to: NJASA New Superintendents' Academy • 920 West State Street, Trenton, New Jersey 08618

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LEGAL CORNER

by Beth Lynn Finkelstein, Esq., Assistant Association Counsel

The New Jersey First Act

On May 17, 2011, the New Jersey Legislature approved “The New Jersey First Act,”¹ which becomes effective September 1, 2011. The Act generally requires (with some exceptions) that all state public employees live in New Jersey. Specifically, the Act requires every person holding an office, employment or position in any Executive, Legislative or Judicial branch of this State, or (1) with an authority, board, agency, commission, or instrumentality of the State (with some exceptions) including any state college, university, or other higher educational institution, and in some instances, interstate agencies, or (2) with a county, municipality, or other political subdivision of the state or an authority, board, body, commission, or instrumentality of the county, municipality, or subdivision, or (3) **with a school district or an authority, board, body, agency, commission, or instrumentality of the district**, to have his/her principal residence in New Jersey.

The Act further provides that, for the purpose of public employment, a person can only have one principal residence. Principal residence has three elements and is defined as: (1) where the person spends the majority of his/her “nonworking” time, (2) which is most clearly the center of their domestic life,

and (3) which is designated as their legal address for voting.

Public employees who were already employed prior to September 1, 2011 are exempt from the residency requirement provided that the person continues to hold an office, employment, or position in New Jersey without a break in public service that does not exceed seven (7) days. Therefore, someone who is a public employee and was already an out-of-state resident on the effective date of the Act, can change positions, provided a break in service does not exceed seven days.

People who are out-of-state residents and wish to apply for positions covered by the Act may do so. However, such individuals who reside out of state and secure one of the positions covered by the Act after September 1st, will have up to one full year from the commencement of employment to relocate their residence within the State of New Jersey. If the relocation fails to occur within that time, the person will no longer be eligible for the position.

The Act also provides the opportunity to apply for an exemption. Exemptions will be granted on the basis of “critical need or hardship.” The applications will be

considered by a five-member committee. The committee will be composed of three members appointed by the Governor, one member appointed by the Senate President, and one member appointed by the Speaker of the Assembly. Committee members will serve at the pleasure of the person making the appointment with a term that cannot exceed five years. An exemption can only be granted by a majority vote. If the committee does not act on an application within 30 days of submission, the application is essentially deemed denied.

For purposes of the Act, it is important to note that a school district is defined as any local or regional district established under chapter 8 or 13 of Title 18A of the New Jersey Statutes, as well as any jointure commission, county vocational school, county special services district, educational services commission, educational research and demonstration center, environmental education center, and educational information and resource center.

There is every reason to believe that this Act applies to interim superintendents who, if retired from the Teachers’ Pension and Annuity Fund (TPAF), can be appointed as an interim for a term not to exceed one year and, thereafter, may be appointed by a board of education for an additional year without the appointee being required to re-enroll in the pension system.² However, if the interim lives out of state, he or she would have to relocate to maintain the interim appointment for the second year.

As the above indicates, residency can now be an issue affecting an administrator’s eligibility for employment in New Jersey, whether or not the appointment is as an interim or regular full-time appointment.

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CURRICULUM CORNER

by Steven Engravalle, Assistant Superintendent of Schools, Fort Lee Public School District

Pathway to Success

On September 9, 2010, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan recognized 304 schools as 2010 National Blue Ribbon Schools. Established in 1982, the program honors public and private elementary, middle, and high schools that are either “high performing” or have shown great improvement in student achievement, as measured by the school’s performance on state assessments or nationally normed tests. Among the honorees recognized by the United States Department of Education (USDOE) for achieving the prestigious “National Blue Ribbon School” status were ten New Jersey schools including School No. 3 from Fort Lee. The K-6 school was chosen because of the one-year increase in test scores in grades five and six. The scores in grade six jumped from 66% proficient to 90.3% proficient. Fifth grade increases went from 75% to 87% proficient. These significant increases earmarked School No. 3 as a school on a positive trend in test results, therefore, resulting in the National Blue Ribbon nomination with the “most improved” designation.

Built in 1896, the uniqueness of School No. 3, is that it demonstrates the success of a truly diverse population coming together as a community of one by embracing cultural differences; supporting intellectual strengths; nurturing individual gifts, talents, and interests; and simply, taking care of

each other. In School No. 3, English is the first language spoken in only 27.6% of children’s homes. The remaining 72.4% of households speak Korean, Japanese, Spanish, Mandarin, Arabic, and Russian, among other languages. Despite the perceived challenges of such a multicultural population, the school has thrived and demonstrated increased standardized test scores in all grade levels.

From Selling Scones to “Selling” Smiles
Modeling his leadership and management style after great corporations such as Google and Apple, Principal Robert Kravitz makes certain School No. 3 is a place where the employees love to go to work. As a result, children at School No. 3 love to come to learn, and parents feel like true partners in the education of their children. As part of his commitment to such a caring and safe school environment, he personally greets all students and staff by name with a warm smile each day.

To further promote the culture of the school, its motto, “School No. 3: The Place To Be!” is heard daily over the intercom at the beginning and end of each school day, as the principal and staff greet and dismiss the students. The slogan has become so catchy that it can be heard being echoed by students at assemblies and programs, and lyrically spoken by faculty members and parents for no other reason but to express the warm spirited nature of the school, which is a second home for all of its employees.

The Triangle Theory
At School No. 3, the philosophy of the building principal and his staff demonstrate that it takes a community to nurture the growth of the whole child. Teachers, administrators, parents, and all community

members are stakeholders working together to develop the intellectual, emotional, and social strengths of all students. Using what he refers to as the “triangle theory,” Principal Kravitz also frequently reminds parents that they play an equally important role in their child’s development, alongside the teacher and principal. Beginning at Back to School Night each year, the principal displays an appropriately colored “blue” triangle to the crowd and explains that the shape is a visual demonstration of each child’s education: the administrator is on one angle; the teacher is on another, and the parent is on the third, with the child in the middle. As he explains, all three angles have to push with an equal amount of pressure to maintain the shape’s structure so the child can learn. If any one of those angles are removed, the defined shape no longer exists, and the child can “fall out” of the middle.

Inspiration and Dedication Lead to Results

Principal Robert Kravitz and his staff helped the children placed in their trust achieve greatly in the face of many potential difficulties, thus earning them the honor of a 2010 National Blue Ribbon School designation. This occurred because of the commitment of a dedicated principal and an outstanding staff, who believe in treating education more like a business: by completing a cost benefit analysis for everything they do; demanding results; committing to the creation of a caring and safe school environment where everyone is willing to take responsibility for every child; and to working tirelessly as a community with parents and other stakeholders. Without a doubt, this strong collaborative formula has and will ensure that the spirit in the motto, “School No. 3: The Place To Be!” along with consistent student achievement, will be protected and preserved for future generations.

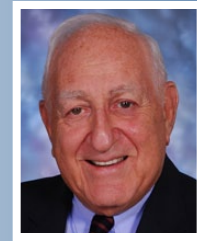
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Don't Hold Your Breath While Waiting for Cost-of-Living Reactivation

FINANCIAL CORNER



by Mort Reinhart, NJASA Pension Consultant

One of the most despicable aspects of Chapter 78, P.L. 2011, the so-called pension and benefit reform legislation, signed into law by the Governor on June 28, 2011 was the suspension of the "Pension Adjustment Act," which provided annual cost-of-living adjustments for retirees.

The "Pension Adjustment Act" became law in 1958 and has provided inflation protection through annual cost-of-living adjustments for all New Jersey retirees for the past fifty-two years. Its suspension will have a drastic effect upon those already retired, especially those who are retired the longest (and who are oldest) whose salary base for pension was not nearly as large as some of the current salaries and whose pensions are considerably smaller than those of recent retirees. It also will have an effect on active educators who may be contemplating retirement who will have to think about their future years in retirement without adjustments.

While the politicians were quick to point out that the benefit was being suspended not eliminated, its reactivation depends upon the retirement system funding increasing dramatically in future years. Further, the decision to reactivate the adjustments is not guaranteed by law but, rather rests with a new committee, established by Chapter 78 for each fund, and not with each fund's board of trustees.

Prior to the passage of the new law, cost-of-living adjustments were automatically provided to all retirees and beneficiaries based upon changes in the Consumer Price Index (CPI). If the CPI rose, the retiree's pension allowance was increased by 60% of the change. Thus, if the CPI rose 3%, the retiree's pension for the succeeding year was increased by 1.8%. There was no discretionary authority on the part of the board of trustees and there was no differential between retirement systems. If the retiree had retired from Teachers'

Pension and Annuity Fund, (TPAF) the adjustment was the same percentage as for a retiree from the Police and Fire Retirement System.

(And "yes," there could be a decrease in the next year's pension if the CPI went down; but the pension could not go below the original retirement allowance granted to the retiree.)

Under the new law, there will no cost-of-living adjustment for current and future retirees until the retirement fund from which the individual retired reaches its "target funded ratio," a number calculated each year to determine the strength of the funding of each system.

In simple terms, the "target funded ratio" compares the liabilities of the system with the assets of the system. The liabilities of each fund (money owed to current retirees and projected benefits for current active educators) are calculated by an actuary at the end of each fiscal year. This is done by using a series of mathematical factors (retirement date, amount of pension, life expectancy, inflation, etc.). Then, the actuary determines the value of the assets of the fund (stocks, bonds, etc.) on the same end of fiscal year date.

By comparing the two numbers (liabilities vs. assets), the actuary is able to provide a percentage of the liabilities covered by the assets. That percentage, in essence, is the "target funded ratio." [That percentage, in addition to providing a picture of the strength of the fund, is also the basis for the contribution that must be made by the employer (State or local) in order to fund the system.]

Under the new law, the "target funded ratio" must be 80% or more before the newly created committee can consider reactivating the cost-of-living adjustment for retirees. The law does not require the committee to

reactivate the benefit. It gives the committee "discretionary authority ...to...activate the application of the 'Pension Adjustment Act,' for retirees for the period that the system ...is at or above the target funded ratio and modify the basis for the calculation of the adjustment and set the duration and extent of the activation."

It is not very assuring language. First, it doesn't require the reactivation. The committee has "discretionary authority." Second, any reactivation if only for "the period that the system... is at or above the target funded ratio." Third, the committee has the authority to "modify the basis for the calculation of the adjustment and set the duration and extent of the activation." Apparently, any reactivation could be halted if the funded ratio falls below the targeted number; and the period (duration) of reactivation is still at the discretion of the committee whether the ratio stays above the target number or not.

All this leads to a few perplexing thoughts, since every fund within the overall retirement system will have its own committee and will be evaluated for its own target funded ratio. That could result in retired members of the TPAF having their adjustments reactivated because the TPAF funded ratio exceeded 80%, while members of the PERS would not have their adjustments reactivated because the PERS funded ratio was below the 80%. And this could occur in every one of the funds within the overall system.

Lastly, since every committee has "discretionary authority," what happens if two funds are above the funded ratio and one committee decides to reactivate the adjustment, while the second decides not to reactivate.

All this leads to a conclusion that not much thought was given to all the ramifications of the suspension of the cost-of-living adjustments. It seems that saving money was more important than caring for people.



COMMUNITY CORNER

by Geraldine Margin, Chief School Administrator, Manasquan

Building a Competent vs. Complacent Community

In January of 2008, the Southern Monmouth County community began an overwhelming journey filled with crisis, loss, mobilization, action and [hopefully] finally recovery. This slow, cautious, recuperative process is the result of the commitment of a few strong individuals who led the way in developing a community-wide effort to support our youth and their families.

From January, 2008 to June, 2008, Manasquan High School lost three young men to suicide. These deaths left Manasquan and surrounding communities devastated and searching for answers and guidance. Through the next two years, five more young men, from the ages of sixteen to twenty died, all attributed to suicide. Finally, last summer, an eighth grade girl also committed suicide. As this contagion spread, the community, supported by the Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide and Manasquan School District, came together to try to understand and deal with these deaths, as well as to build an infrastructure to support families and stop the contagion.

Manasquan High School dealt with the first three deaths, using our school crisis team and our county mental health providers. Those efforts addressed the immediate needs of our students and staff but we knew that a much more coordinated effort would be needed if we were to eradicate what was clearly a contagion. We brought in additional resources. Consultants from the Mental Health Association of Monmouth County and the Society for the Prevention of Teen suicide provided school and district administrators with best-practice, post-intervention strategies. These strategies addressed the development of policies,

procedures and protocols to contain the impact of the deaths while supporting the need of in-school support for students personally affected.

In the spring and fall of 2008, our high school crisis team received training to increase their expertise and skill level to deal with the complex issues of managing a contagion. The staff and community were provided numerous workshops with recognized experts in the field of teen suicide, such as Dr. Schafer, Columbia University. We quickly learned how we responded to the deaths could increase the risk of more suicides...a very sensitive balance was required. Our staff worked with the victims' families to help them through their grief without memorializing the act of suicide. We also reached out to the local news media and asked for their cooperation in reporting the incidents to minimize "copycat" behavior.

Quickly, we recognized the need for a more community-inclusive approach if we were to be successful. It was clear the school could not be the sole provider of the crisis response. The community needed to be mobilized and empowered, by building its capacity to respond to the ongoing crisis. Consulting with national experts at Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Disease Control, Suicide Prevention Resource Center, American Foundation for Suicide Prevention and Suicide LIFELINE, a coordinated effort that included the emergency room staff of four local hospitals, police from seven municipalities, multi-denominational clergy, local teen help-line volunteers, private mental health practitioners and school counselors from

seven school districts was established to provide training and guidance. A Community Suicide Task was formed which included school officials, contagion experts and members of all the local groups listed above. The Samaritan Center at the Jersey Shore Hospital was founded to foster hope and well-being through professional faith-based counseling. This mobilization of community groups was led by Maureen Underwood, LCSW, Sue Tellone McCoy, our school nurse and Denise Wegeman, MSW, LESW.

The Manasquan School District applied and received a \$250,000 School Emergency Response to Violence (SERV) grant from the Department of Education, Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools in March, 2009. This is funding the continued support and guidance of nationally recognized experts and the training of school staff, local therapists, and hospital and emergency staff. It also helped to provide school personnel to triage over 130 students identified as high risk. These students are provided ongoing therapy and counseling both in and out of school.

The SERV grant is also funding student recovery efforts. A new suicide prevention program, *Lifelines*, was selected for grades six through twelve. It educates students on the facts about suicide and students' role in suicide prevention. It provides information on where to find suicide prevention resources in the school and community. Training materials are included for faculty that provides accurate and practical information on identifying and referring students who might be at risk for suicide.

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Community Corner

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Support groups for students identified as at risk were established and run by local mental health providers. **Friends Helping Friends**, a student program, was created to empower students to take responsibility, since they are often the first to know about the suicidality of a peer. This group created wristbands, T-shirts, a teen helpline, website and video focused on getting the message to our youth that there are resources – “you are never alone!” Focus groups were formed at the middle school because many of the suicide victims had younger siblings. Habitat for Humanity worked with a group of at risk students to form a **Brush with Kindness** summer project. In the past three years, they assisted a local family in repairing a home and refurbished a community building to provide a Teen Center.

On December 10, 2009, the high school's first **Life Is Good**® day celebration took place. Organized by teachers, siblings and friends of the suicide victims and funded by private community members, the entire student body celebrated by receiving

Life Is Good® t-shirts, competing in a “Why Life Is Good” multi-media contest and competing in other events to win prizes, culminating with an assembly and inspirational guest speaker. It has become a very successful, annual school event.

Our community has learned, and is continuing to learn, many lessons from this experience. The most important is engaging the entire community and mobilizing it immediately. Data must be collected that can help identify at risk students such as: connection to victims, visits to school counselors, nurse and SAC's. Developing strong relationships with local mental health care providers and hospitals can help the sharing of valuable information. Families of the deceased need not only condolences, but information about memorial services that may potentiate contagion. You must always be sensitive to not allowing these suicide acts to be viewed as the behavior of a hero. A strong crisis plan must be in place to support staff and provide them with daily information immediately following the crisis event. Depending on the severity and length of the contagion, there must be

ongoing training and support. It is essential to utilize the many national and state resources available.

By fostering continued ownership of responses by community resources, empowering students to be part of the response plan, and encouraging community collaboration, we have developed into a competent community, prepared to meet the challenges of a major crisis. The school district and community will continue to assess and respond to emerging needs, outcomes and processes. This battle is not over, but the process of managing our recovery is on the right path.

Resources:

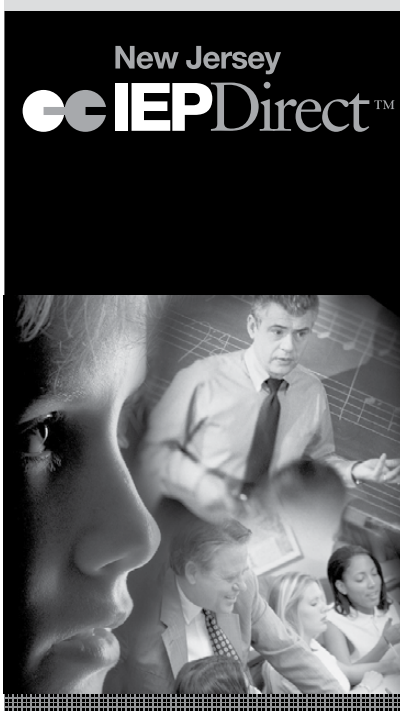
The Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide: <http://sptsnj.org/>

Center for Disease Control:
www.cdc.gov

American Foundation for the Suicide Prevention: www.afsp.org

Suicide Prevention Resource Center:
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PARTNERSHIP CORNER

by Dr. Monique J. Tremaine, and Dr. Loran C. Vocaturo, ABPP (Rp)



Hard Hits: Exploring Sport-Related Concussions

What do the schools have to say?



Dr. Loretta Bellina John J. Keenan

“The safety of our student-athletes is of the utmost importance at Cresskill. We felt this relationship with Kessler would create an opportunity to bring in brain-injury experts to present the facts to our coaches, training staff and parents. I attended the presentation myself, and thought Kessler did an excellent job explaining the signs, symptoms and effects of concussions, return-to-play strategies, and complications that could arise if these injuries are not taken seriously.”

– Loretta Bellina, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools
Cresskill Public Schools

“Working with the experts at Kessler has been an extremely positive and productive experience. Northern Highlands’ partnership with Kessler is a prime example of a professional relationship that benefits our student-athletes, parents, coaches and recreational volunteers. We are thankful to Kessler for this focus on community outreach.”

– John J. Keenan, Superintendent
Northern Highlands
Regional High School

From the National Football League to Little League, concussion – or mild traumatic brain injury – is a hot topic. And like the professional leagues, New Jersey is taking a long hard look at these injuries. In fact, the state recently enacted legislation to improve awareness and prevention of sport-related concussions.

Concussive brain injuries are common among the state’s student-athletes, whether they participate in football, hockey, basketball, baseball, gymnastics or cheerleading. The greatest challenges for coaches, parents and school administrators, as well as the individual student, is that a concussion often goes unrecognized, which can lead to the disruption of academic, social and emotional functioning.

Kessler Institute for Rehabilitation, one of only 14 federally-designated Model Systems in the nation for brain injury rehabilitation, has pioneered this field for more than 60 years. As part of its renowned Brain Injury program, Kessler offers a specialized Concussion Clinic to effectively identify and treat sport-related brain injuries, as well as to provide baseline screenings, post-injury evaluations and educational programs to school districts throughout the state.

What is a concussion?

A concussion, also known as a mild traumatic brain injury, occurs when a blow or jolt to the head or body disrupts normal brain function, typically causing a change in mental status or consciousness. Although evidence of a concussion may not be apparent through CT or MRI scans, microscopic damage to the soft tissues of the brain may have taken place and long-lasting cognitive and behavioral effects can result.

How does a concussion occur?

The brain is a soft organ surrounded by spinal fluid and protected by the hard skull. Normally, the fluid around the brain acts like a cushion to keep the brain from hitting against

the skull. However, a sudden, sharp or violent blow to the head or even to the body can cause the brain to crash against the skull. This temporarily prevents the brain from working normally.

What is the risk of injury?

The risk of sustaining a concussion is significant – particularly when an individual engaging in any sport or activity where speed, person-to-person contact, or person-to-object (such as a ball) is involved. In fact, nationwide, more than 3.8 million student athletes will sustain some type of sports-related brain injury each year. Mild traumatic brain injury can also be caused by motor vehicle accidents, falls and physical violence.

In what sports are we most likely to see concussions?

The greatest risk of injury occurs in high-contact sports, such as football, hockey, boxing, soccer and basketball. Football-related injuries are the most prevalent, despite the use of helmets and other protective gear. Boys have a higher incidence of concussion than girls because they are more likely to be involved in contact sports. However, girls have a greater susceptibility to concussions than boys, particularly in certain sports like soccer and cheerleading.

How dangerous is a concussion?

A concussion will often result in a brief loss of consciousness or a period of confusion. Symptoms (see below) may last anywhere from a few seconds to several weeks but most people recover within four weeks. Repeated concussions or a severe concussion may lead to long-lasting problems with movement, learning, or speaking. In some cases, concussions can produce more serious or even life-threatening problems, such as if any bleeding occurs in the brain. That’s why it is critical for an injured student-athlete to receive appropriate medical attention, even if symptoms do not appear to be serious.

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Partnership Corner

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What are the initial symptoms of a concussion?

Symptoms vary greatly and unlike a sprain or broken bone, the signs may not present themselves immediately. Typically, however, the initial symptoms may include:

- Headache
- Dizziness
- Nausea or vomiting
- Confusion or disorientation to time, place
- Loss of memory for events preceding injury
- Difficulty remembering new information
- Drowsiness or lethargy
- Disruption of balance
- Sensitivity to light or noise
- Visual blurriness or fuzziness
- Clumsiness, stumbling, or slowed movement

Are there additional symptoms a student-athlete might have?

Following an injury, individuals may also begin to experience a range of difficulties, including:

- Change in mood, often displayed as restlessness, sadness or irritability
- Problems with concentration, attention, memory, thinking or multi-tasking
- Ringing in the ears
- Changes in normal sleep patterns - sleeping more, less or not being able to sleep at all
- Feeling mentally slower, “foggy” or “groggy”

What should parents, teachers, coaches and others watch for?

Those closest to the individual may notice other changes in cognitive, behavioral and emotional status, such as:

- Odd or unusual behavior and emotional outbursts
- Unexplained drop in grades and/or social functioning
- Difficulties in social functioning or isolation
- Confusion, emotional distress, frustration or feelings of “going crazy”
- Short-term loss of newly learned skills or memory/recall problems

What should be done when an injury occurs?

Any athlete suspected of sustaining a concussion should be removed from competition immediately and examined by a trained professional. If the player experiences a loss of

consciousness, even if just for a few seconds, he/she should be taken to the emergency room for a thorough neurological evaluation.

What kind of testing is available?

A cognitive assessment should be part of a pre-season physical. This important tool, which is increasingly being used at both the professional and school-age levels, helps to establish a baseline measure of cognitive functioning that can be helpful in diagnosing the extent of any brain injury. Today, most schools require that student athletes undergo imPACT™ testing.

What is imPACT™ testing and why is it so important?

ImPACT™ testing is a computerized assessment of an individual’s cognitive skills, such as thinking, learning and attention. Administered by a physician, neuropsychologist, athletic trainer or other licensed healthcare professional, the test provides an important baseline point-of-reference for the student-athlete.

If a concussion is diagnosed or even suspected, the individual is re-assessed and scores are compared to identify any cognitive changes and the extent of injury. The findings are helpful in determining the need for treatment, as well as in establishing a return-to-play timetable.

When can an injured player return to play?

Although there are no formal or clear-cut guidelines, the New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association (NJSIAA) recommends that any student athlete suspected of sustaining a concussion be immediately removed from play and not be allowed to return that day. The individual should be evaluated by a physician experienced in treating mild traumatic brain injury.

It’s important to keep in mind that it takes time for the brain to recover. Rest is critical and, depending on the recommendations of medical and cognitive rehabilitation specialists, the athlete should limit activities for a period of time. Once given clearance, he/she should follow a gradual six-step physical return-to-play evaluation period.

How dangerous is it to return to play too soon?

Perhaps the greatest danger in returning to play too soon is the risk of sustaining another concussion. Multiple concussions,

particularly when they occur over a short period of time, can have a cumulative effect, resulting in lasting cognitive and behavioral impairments.

What about the pressure to return to competition?

No student-athlete likes to be sidelined, but they do need to be honest about any problems they may be experiencing. All too often, players will disregard their symptoms, “tough it out” or try to cover up any deficits in order to return to play quickly. They do this so that they will not lose their competitive edge or their position on a team, or let their team and coaches down. However, these young athletes need to understand that ignoring their symptoms can result in serious complications and long-term problems.

What is the role of coaches and teachers?

Coaches, trainers and others involved in a school’s athletic program need to help their players to understand that in the game of life their health and well-being is paramount. This can be difficult given an athlete’s desire to play – and a coach’s desire to have him/her on the field, especially if a “star” player is injured. But that is why it’s even more important for coaches, teachers, and parents to be able to recognize the range of symptoms and work together to monitor a player with a suspected injury.

How does an injury affect classroom performance?

Often overlooked is the academic performance of a player while he/she is recovering from a concussive injury. In some cases, a player may be required to miss some school or may have difficulties in the classroom with attention, concentration, test-taking and other tasks. Although most individuals will recover within days or weeks, accommodations may need to be made for the student during that time.

What are the outcomes for injured student-athletes?

A concussion is a serious injury, but the good news is that most individuals do make a full recovery. With stronger guidelines and new school policies in place, as well as access to effective assessment tools and specialized treatment, an injured student-athlete is likely to be able to resume play in a timely manner. Critical to this is the ability of parents, teachers, coaches and

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Legal Corner

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It can also be an issue when making recommendations for filling other openings within school districts.

If any issues arise concerning residency and your eligibility for employment as a school administrator, it is best for you to contact the legal department at NJASA, or your own personal attorney for appropriate assistance with your employment contract. Similarly, if there are questions about other employment recommendations for your district, it is always advisable to contact your board attorney.

¹ Pub. Law 2011, ch. 70.

² See *N.J.S.A.* 18A:66-53.2(b). It is important to note that a retiring superintendent may not become re-employed by his/her former district of employment of at least one hundred and twenty (120) days, nor can they make any arrangements to do so within that one hundred and twenty (120) day period.

Partnership Corner

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others to understand and recognize the symptoms of a mild traumatic brain injury and partner with health care professionals to optimize the individual outcome.

What services does Kessler offer to schools throughout the state?

Building concussion awareness, implementing testing programs, developing prevention strategies and managing players' injuries can be challenging. With extensive experience and expertise in treating brain injury, Kessler is working closely with schools

throughout the state to provide **impACT™** testing and post-injury neuropsychological evaluations. Kessler also offers schools a Concussion Awareness Program, which includes presentations on a variety of concussion-related topics, as well as consultative services to help school districts with policy development and related guidelines.

For more information, please contact Patricia Judd, PT, AVP, Outpatient Services, Kessler Institute for Rehabilitation, 973.243.6947 or pjudd@kessler-rehab.com



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NJASA *On Target* is published as an information service by the New Jersey Association of School Administrators. The publication is sent to Association members as part of their annual membership dues. It is available to non-members at a subscription rate of \$24 per year.

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