
Committee Meeting

of

JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

“The Committee will meet to receive testimony from invited guests on the impact the teacher shortage has had on learning loss and the expanding achievement gap”

LOCATION: Meeting via Zoom

DATE: February 22, 2022
10:00 a.m.

MEMBERS OF COMMITTEE PRESENT:

Assemblywoman Mila M. Jasey, Co-Chair
Senator Joseph P. Cryan
Senator Michael L. Testa, Jr.
Senator Samuel D. Thompson
Assemblyman Ralph R. Caputo
Assemblywoman Verlina Reynolds-Jackson
Assemblyman Benjie E. Wimberly
Assemblywoman Victoria A. Flynn
Assemblywoman Michele Matsikoudis
Assemblyman Erik K. Simonsen



ALSO PRESENT:

Rebecca Sapp
Executive Director

Ivy Pomper
Executive Assistant

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Meeting Transcribed by
The Office of Legislative Services, Public Information Office,
Hearing Unit, State House Annex, PO 068, Trenton, New Jersey

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SENATE

Hon. James Beach
Hon. Joseph P. Cryan
Hon. Declan J. O'Scanlon, Jr.
Hon. Ronald L. Rice
Hon. Michael L. Testa
Hon. Samuel D. Thompson



JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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MEETING NOTICE

TO: Members of the Joint Committee on the Public Schools

**FROM: Senator Ronald Rice, Co-Chair
Assemblywoman Mila Jasey, Co-Chair**

The Joint Committee on the Public Schools will meet on Tuesday, February 22, 2022, at 10:00 a.m., via Zoom, to receive testimony from invited guests on the impacting the teacher shortage has had on learning loss and the expanding achievement gap.

The public may address comments and questions to Rebecca Sapp, Executive Director, at 609-847-3365, or by email at Rsapp@njleg.org

Issued February 17, 2022

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MILA M. JASEY (Co-Chair): Good morning, colleagues, and welcome to the first meeting of the Joint Committee on the Public Schools of the 220th Legislative Session.

A special welcome to our new Committee members, and those of you who have joined the Assembly.

The Joint Committee is a statutory body created to oversee K-12 education statewide. And our role is a critical one, as nearly 60 cents of every taxpayer dollar is spent on funding our public schools.

There is little that we do as a Legislature that is more vital than the education of future generations. And your presence here today evidences that shared belief.

Though not a standing reference Committee, we examine and shine a bright light on the issues facing our students, Administrators, faculty, staff, and districts to inform legislation and achieve systemic change.

Today, we will hear testimony regarding a concern that is front and center -- the overwhelming teacher shortage and how it is impacting learning delays and widening the already-significant achievement gap.

We have a two-hour Zoom window and many educators and advocates who will share their experiences and offer solutions to address these concerns.

And as a note, I'm going to say that given the number of people we have testifying today, I'm going to ask members to hold their comments and questions until the end. And, if necessary, we will schedule a follow-up meeting, because this is a subject that is way too complicated and important to shortchange. But I do want to hear from the experts today, in terms of

their solutions or possible suggestions for things that we need to do as a Legislature.

But before we begin, I would like to give my members a moment to say hello; and I want you to know that Senator Rice, who is my Co-Chair, will not be with us today. He has had a very serious loss in his family and is not back yet.

Our newest member is Assemblywoman Vicky Flynn. So why don't we start with Vicky; followed by Michele Matsikoudis, Senator Beach, Senator Cryan, Senator O'Scanlon, Senator Testa, Senator Thompson, Assemblyman Caputo, Assemblywoman Reynolds-Jackson, Assemblyman Erik Simonsen, and Assemblyman Benjie Wimberly.

Assemblywoman Flynn.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN FLYNN: Good morning, Chair, and thank you for giving me this opportunity to say hello to everyone.

I'm very excited to be part of this Committee, as I just -- I thought I retired from the public school business after six years on the Holmdel Board of Ed. I do have a lot I can share, so I'm happy to continue to engage in this conversation and continue.

So thank you for allowing me to be part of it, and I look forward to listening to the experts, listening to the testimony, and sharing whatever information I can share after having been dealing with it as a Board of Ed member, as recently as December.

So thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you, Assemblywoman.

Assemblywoman Matsikoudis.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN MATSIKOUDIS: Good morning, and thank you, Assemblywoman. So, so happy to be here.

I was ingrained in the public school system for a while. I was PTA President for a number of years. Superintendent Miceli and I have a long-standing relationship, but I'm happy to see him on this call. And I'm looking forward to hearing all the testimony, and also offering whatever assistance and help I can.

So thanks again for having me.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you.

Senator Beach. (no response)

Senator O'Scanlon.

MS. SAPP (Committee Executive Director): They're on their way.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Okay; we'll get back to them.

Senator Rice is not here.

Senator Testa.

SENATOR TESTA: Good morning, everyone.

I really appreciate what you've done here in assembling us today. And Assemblywoman Jasey, I think we really have to have a serious conversation about tackling the very real issues that the COVID-19 era has presented for our students in the State of New Jersey. We really can't continue to allow them to lag behind.

The one thing that New Jersey has done correctly over the years is being number one in public education, and we need to continue to do that. And we have to come out of the COVID-19 era, and realize that so many

children have been left behind -- especially the children who are in the special education space. So I'm really looking forward to listening and learning.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you, Senator.

Senator Thompson. (no response)

I think we just lost him; we'll come back to Senator Thompson.

Assemblyman Caputo.

ASSEMBLYMAN CAPUTO: Good morning, Assemblywoman.

As usual, I'm very impressed with the subject that we're going to discuss. It's probably the only arena in the State Legislature where we get an opportunity to talk to the experts in the field. And I know you, and I, and many of the members of the Committee are very concerned about the learning loss, the anxiety, and depression that's taken place, not only with students, but with teachers and parents.

So this is a great opportunity to hear from the people in the field. So many times decisions are being made from the top down. We want to hear from people who have had these challenges on a day-by-day basis.

So I appreciate the opportunity.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you.

Do we have Senator Thompson now?

SENATOR THOMPSON: Yes; can you hear me now?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Yes, Senator.

SENATOR THOMPSON: Madam Chair, you summed up the situation out there very well. This is a really critical thing for our future, our kids. I mean, the problems they've gone through here with COVID, the loss

-- it's so critical that they be fully staffed with good teachers, etc. So whatever we can do to (indiscernible) this problem, we really need to get it done.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you, Senator.

Assemblywoman Reynolds-Jackson.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Good morning, everyone.

I am so happy to be back on this Committee again to serve with you all.

As we all are singing the same chorus -- that we've been talking about this for a long time, especially in the New Jersey Legislative Black Caucus. We've seen this, we've talked about it. And so we have some great partners on the line today. So I'm here to listen, and learn, and see what we can do to make public education great again, recruit more teachers, and also be able to help our students.

Thank you so much, Madam Chair.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you, Assemblywoman.

Assemblyman Simonsen.

ASSEMBLYMAN SIMONSEN: Yes, Assemblywoman Chair.

I'm just happy to be here to listen. And as an educator of 30 years myself, both in the classroom, Supervisor, Vice Principal, Athletic Director and everything else, you know, I've seen it firsthand. I'm in my office today and I will say that it's not just teachers, but it's one-to-one aids for special needs children. There's a shortage of bus drivers, obviously; staff workers, janitorial staff, buildings and grounds, etc., etc.

So anything we can do to help, I'm here to listen.

So thank you for having me on.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you, Assemblyman.
And Assemblyman Wimberly.

ASSEMBLYMAN WIMBERLY: Morning, Madam Chair.

This is something that hits close to home. I'm still working for the Paterson Public School District. Shortages, particularly in certain fields, when it comes to special education, ESL Yes, teachers, and administrators. And it's trickling all the way down to security staff, lunch monitors, things that maybe people take for -- you know, you just take it for granted that those people will be there. But these are all the shortages we're experiencing, and I'm looking forward to working on these solutions.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you, Assemblyman.

And if it's all right, Becky, we're going to let that stand as our taking roll, if you will, so that we can save some time.

So I'm Mila Jasey; I am Co-Chair of the Joint Committee on the Public Schools, Chair of Higher Education, and Vice Chair of the Education Committee.

Becky Sapp is our Executive Director, and Ivy Pomper is the Executive Assistant to the Joint Committee. So if you have any issues, if you need copies of anything, they are the people to reach out to.

A few housekeeping observations: We would ask that questions during and following testimony be circumspect so that we can have the opportunity to hear from everyone. And we ask that those testifying limit themselves to five minutes and avoid repetition.

Remember that we have all received your written testimony. So let's begin with Deb Bradley-- No, I'm sorry, Deb. We're going to begin with

Julian Vasquez Heilig, Dean and Professor of the College of Education, University of Kentucky, and Co-Chair of the Kentucky NAACP; followed by Deb Bradley.

JULIAN VASQUEZ HEILIG, Ph.D.: Great; thank you so much. And I appreciate that.

I am the Dean of a 3,000-person college, and I have something coming up at 10:30. So I'll just talk quickly.

I have prepared some slides for testimony; I'll just quickly go through them.

I hope that the reason why you've invited us today is because of the success that we're having here at UK.

So we know that education was one of the most popular majors in the 1970s. We've seen a reduction of about 50 percent of teacher education majors since that time. Now only 4 percent of all college graduates are in teacher education. We know that the Learning Policy Institute found that these long-standing shortages are most acute in hard to staff schools and high-need fields, and that the pandemic has exacerbated these needs.

The New Jersey Policy perspective did a really interesting piece, in 2020, that sort of lays out the challenges in New Jersey. You have a 49 percent decrease in the number of candidates completing teacher education programs. And the research is showing that teachers are, in part, concerned with what they're paid, their pensions, their working conditions, etc.

The next slide that I have in my testimony shows that drop -- a 63 percent drop in enrollment since 2009 in New Jersey. And that drop is also exacerbated by race. You have fewer Latino teachers, you have fewer Black teachers, fewer Asian teachers being trained. A decline of 33 percent

for Latinx folks, 58 percent for African-Americans, 36 percent for Asian Americans. Again, that's from the New Jersey Policy Perspective.

I'd like to quickly talk about our college and what you see here. We've had a 46 percent increase in applications to our college over the last three years -- from 1,100 to 1,600. That's the good news. Now, the challenge for us has been that our teacher ed programs have remained fairly stable. For the last eight years, before 2019, that enrollment was dropping. But we see that enrollment has now leveled off, but that's in the midst of a 46 percent increase in applications. So something's happening there. There aren't enough incentives for those students to come into our college. So what do the students tell me when I see them in the hallways, when I visit the classrooms? They tell us a lower return on investment; you know, the business majors and other majors ask them, "Why are you in education? There's a lower return on your investment." Reduction of respect for the teaching profession, onerous requirements of various education reforms, growing availability of backdoors into teaching alternative certification, problematic working conditions exacerbated by the pandemic. There's a whole list here; I won't go through all of them,

But there are also internal barriers to colleges of education that a lot of people are not aware of. When universities have performance and incentive systems, guess what? Colleges of education don't do well in those incentive systems because of the ways that colleges of education operate relative to accreditation for psychologists, for education counselors, for education teachers -- all that information is here. But just know that when you fund a university, that does not mean that those resources are going to go to colleges of education or go to help address a social problem, like teacher

shortages. Because as it filters through the priorities of university leadership, that does not mean that it's necessarily going to translate to colleges of education.

Then my last slide is just about public policy. So there are a couple of interesting bills that we identified: 5576, which apparently has been signed; 4203-- And those really -- last year there was an exciting teacher diversity package. And I think, here in Kentucky, we can learn from that. Every year we should see a teacher diversity package. Because Rome wasn't burned in a day, as my slide said. The reason why we're having the challenges with teacher diversity is, these are long-standing structural problems in our teacher training and teacher preparation system.

How do we address this challenge that, you send money to universities, but it doesn't make its way to colleges of education? One of the ways they're thinking about, here in Kentucky, is for the education -- Higher Education Authority to do direct performance grants to colleges of education to address teacher shortages. That way, we don't have to deal with all the machinations that the University has that directs-- Here in Kentucky, for example, the College of Communications got a million-dollar performance grant. That's great; doesn't solve the teacher shortage.

Finally, there are two interesting bills here. One is loan forgiveness for teachers who live in Promise zones. I think there's one in Camden that I'm aware of. Also, loan forgiveness for expedited programs. So the Legislature is considering giving \$10,000 in loan forgiveness for teachers who finish their teacher education program in three years. That's something in colleges of education that we can figure out.

So just a little bit of context. Some of the solutions that we see here in Kentucky; some kudos for the work that you all are doing already there.

And I'm so sorry that I have to depart, but I have a hard stop at 10:30.

So please reach out to me. You can find me on Twitter -- Professor JVH; or my e-mail is *J.VH@UKY.edu*.

Again, I'm Julian Vasquez Heilig, Dean of the College of Education, University of Kentucky; and Education Chair for the Kentucky NAACP.

Thank you for your time.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you very, very much. That was a great opening to our discussion this morning.

I'm sorry you can't stay with us, but we will be sure that all of your information is distributed to all the members.

Thank you.

DR. VASQUEZ HEILIG. Thank you very much.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Next up -- Deb Bradley, who is Executive Director of the New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association.

And she is here today, I believe, with Heather Moran and Anthony Scotto.

And Debra will be followed by Melanie Schulz.

Deb.

DEBRA BRADLEY, Esq.:

Good morning, Chairwoman Jasey and members of the Joint Committee.

I'm actually Director of Government Relations, but I do appreciate the promotion.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Oh. (laughter)

MS. BRADLEY: I am representing over 7,000 principals, assistant principals, assistant principals, directors, and supervisors in our public schools. And we have testified before this Committee in the past about the comprehensive staffing shortage that's been occurring, not only during the pandemic but before the pandemic. But since today you are focusing on the impact of this staffing shortage on students, I thought it really important to bring before you two accomplished educators who can talk directly about the impact of the staffing shortage on students.

And so with me today is Heather Moran, Principal of Logan Middle School in Gloucester County; and Anthony Scotto, who's going to talk more about the district-level impacts. He's the Director of Curriculum and Instruction at the Hamilton Township School District in Mercer County.

And I will pass this over to Heather.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you; welcome.

H E A T H E R M O R A N: Thank you.

Good morning, Chairwoman Jasey and members of the Joint Committee on Public Schools.

I am Heather Moran, as Deb said, the proud Principal of Logan Middle School in Logan Township, Gloucester County.

My school currently serves 371 students in grades 5 to 8. I've been here for 10 years, and I am especially proud of the work we are doing to provide all students with equitable opportunities, due to the School Climate Transformation Grant we were awarded.

As a lifetime educator, I can personally attest to the fact the challenges our schools have faced since March 2020 are nothing like we have ever seen before in public education. Students, teachers, and school leaders, like myself, have had to find inner reserves of creativity, flexibility, and resilience to meet the challenges we face each and every day.

As I planned for our students' return this September, I truly hoped that this school year would be a return to normalcy that we hadn't experienced in quite some time. Yet, this school year has doggedly refused to do so, insisting, in many ways, on being more challenging than last year.

A key reason for this is the difficulty we have had with staffing -- not only in my building but across New Jersey. These staffing issues plagued schools and leaders like me, not only within the teaching ranks but in every position within my building and my District.

Let me share a few things from my staffing challenges that I have faced in my building, and that have truly impacted my students.

Instructionally, we are dedicated to our mission at Logan Middle School to provide a well-rounded, quality education linked to New Jersey's learning standards, through a comprehensive curriculum taught by high-quality staff. This is especially important as students have returned to school bringing not only learning challenges, but significant behavioral issues and mental health needs as well. Yet the pandemic, through actual cases of COVID, its quarantine, and health and safety requirements -- resulting in staff leave requests and our difficulties in finding long- and short-term staff replacements -- have definitely strained our ability to staff our classrooms and provide consistent instruction. This directly impacts our students in terms

of the services they need, whether they're instructional, counseling, or other supplementary services.

Some specific challenges that I myself have faced: First, despite the student learning needs in my building this year, I have been unable to provide intervention services in math and English Language Arts on a consistent basis because I pull those intervention teachers to cover other classes.

In September, we needed a full-time physical education teacher, with all benefits included. Normally, I would receive upwards of 50 or 60 applications for such a position; 4 people applied. And when I did finally hire someone, that person was held to their 60 days' requirement, and my students did not have health for the first marking period of the year.

Our District's Pre-K building has been unable to fill a special education position. And in order to care for our youngest learners, we've had to take a special education teacher from my building and move her over to that position. I now have many students with IEPs in science and social studies without the support of a trained special education teacher to modify their assignments and help them interact appropriately with grade-level content. This is an issue that I work on every day right now.

Despite the major increase in student mental health needs, I only have one school counselor for a building of 371 middle schoolers. This inability to meet individual needs in the area of mental health has resulted in far more disciplinary interactions interrupting instruction, rather than addressing these needs through appropriate mental health services.

In the fall, I'm going to need a science teacher, and it keeps me up at night worrying about whether I'm going to get people who will have the proper certification to fill that position.

As it occurs in most New Jersey school districts, my teachers continually sacrifice their prep time to cover classes. This adds to the enormous amount of stress and workload that our teachers are already under, and I can't afford to lose another teacher to another district, to retirement, or to another profession.

One of my biggest worries is honestly the availability of substitutes and paraprofessional roles, such as cafeteria/playground assistants, crossing guards, classroom aides, and cafeteria staff, as these positions currently go unfilled. All of the gaps in these necessary roles truly make it difficult to provide a secure and safe environment for my students.

Since these widespread challenges will continue to threaten school operations and instructional programs now, and into the future, I thank this Committee for your interest in seeking to understand and address the scope of this problem. From the perspective of a Principal who is in her building every single day, I thank you for enacting legislation that has sought to widen the pool of candidates available to us to fill positions across our schools, including positions in school leadership, such as principals, assistant principals, and supervisory roles.

I urge you to pass S-904 and A-2229, which would further increase our candidate pool by temporarily relieving the New Jersey residency requirement for new hires in our school. And I also ask you to examine programs in other states, like the gentleman before me was discussing, and is occurring in Tennessee, where they have created a program that treats teacher

candidates like apprentices -- where they work, earn money, and complete their programs all at the same time. I truly fear what will happen to public schools if we do not move in directions like these.

Another request is, please do not enact any new mandates on schools at this point in time. We simply don't have the staff to fulfill any additional responsibilities.

Finally, I would ask this Legislature to develop a campaign to promote the teaching profession as a strong and important career path in our state. We need to rebuild New Jersey's strong tradition of believing in our top-notch system of public education, supporting our educators, and modeling to our youth our strong, state priority in public education as the true pathway to a promising future.

I truly appreciate your time and attention to this matter.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you very much, Heather.

I think you've covered a number of topics that we have been thinking about, and that we'll continue to discuss this morning.

I'm going to ask all my speakers-- I know you're listening, so in terms of staying under the two-hour limit -- because we'll get cut off -- please don't repeat something that someone else has said, if possible.

Next up we have Anthony Scotto, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Hamilton Township School District.

Good morning.

ANTHONY SCOTTO: Good morning, Assemblywoman Jasey and members of this Committee.

Thank you for having me

As you mentioned, I'm Anthony Scotto, the Director of Curriculum and Instruction for the Hamilton Township School District in Mercer County. In my role, I am responsible for the curriculum and instruction, and the hiring of teachers across our entire District. We are a very large District, if you're not aware. We serve almost 12,000 students. We have 17 elementary schools, 3 middle schools, 3 high schools, and one alternative middle/high program. And when I tell that to people, they'll say, "No, really; how many do you have?" And that is exactly how many that we have.

While we are a very large school district, we're very proud of what we've done, particularly in the areas of curricular enhancements, new teacher induction, professional learning, technology, and access and equity for all students.

I'm here also today to talk about staffing challenges and what they've looked like for the last two years, particularly since the pandemic.

You know, every year a school district manages ongoing vacancies. We have vacancies before the school year starts, we have vacancies that happen during the school year, and we even have them after the school year. However, with a greater number of vacancies currently, and a significantly smaller pool of teachers, our districts are struggling with staffing.

I'm not really sure why we have a smaller pool, and I'm sure you're thinking the same thing. I think here are a few reasons why. The pandemic has created an increased number of staff members legitimately needing to take leaves of absence. Some of our teachers have older parents and they need to take care of them. The health crisis may be impacting school-age children, and those parents need to take care of their kids as well.

I'm also seeing an increase in paternity leaves that I have not seen in quite some time. And the thing that probably upsets me most is I have noticed lately that people are leaving the profession before retirement age to obtain and pursue another career. And as a result, we do not have enough teacher candidates entering the profession to replace them. So the need is greater than the ability to fill.

It's not unusual for our District to post for a long-term sub vacancy, or tenure-track vacancies, and receive a minimal number, if any, of candidates applying for these positions. And what does this do? It creates an interruption in learning for the District, for the school, and, most importantly, the students.

Yes, there are times we can secure a candidate, but not every time. Here's an example of what it could look like with LTS -- long-term sub -- or teacher vacancy. And I'll try to summarize, because I want to honor everyone's time, Assemblywoman, as you mentioned.

So Mrs. Moran talked about intervention. We have had the same situation happen in our elementary division, so I won't rehash that. But I'll also talk about -- we're having difficulty finding teachers in the related arts, and art, and music; and all those modes of expression are just as important for our kids as math and English Language Arts. And when you do not have a teacher, particularly in elementary school, which creates a preparation period for a teacher to do lesson planning, parent communication, attend meetings -- it interrupts so many things in the school.

I'll give a different example for middle school, different than Mrs. Moran.

Assume a Language Arts teacher wants to go on leave. We post for that long-term substitute; no one applies, so what do we do? We have to go with plan B. Now we ask our existing teachers to write lesson plans and grade assessments for the classes that are not covered. Next, a principal, like Mrs. Moran, now has to find someone to cover the class. And while those lessons are developed and those assessments are graded by a member of the department, the students in that class do not have the opportunity to interact with the teacher, just like the other students do on that grade level team.

A unique example I'd like to share with all of you at the high school level -- assume a member of the math department has left the District mid-year or taken an extended leave of absence. We post; no one applies. We try to work with our long-term sub group; no one is able to meet our need. We now have to stream instruction from one high school in our District to the other side of town. Our recent tech enhancements allow us to do this, but now the teacher, the math teacher, is teaching 20 to 22 students in front of them, and 18 to 20 students virtually. We compensate them, we set up all the technology that they need. But their ability to help children is a little more challenging.

What does this mean for students? You know, we try to prevent as much interruption as possible, and this has been a challenging year. And I'm worried that if this continues, districts, particularly high school districts, may have to eliminate courses. We have very robust courses in Hamilton Township. So far, thank goodness, I've not had to eliminate them. With the shortage of staff, or lack of applicants, I worry that the breadth of what I've been offering may start to decline.

This year I complete my 27th year in education. And I see that staffing issues are more unique now than I've ever seen them, particularly as a Central Office leader.

A few recommendations for you folks to think about.

Please, strengthen the turnaround time for the issuance of substitute and teacher certificates. I feel -- we feel that there has been a delay in that area. And without those certificates, we are unable to put people into the classrooms.

Please continue to work proactively with colleges and universities to increase enrollment in teacher education programs. I felt when I entered this profession, this was my calling, my vocation. I've been a teacher for almost 30 years, and I worry that those incentives are not there, as our colleague talked about in the beginning. Perhaps we want to look at districts, such as Hamilton Township. They have very strong four-year new teacher induction programs, and highly effective teachers to work with staff. And maybe bypass some of the current requirements or barriers, such as the edTPA, that honestly I do not feel are producing stronger candidates for the classroom.

Allow us to please continue to learn and reflect on what was taking place during this pandemic that has modernized teaching and learning in education, and allow us to continue and not default back to the old way.

And finally, permit schools to have greater flexibility. I don't mean water down and have less quality teachers, but allow us to have greater flexibility as we hire alternate route candidates. Because we have a very robust new teacher induction program. I am confident that if we find people

with the degrees, and we work closely with them on instructional strategies, we will be able to begin to close the staffing gap.

In closing, lack of staffing slows down the business of the district. And the business of the district is teaching and learning. That's why we come to work every day. I know the staffing issues we are facing in Hamilton are not just specific to our District; they are specific to Mercer County. I attend roundtable meetings regularly with my colleagues, hearing very similar concerns. I know that these conversations are taking place across the state, as I speak with my peers at NJPSA.

Thank you for listening; thank you for considering our collective recommendations this morning.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you, Mr. Scotto. I appreciate everything that you said, and I'm sure my colleagues do as well.

Dr. Gina Coffaro, Superintendent of the Oakland School District, is up; and I would ask that--

MS. SAPP: Assemblywoman?

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Yes?

MS. SAPP: Actually, next up is Melanie Schulz.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Oh, sorry, sorry.

MELANIE SCHULZ: Good morning, Assemblywoman; and good morning everyone on the Committee.

It's good to see all of you. Hopefully, we'll be in person soon.

When I was thinking about testimony today-- Although COVID is sort of the icing on the cake for all of this, I took it back to the beginning. And the beginning, for me, is when I was in high school. And when I was in high school, a woman became one of three things: She was a

teacher, a nurse, or a secretary. And so that, even though there were men who went into the profession, most of the women went into the profession. And for decades we filled that pipeline. And also, most of the people went to school here in New Jersey; for whatever reason, they stayed in state.

We've come to the point now where those people are retiring, or have retired, and that's left a huge void just in a natural progression of people who were going to retire.

Then in the late 1990s and the early 2000s, we promoted STEM and health professions. No blame here; nothing wrong with that. The employment was changing; people were looking to those programs. We created very great, robust academies for STEM and health-related professions. And although we did create, in certain school districts, some pathways for pre-teacher programs, we really need to incentivize those programs in high schools. Because if we don't get them in high schools, they're not going to go on to college and become teachers.

Assemblywoman Jasey, back in 2012 you created a law with the late Senator Jim Whalen; the Vet Teach Program. That was a great program. We need to, maybe revisit that and look at how that's been going across the state, and maybe, re-incentivize those folks. We've done some great things with incentivizing men to become professional teachers, or the minority populations. We just need to do more at the -- starting in middle school to get kids interested, and in high school, certainly, to get them hooked so that they want to go into this profession. I think that there are places that it's being done, and it's being successful; but we need to do more of that.

I'm going to turn it over to now-- I'm going to give you a little profile of Dr. Gina Coffaro. She's Superintendent in the Oakland School

District in Bergen County. It's a 1,500 student population, and she has been there for 10 years.

And following up from Dr. Coffaro will be Dr. David Miceli. And Assemblywoman Matsikoudis, I have to say that when I saw that you were appointed to the Joint Committee, I reached out to Dr. Miceli; because I thought that that would be a good way for you to have your first meeting and be with someone you were very familiar with.

Dave's been in the New Providence School District for 18 years; 16 of those as Superintendent. And that is a District in Union County, 2,400 students, pre-K to 12.

I'm going to stop talking now and send it over to Dr. Coffaro. She's going to give you a really interesting presentation, I'm sure.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you, Melanie.

And I apologize for not introducing you.

I also want my colleagues to know that if you have -- if something occurs to you while we have a speaker on, I am happy to take your questions or comments. But I am also very aware of our time limitations, and the fact that we have all of these experts gathered here today. I don't want to shortchange them either.

So Dr. Miceli.

DAVID MICELI, Ed.D.: We were going to start with Dr. Coffaro.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: I apologize; Dr. Coffaro.

GINA COFFARO, Ed.D.: Good morning, Assemblywoman Jasey.

It's a privilege to be with all of you. And thank you, Melanie, for the introduction.

First, let me thank you all; because the work that you are all doing, every day, has not been easy. It's not been easy on school leaders, it's not easy on teachers, and it's not easy on our legislators, and Senators, and politicians.

We have so many constituents who we deal with on any given day, and we have an assortment of problems that come to us. And it's our responsibility as educators that we have to resolve issues and we have to provide that support. Because what we do is we have to make a difference every day for the children who are placed in front of us.

As a school Superintendent, my most important job is to support the entire community -- students centered first. But I also have to support my teachers. And over the last three years -- not being repetitive -- we all know how difficult it has been.

But it's going back prior to that. I've been in Oakland 10 years, and it's been an honor and a privilege to be a school Superintendent. But over that time, I've started to see a little bit of decrease in the number of applicants that we have been receiving. We're an outstanding District, we have an outstanding Board of Education, outstanding support from our parent constituents and our local constituents within the governance, and operations -- in everything. I'm so proud of the work we're doing. So why are we having an issue having applicants apply to our District?

So I started to do a little bit of research. And I sit on the faculty council at William Paterson, and I know they have been seeing a decrease in their candidates who are applying to their teacher ed prep programs. So going back to 2014, the Administrative law -- the Code changed, and they incorporated, at that time, the basic skills assessment for students who are

entering the teaching profession, in any type of teacher ed prep program in New Jersey. At the same time, in 2014, the Administrative Code changed to incorporate the edTPA component; edTPA did not become consequential until 2017.

So I know how valuable your time is, and I know how -- so many others have to speak. So I just want to share some data points with you, because I do believe the numbers are going to share with you all why we're at where we are at today.

And I know the Administrative Code is supposed to sunset in November 2022. So after you hear these numbers, I do believe, with the-- Most care for the work that we all do -- because we're here, because what drives us is to make a difference for children. We're not here because we have personal gain for ourselves. Yes, it's our calling; but what's making us want to do this is we're supposed to build the next generation of any type of profession. That's what teachers do; that's what leaders do.

And when you hear these numbers, I want you to give some thought to the following: Where do we get our future leadership from? In education; we get it from our teaching pool. And if the numbers of educators, future teachers are decreasing, that means the number of future leaders in New Jersey will also be decreasing in our public schools.

So this is the report year; and these numbers are right on the New Jersey Department of Ed, in the link. And it's from the *eppdata.doe.state.nj.us*. And it's some data points; and it reports by year. And they report by two-year periods. So the report year for 2014 has 2010 to 2012. The number of candidates certified in 2014 was a very robust 10,255 certified teachers who could go out and seek employment. Six hundred

districts in New Jersey, over 10,000 newly certified teachers -- I think that will be fair for all of us to say that that number was a fair number, and that was a number that would be optimistic. And that's why my colleagues prior to me speaking -- we would receive résumé pools where we would have them on our desks. Yes, we would go through them all, and we would receive hundreds for elementary positions. Certain higher to fill positions we would receive less. But in general, in the K-8 districts, elementary positions, you would absolutely receive over 40 or 50 applicants.

In 2015 -- report data period 2011 to 2013. The number dropped to 9,284. In 2016 -- this is reporting period for two years, 2012 to 2014 -- the number dropped again to 8,099.

In 2017 -- reporting data period 2014 and 2015 -- the number once again dropped to 3,687. In 2018, the number dropped to 3,277. And in 2019 -- and there is no other reporting year at this point; it stopped at that, they have not updated it -- for the 2016-17 (*sic*) reporting period, the number of candidates is under 3,000 -- at 2,972.

I think that speaks very strongly to what we are seeing with regards to having a steep decline in the number of candidates who are getting certified and licensed to teach in New Jersey. And I do not believe it's because they don't want to teach. I believe there are two barriers that are in the way right now. We are, as educators -- we are to build opportunity; we're not to put up barriers. And I think the Administrative Code, if we have an opportunity, with the most respect, is to look at the edTPA component and the basic skills component.

At William Paterson alone, there are currently 229 students who have met the 60-credit requirement, who are the most caring group of future

educators in New Jersey who want to be there. They are a diverse group. And they cannot move forward in the program because they have not met the basic skills requirement. So that's a barrier that I think we need to look at. And I applaud all of you because of the alternate ways that you're looking at trying to increase the teaching pool right now -- because we are in a crisis moment -- with offering those alternate pathways. I think it's an outstanding way because it's not looking at, what my colleague before said, *watering down* anything -- because that's not what we're looking to do. We're looking at providing a more robust opportunity. Maybe the edTPA doesn't belong in licensure; maybe it belongs in the two-year mentorship. Maybe you look at the basic skills requirement and say, "Okay, if you don't pass the basic skills requirement, then you have to do the edTPA."

I think we have to look at options, and I think we have to look at how we're presenting the licensure requirements. Because I think within five years, if we don't look at this right now, we're all going to be looking back on this day, and nothing's going to be resolved because our teacher ed training programs are going to see a continued decrease.

And when we have a decline in programs in New Jersey, it's going to impact the number of licensed teachers in New Jersey. And we're still going to be having the same conversation. And who's going to be hurt the most? Our children.

And New Jersey has had -- always has been at the top for education. And when I went into teaching, there was no other thought in my mind of what I wanted to do, because I cared about making a difference.

In 1985, former Governor Kean put in the \$18,500 to attract a broader teaching pool. Maybe it's time we look at raising the starting salary,

although I think it is at a fair place right now; most districts. Salaries are going up in other industries, and maybe it's time that that conversation took place as well.

The work that all of you are doing -- you're doing because you care, and that's why you're on this Committee. As a school leader, there's no greater difference that I can do, when I put my head down on my pillow at night, than to wake up the next day and to mentor future leaders and future teachers.

And I'm so concerned. In all of my years in education, over 30 years now, that we're not going to have the pool to mentor.

So anything I can do, anything I can provide, I will make myself available. I will sit down and take a look at the numbers, all for developing teacher academies and leadership academies. I think if we offer incentives, and I think if we look at the heart of the data, I think we'll get a better understanding of the picture that's been in front of us, prior to COVID, and just exacerbated by the last two years.

So just thank you for this opportunity, and I just have nothing but pride for all the work that you're doing.

Thank you kindly.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you, Dr. Coffaro.

I think you have basically outlined the concerns and some of the reasons-- And I will tell you that some of us are looking at edTPA and the basic skills requirements that don't always connect to or predict the best teachers. So I think sometimes, unfortunately, more than often, it required-- We have to have a crisis to really sit down and resolve questions like this, problems like this.

Thank you; and we will be in touch with you.

Dr. David Micelli.

DR. MICELI: Thank you, Assemblywoman. I really appreciate everyone's time today.

I want to also say hello to Assemblywoman Matsikoudis; it's great to see you on this Committee.

I want to -- I'll just thank my colleagues who went before me. I think you guys covered it really well. Heather Moran, Anthony Scotto, and certainly, Dr. Coffaro have covered a number of issues, so I don't want to be redundant in that way.

But I'll give you my own, sort of, personal experience in New Providence. And I'm going to just start with trying to emphasize the importance of a teacher, right? We're all here because we want to see students achieve at the very highest level. And whether that's a student in a preschool or kindergarten class, or a senior in an aerospace engineering course, they need a dynamic, competent, caring teacher to achieve. It is just the absolute priority in all the work that we do. But everything that I do on a day-to-day basis as Superintendent -- the most important thing I do is hiring our staff. And I've had the good fortune of doing that in the past 18 years in New Providence, and I personally interview all the teachers and staff members that we have.

I'll give you a little bit of perspective. When I first started, back in the early 2000s, we probably, on an annual basis, had about 10 openings of about 330 staff members on an annual basis. And those would typically be due to retirements and some maternity leaves. And for those 10 openings, I used to get about 2,500 applicants for those 10 openings. Today, we have

anywhere between 40 and 50 openings, for various health reasons, retirements, resignations -- you name it. And I might get 200 applicants for the number of openings that we have. So there has been a tremendous decrease in the applicant pool that's out there, and it does not afford me the same opportunity to hire those critical positions. It does not afford me to have that dynamic person in front of all our students. And therefore, we're seeing a decrease in their achievement.

And I agree with my colleagues who spoke before that this isn't just a COVID situation. COVID certainly has exacerbated things, but this started probably a good 10 years ago, as the sentiment around educators changed in the state. And when you now talk to our students at the high school, or you talk to college students -- and I have the good fortune of having three children of my own who are all in college, and speaking with them, as well as their friends -- you just do not hear the same interest and passion of our children going into this profession. It is just not sought after in the same way.

I see it in the interviews of the staff that I meet with now, versus 18 years ago -- when folks came in for an interview, they were excited. They were passionate; they were knowledgeable; they were very competent. They had done their homework about New Providence; they understood the culture of the District. And they came in very enthusiastic and asked really, really good questions about the profession, and you knew that they had done their homework.

Today, interviewing some folks, you still see some of that; but not nearly as much, and there is a very different sentiment. But I truly believe that we have to look at the big picture here. My colleagues mentioned many

of the day-to-day operational issues in our buildings, as well as at the college level. But I think, from a very big picture perspective, we're just not in the same place of there being the same level of appeal of coming into the profession. And there's a whole host of reasons for that. Over the past decade, we've watched the various long-standing benefits get chipped away for the new generations as they come in. They see that as very problematic, and are very concerned when they're interviewing, and you're at that final stage.

The salaries have certainly improved; certainly. But when you compare them to the rest of the marketplace in other industries, they're just simply not there; nor is there the same opportunity for growth.

As you guys, I'm sure, are all very familiar, we've been grappling with the 2 percent tax levy cap now for a very long period of time. And understandably so, we understand why that's there and why that needed to be put in place. But that being said, as an institution, all of us, approximately 80 percent of our budget is built on salaries and benefits. And if you have a 2 percent cap on that, the majority of your increase goes to what we have available to hire. So when you're sitting at the table as boards of education, and the various bargaining units sit there, they all know, going to the table, that in that negotiations there's this tax levy cap. It does not allow for there to be a true competitive marketplace. Everyone has the limitations with that cap. And as inflation has gone up and our bills are continuing to go up, even development of this year's budget -- whether it's insurances, utilities, just other aspects like special education tuition, if you will, at private schools for the disabled -- things are going up, and we just don't have the same flexibility.

So I circle back to my opening comment about student achievement and having those dynamic teachers. If we want the best and brightest, if we want those fantastic folks who are -- not just there for the calling because those folks who came into the field because of the calling, they're there; and they certainly will continue to be there. But we obviously need more folks who want to become interested in this, over time, and maybe didn't have the calling but see the appeal, and have that opportunity, and have their own colleagues, have their own family members and friends, say, "Hey, you should go into being a teacher. You would be great working with kids." You just don't hear that sentiment anymore.

And I think that, on a global scale, as a State, we have to re-evaluate what those incentives should look like, moving forward. We have to create a culture where people find education appealing, and that it can be a committed profession that you go into, and a lasting profession that you can make a real impact; while, at the same time, feel as if you can be compensated fairly and that you can continue to sustain a family in New Jersey with the cost of living in New Jersey.

And so with respect for everyone's time, those are my sentiments. I really appreciate the opportunity to be here today. And I'm more than happy to answer any questions, and happy to continue to work with the Committee, over time. I've been an educator for quite some time and would like to see our profession continue to thrive in the future.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you. Dr. Miceli.

I agree with you.

I am going to -- I probably should have said this earlier -- I'm going to ask each of our speakers to try to limit your comments to three

minutes, four minutes, because we have a number of people to hear, and I do want to respect everyone's time and hear everyone who made the effort to be here.

Remember that your comments and your testimony, in written form, have been distributed to all of the Committee members. And I want to give my members a little bit of time to make comments once we've heard from everyone. Normally I would entertain the comments in between speakers, but because we have so many people today, that's not going to be possible.

Next up is Sharon Kregel, Policy and Outreach Director from the Education Law Center.

Sharon.

SHARON KRENGEL: Thanks very much, Chairwoman Jasey and all the members of the Joint Committee.

And I will try to go through this quickly. I know you have my lengthy testimony in front of you.

So we know everyone has talked about this. There had been a serious teacher shortage in the state long before COVID, and that has only exacerbated it.

But one important fact: We still don't know the full extent of the teacher shortage, including the actual number of vacancies, the specific subject areas most in need, or those districts that are facing the greatest challenges. And the reason for this is that the Department of Education doesn't currently collect or publicly report data on teacher vacancies across the state. So this makes it almost impossible to answer your questions about

deficits in student learning, how this affects our students, and especially those in high-need districts.

The Murphy Administration and the NJDOE are currently following the State's playbook that they've used throughout COVID, which is to leave the problem to districts to solve, and largely on their own.

So what we need to do is to go beyond individual districts -- what they can do to address this problem -- and instead, address it on a systemic, regional, or on a statewide basis, with the full support of everybody on this Zoom, and the Governor, the Department, the Legislature, State officials, and even the Department of Higher Education. And solutions to this problem do exist; in my written testimony you have not only the list of some of these things, but the links also to go take a closer look at this stuff.

But just to list this very quickly -- some of the solutions include scholarships, loan forgiveness, teacher residencies, Grow Your Own programs, mentorship, making sure districts have the resources to offer competitive compensation, encouraging strong partnerships with higher ed and among peers, etc. And also supporting students' and staff's mental health.

So in order to address this, in order to get to these solutions, there are two structural barriers that have to be taken care of. First, the Department itself, the NJDOE, is severely short-staffed. An ELC analysis showed that, since 2014, the NJDOE has lost a staggering 24 percent of its total workforce. And that percentage is much higher in some job categories; and there's more information about that in my testimony.

And second, the multiyear underfunding of the SFRA school funding formula impedes districts' ability to recruit and retain teachers. The cost of hiring and retaining teachers in all subject areas is part of the formula,

but underfunded districts are unable to provide the full staff complement that's envisioned within the formula. So getting to full SFRA funding as quickly as possible is a key to solving the shortage.

And the numbers regarding underfunding-- Again, there's more data and more information in the testimony. But briefly, the numbers regarding underfunding are, right now, a total of \$1.2 billion is still owed to districts in the current school year, and over half of that is owed to 46 low-wealth under-adequacy districts. And Black and Latino students in New Jersey are far more likely to attend schools that are spending well below the SFRA's adequacy level.

And finally, one of the most significant concerns regarding New Jersey's teacher workforce is the lack of racial and ethnic diversity. Our teachers just do not reflect our student population, and that is a problem that is rooted in structural obstacles, like the cost of higher education, potential biases in certification exams; folks have talked about that stuff. And this, even though research shows that by diversifying the teacher workforce, we improve academic outcomes for students.

Methods to recruit and retain a diverse teacher workforce include stipends and scholarships; districts can help pay for the cost of certification. They can hire cohorts so peer support is available. And they can provide mentoring. And that obviously is just kind of the tip of the iceberg.

And you know, we know that teachers of color are often recruited to work in under-resourced schools, and are often concentrated in these schools. And that's another reason to fully fund the school aid formula as quickly as we can.

And we also need the Department of Education to make sure that culturally appropriate and anti-racist curriculum is part of these under-resourced schools; and, in fact, all New Jersey schools. And make sure that the Amistad Program and the new requirement to include Asia American and Pacific Islander history are implemented everywhere, and well.

And I just want to finish by thanking you again for the opportunity to provide this testimony. And just to add that, until we do develop and implement a comprehensive statewide plan to ease the teacher shortage while diversifying the teacher ranks, we'll continue to endure this untenable situation with individual districts going it alone, often competing with each other, and unable to provide their students with the school experience they need to overcome the challenges of the past two years.

So thank you very much; and I'm happy, even obviously beyond this Zoom, to answer any questions.

Thanks.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you; thank you so much, Sharon. I appreciate it. And one of the things I want all of the members and everyone listening to know is that Assemblyman Mukherji and I do have legislation in to have a task force to examine and evaluate SFRA. It's been a while. We need to go back to that.

So thank you very much.

Next up we have Rhena Jasey-Goodman; yes, my daughter. But this is a topic that we are both very passionate about, and so I'm very proud to have her give testimony today.

Rhena.

RHENA JASEY-GOODMAN: Good morning, everyone. Thank you for having me.

I am the Induction Coordinator at Montclair State University. Prior to that, I was a public school teacher for 10 years, and I was a coach and director in the New York City Department of Education.

And so thank you for what everyone has shared. Many of the suggestions, observations, and experiences that everyone has shared are similar to things that I had included in my testimony. And so I will try just to sort of touch on some other ideas.

I think that it's important, when we consider the impact of the teacher shortage on student learning, to look at the impacts that the pandemic has had overall on teacher preparation and on students. Because in my position as the Induction Coordinator, I support teachers in their first, second, and third year. And what I have seen is that our brand-new teachers are really struggling, and leading to even more of a teacher shortage because they're just not able to stay in the classroom.

And so we think about how teachers are prepared during this pandemic. Many of the teachers in their first years of teaching right now were trained completely virtually. And so if you think about what that means, that means that they didn't have the opportunity to do their student teaching in-person; to develop classroom management skills; how to support students in person; how to set up and structure a classroom space to maximize learning; or to just experience the physical nature of being a teacher, right? Getting up early, getting there before the students, walking the students from classroom to classroom if they're an elementary school teacher, dealing with 25 people in their space. And so they just didn't have that experience of

really understanding what it was going to be like when they got into the classroom as a teacher of record.

And so these limitations in their preparation left our new teachers unprepared to meet the heightened needs of the students returning to the classroom for the first time in over a year. And so we now have the least prepared teachers trying to meet the needs of the neediest population we've had in a very long time. And so it's just been a very challenging situation.

And so we think about some of the students' needs and challenges that have come out during this pandemic. We know that many students have missed instruction due to issues with virtual learning -- either because they are not able to learn virtually because of their age, or other learning styles, or they didn't have the resources to engage in online learning. Maybe the Internet was their issue. Maybe they didn't have the right devices, maybe they didn't have enough devices; they were sharing one device with siblings, so they couldn't all be on at the same time. So we know that they lost learning time.

We also know that students have experienced COVID-related trauma, financial instability, and mental health challenges. And all of these are things that happen generally, but the pandemic just exacerbated these inequalities and challenges that already existed in our schools.

And so now we have-- In addition, we have students who are demonstrating immaturity and a difficulty with social-emotional interaction with peers. Why? Because they were in front of a screen for a year. And I've talked to people who work with kids in Summit, Morristown, Newark, South Orange-Maplewood, Milburn. It seems to be across the board, people

are saying, “Yeah, it’s like the kids are two years younger than they actually are,” when you think about their maturity level. And so that really impacts their ability to engage in the classroom and to interact with each other.

And so now students need to relearn how to do school, how to interact with their peers, and how to be more independent. So we see the needs of students are high-end and the preparation of teachers is less than it typically is. People have already talked about the impact of the vacancies on all the different roles served by teachers, paraprofessionals, bus drivers, aides, student teachers, right? So if there are no bus drivers, there are certain kids who are not getting to school every day, and that impacts special ed kids more. So that when we talk about the achievement gap, we can think about the impact of that.

The lack of paraprofessionals means that the teacher of record, in many cases a brand new teacher, does not have the other person in the room, or people in the room, to help support the individualized instruction and behavior needs of the students. And so it’s even more stress and strain on that brand new teacher, so making it even harder for them to stay in the classroom.

We know that many other roles are pulled -- department chairs, vice principals are covering classes, ESL teachers, academic interventionists -- and so all in all those people are pulled to cover classes. They are not able to supervise and support the new teachers and give them the support they need to be successful.

So we see that all of these sort of things come together to lead teachers just feeling really unsupported, really stressed out, and their mental health is suffering; the ones who I have worked with specifically.

One of the suggestions that I have is that we need to better leverage the induction mentor teacher. And people have talked about that a little bit, but that is something that all brand-new teachers need to have. But sometimes -- I won't say in many cases -- but sometimes those teacher induction mentors are not fully trained and prepared to support those teachers. And so how can we better leverage those positions, how can we better train them, and how can we better support their ability to support their teachers?

I would want to talk about a couple things that we're doing at Montclair State. Somebody talked, and we talked, about the issues of substitute teachers. We have created a new program called *SubIN* at Montclair State, where we are helping to support students in Montclair State with obtaining their sub license; and we also provide a three-hour training for them. And we provide those names to our network school district so that there are more people available to substitute.

And we've already talked about reducing the barriers to entry into the teaching professions: the edTPA, the cost of the Praxis, loan forgiveness -- all of those things. We are doing residencies here; I work with the residency program at Montclair State. We're doing teacher academies here with Newark. So we have a lot of, sort of, other ideas we could share, if those are things of interest that people would like to talk more about.

I think, in general, we just need to think about what do students need, and what do the teachers need to be successful, and how do we provide them with what they need.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you; thank you, Rhena.

And yes, we talk about this 24-7 in our house, I think, sometimes. Because in addition to Rhena being in education, my sister lives with us and she's a high school teacher in Newark. And she -- we talk about this every night at dinner. How students are two years behind emotionally, socially, as well as academically. So we have huge challenges ahead of us.

Next up we're going to hear-- And please, I'm mindful of the time, and I do want to leave some time for my members to ask some questions or make comments at the end.

So Betsy Ginsberg, who represents -- I should know this -- who is the Executive Director of the Garden State Coalition of Schools. And I believe-- Betsy, are you here with David Aderhold?

ELISABETH 'BETSY' GINSBURG: Yes; and in the interest of time, I want to introduce David Aderhold, President of the Garden State Coalition, and Superintendent of the West Windsor-Plainsboro School District.

And I'll hand it over to David.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you, Betsy.

DAVID ADERHOLD, Ed.D.: Thank you, Assemblywoman Jasey, and thank you, Betsy.

Good morning to the members of the Joint Committee and to all the other speakers.

I don't have the benefit of hearing all the early testimony, but what I would say is that since March 2020, our profession obviously has seen a dramatic increase in retirements, early retirements, medical leaves, and maternity leaves. And when you factor in all those factors together with a broken teacher pipeline, less individuals entering the profession than any

other time in our recent history; as well as when you start thinking about the systemic barriers and the broken processes that have been put in place, quite frankly the failed education policies of the Christie Administration that still continue today -- the Pete Schulman era of terror; and when you start thinking of the continued -- those are continued practices by the current New Jersey Department of Ed, the current State Board and, quite frankly, the current Legislature-- There are definitely things that we can do immediately to start thinking about creating remedy to the teacher pipeline.

edTPA essentially has -- we have essentially, as a State, outsourced teacher certification to Pearson, right? That is what we've done. It was predicted in 2017 by those who testified at that time, by members of the university presidents and college presidents, by members of education advocacy groups, school Administrators. We predicted this would happen. It has only been exacerbated by the pandemic.

So now you take those components, and I look at what's happening in our district today. I have over 80 maternity leaves this school year; 80 on a staff of 900; a teaching staff of 900. Trying to find maternity leave; German maternity leave certification is near impossible. Dual Language immersion, Mandarin/Elementary -- nearly impossible; Elementary teacher -- nearly impossible, right? It's every certification area that there's a shortage. And then if we look around to our partner colleges, and we look at areas like World Language -- TCNJ had one of the best Spanish certification programs in the state. We tried to recruit those staff at all costs. They shut the program down at the onset of edTPA. They could not get enough candidates to make that a viable program for them to offer.

We are not producing family consumer science certification area teachers. We are not producing teachers of technology. In fact, we received a resignation last night from one of our teachers, as he's going off to industry; and he's one of our teachers of technology at one of our high schools.

TCNJ produces three to five teachers per year with that certificate. I could hire all of them, every year. One district with need, let alone the other 600.

So when we start thinking about immediate solutions -- and I'll just jump there in my testimony -- the Legislature and the Governor have signed a couple of things recently. One, we move to the 30 substitute credits, you know; that's something. Two, we also brought in retired nurses, and now we're bringing in retired teachers. Quick fix Band-Aids, but there's a lot more we can do. One, we need to look at the full reciprocity for those entering New Jersey with certifications in other areas; that is a cumbersome process if you're coming from outside of New Jersey. It does not need to be that way, and we are in emergency code red. When it comes to having vacancies, we need to get people in the pipeline as quickly as possible. So those coming from other states should be immediately issued New Jersey certificates.

We need to look at extending alternate route programs for career changers. We need to create embedded and funded residency programs. We need to end the New Jersey residency requirement. We need to develop a process to enable our instructional aides and our paraprofessionals to become certified. We need to incentivize our current high school students, as they're entering into college, incentivize them now to become teachers, through grants, scholarships, loan forgiveness. We have to rethink the ongoing negative campaign against public education that's been waged in the name of

accountability -- forcing tests that no one uses; they're not a predictor of anything. Every district already has internal assessments that we use to support students who are struggling on their individual learning journeys. No one, no district has ever said, "Thank God for the Start Strong Assessment. Now I know I need to give targeted support to that child." That's just ridiculous. But in the meantime, it creates this era of accountability in the name of nothing, just so we can feel good about offering assessments. We need to come off that and realize that the educators know what they're doing in providing those targeted interventions to kids.

But that is driving this negative campaign against-- And this campaign and philosophy have caused harm by advocating for and facilitating the implementation of this assessment system that fails to yield meaningful, reliable, or valid data. It has impacts on our college partners, it has impacts on our -- I know it has impacts on the perception of our public, and ultimately, it has impacts on funding.

Again, we have made systematic moves, as a State, to outsource certification. It just makes no sense. And we had a robust -- our college partners had a robust certification process where they yielded student teachers to become teachers. What has changed is we almost have no mid-year teachers joining the profession. We used to have teachers coming out in January who would graduate mid-year and be entering the workforce. Because of the five-year program now, that doesn't happen. We've implemented barriers, we've not removed them. We need to get in the business of removing barriers, flooding our workforce, allowing the educators to help train the entering -- and when I say *educators* I'm talking about our

college university partners, as well as school systems -- to train our new teaching candidates as they enter the profession.

Through my work at Garden State, or NJASA, or Mercer County ASA, I constantly am hearing from colleagues who are distressed about the concerns of filling vacancies. I talked to a colleague the other day -- a principal in an urban high school that has 18 current vacancies today. They do not have substitutes to cover all those classes, and the students are going to an auditorium with one security guard and one substitute; and they're sitting there, idle, with no instruction.

The crisis is in front of you. The question is, what's the Legislature, the Department of Ed, the State Board, and the Governor going to do about it? Because the profession has been calling for help long before the pandemic. It's only been exacerbated by the pandemic.

So I appreciate the Assemblywoman calling this topic today, and I hope that the Committee can bring forward meaningful recommendations and meaningful actionable steps. Because at the end of the day, what we need is actionable steps to help impact our profession.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: I hear you.

MR. ADERHOLD: And ultimately impact our kids.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Yes.

Thank you so much. You always bring an on-the ground perspective to us, and I appreciate that very much. And your phone is going to be ringing.

Next up we have Fran Pfeffer from NJEA.

And Fran, please keep it short.

FRANCINE PFEFFER: I'll be so short, because I'm not talking. I'm just here with my members.

First, we have Sean Spiller, our President, who will introduce our two members who are speaking.

So -- shortest testimony.

SEAN M. SPILLER: Look at that, Fran. You get the prize. (laughter)

Well, I do want to say thank you, Fran, and certainly Madam Chair. Thank you so much for having me -- having us today. I'll keep it brief as well.

But I do want to note, and certainly just say, I'm Sean Spiller. I'm a high school science teacher, and I'm also, proudly, the President of the New Jersey Education Association, representing over 200,000 public school employees throughout the state.

As I jumped on, and I know there was a little technical thing getting on in, so I assumed Julian was the first one speaking. But as I listened to his testimony, or what he was closing with, and then I've heard every single speaker since then. It is no surprise to me that I think the Committee is hearing, over and over, the same things; over and over, because you're talking to educators, and we're all seeing the same thing, and we're all asking for the same thing.

So I'll just use a moment to emphasize and reemphasize some of the pieces, very quickly, that you've heard. But I think it is so important to note that this is not a problem that's just happened with the pandemic; again, this has been building for a number of years. The pandemic has exacerbated it. We're dealing with a situation -- I know in all the interviews I keep doing,

people keep talking about people retiring. Yes, that's an issue, but it is not just that. There are people not going into the profession, and people are not staying in it. They're leaving mid-career, which is a huge piece as well. We've got to address these pieces, and we've got to take that seriously.

I appreciate you guys dedicating the time to listen to us today. But there is an urgency, I think, as you've just heard. This is, honest, now; it's not building. We are barely getting by.

We've got a lot of people who are making it work, and I'm going to introduce two of them in just a moment. First, from our Paterson Public Schools, our Chair of the NJEA Urban Education Committee teacher, Todd Pipkin, will speak. And from Jackson Public Schools, President of Jackson Education Association, Lisa Crate. They can speak to their own experiences. But again, I just want to note that we have, exactly as you just heard, students who are normally getting visits by specialists; not happening -- right? -- you know, when they're going for art, music, and those pieces. Why? Because those teachers are being called to cover other classes. Students who normally can go to counselors or nurses when they have a problem, right? They're not having the ability to do that, because they're not there; they're not in place. We can't get people to fill these positions, right? We've got general education teachers, normally with a special education teacher; not the case. They're getting pulled out to cover. We've got our paraprofessionals; not there. We can't fill those positions either, right?

So the coverage pieces are huge, and the impact it has on the students of that same teacher is also huge -- the one pulled out. You're not prepping in your prep periods; you're constantly running to another class. You don't know the content area. You know, these are challenges that our

students are facing. And if they're lucky enough to have that, that's great. If they're not, as the example you just heard, students are asked to sit in an auditorium or gymnasium. They've got, maybe, somebody there just to oversee some busy work or something else, but they're not getting the instruction that they need. This isn't even talking about substitutes, cafeteria workers, bus drivers, that we're all talking about in our ESP space as well, where in that, also, we're seeing major shortages. And it has an impact on our students' educational outcomes.

So we've going to address this right now. There is absolutely a crisis that we are in, and it is upon us. We are asking for help, and you're hearing some solutions right now. I do think it's important, when we talk about what can you do. Debt forgiveness programs, low-mortgage loans -- something along those lines. Yes, I've heard higher pay, signing bonuses; people keep talking about some of those things as well. Get rid of edTPA; get rid of a lot of the onerous paperwork that educators are being inundated with constantly, and districts as well. You know, there's a way to streamline, as we noted, without lessening the educational quality. There are on-ramps for our paras to become certified educators. By the way, that helps spread diversity, which we've got to have as part of our focus.

It is -- there's a lot there. And I'll cut it short there because I think you've heard it, and I'm just saying it again because I think you're hearing the same thing over and over.

So with that, I'd like to introduce one of our first educators, and certainly from Paterson Public Schools, as I noted, Todd Pipkin.

Todd.

T O D D P I P K I N: Good morning.

Thank you, Sean, for that welcome.

As Sean stated, I'm a special education teacher who teaches resource and inclusion at Eastside High School in Paterson.

A lot of points have been made. I guess I've missed portions -- got on late -- so hopefully I won't reiterate some of those things.

But what I would like to say is, serving as the Chair also for the NJEA Urban Ed Committee, I get to hear certain views from various counties throughout the state. So my viewpoint today won't just be on my behalf, but also on the behalf of my other Committee members.

From what I've seen in the high school where I work, many of the students who enter the 9th grade are below grade level in reading and math. The pandemic has made this worse. The impact of the teacher shortages will only expand the student achievement gap as time progresses.

In my high school, we have roughly 2,300 students and 150 teachers. It is not uncommon for us to have 40 classrooms in need of a teacher on any given day. As a result, we often, as has been stated, have to house the students in the auditorium, several classes together, under the supervision of only a few staff members.

In addition, teachers are solicited regularly to cover classes during their preparation periods, as another means to help address the shortfall in staffing. And needless to say, that takes away from parental contact time, lesson planning, and then collaborative planning with your colleagues; as well as restroom issues.

Now, we talked about the different impacts that this has on our students. But although I have several listed in my testimony, if I could bullet point two I would say students lose the essential continuity of the given

content; and they also begin, as a result of this being an ongoing process, they begin to lose interest and motivation towards learning, which wanes due to the ongoing disruptions.

We spoke about how this program -- or how this shortage, if you will, has addressed things on the State level. But recently I read, within the last couple of weeks, an article with a survey conducted by the National Education Association. And it stated that 55 percent of the teachers surveyed now plan to leave the profession sooner than they anticipated due to the COVID and other extenuating issues from staff shortages. This not only impacts students today, but it kicks the can down the road. Students over the next several years will need experienced teachers to help them advance.

As experienced teachers leave, there will be new teachers entering a profession at a time when mentoring, support, and experience will be lacking. That same survey pinpointed that those who are Black -- 62 percent now say they anticipate leaving the profession sooner than they anticipated, and 58 percent of those who identify as Hispanic and Latino plan to also leave earlier than anticipated.

The article mentioned that, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in January of 2020 -- only two months before the pandemic changed the face of public education -- there were 10.6 million educators in the United States. Today we have around 10 million. So nationally we're talking about, in that short timeframe a reduction of 600,000 educators from our schools.

Taken together, the interrupted learning, the lack of staff, and a future that may see inexperienced staff dealing with the fallout of the pandemic, puts the future of our students' long-term achievement in

question. To say I am greatly concerned for students and colleagues is an understatement.

I just want to say thank you for this opportunity to address such a pertinent issue in the profession that I love so dearly. And I hope that we can work together to find solutions.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you, Todd. I appreciate that.

Sean, you had a second speaker?

MR. SPILLER: Yes, Lisa.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Okay.

L I S A C R A T E: Hi, thank you.

Good morning, everyone.

Thank you for allowing me to speak today to the Joint Committee.

My name is Lisa Crate, and I am the President of the Jackson Education Association in Ocean County. I've been in education for 29 years, and I represent nearly 1,000 teachers, secretaries, and paraprofessionals in my District alone.

So what I want to talk about today is, as we've all talked about the ongoing crisis about the shortage of educators in our profession, it goes without saying that every district has students whose academic, and social and emotional growth have been interrupted, despite our best efforts over the last two years of the pandemic. And we talked about cuts due to S2 for our teachers, and paraprofessionals, and our child study team members, and everyone else involved in education. But what we're finding is that the needs

of our students -- and we know this -- can only be met when we are present in full, working toward normalcy.

Unfortunately, that's not happening, and we know that. The shortages have forced us to look at this, and have things happen, and put us in positions that we never believed we'd be in. We have resource teachers and interventionists -- whose sole purpose is to work with students who are most in need of assistance -- being pulled, on a daily basis, to cover classes. We have student counselors who should be meeting with and counseling our students -- who were isolated for all those months during COVID -- being pulled to cover duties in classes. We have principals spending multiple periods every day covering lunch duties, leaving the administrative support, necessary for our teachers to have success, on hold until they can be available.

We have no qualified people available to cover special education positions when traditional teachers have to take a leave of absence, forcing some of our class sizes to balloon to over 30 students, in some cases, in order to make sure that we can cover all of our IEPs.

Our special area teachers aren't able to teach music and art as fully as they should, which we know our students need now more than ever, because they too have to be pulled to cover classes and duties.

As a full-time President, I have jumped back into the fray over the past two years. I've worked as a paraprofessional, worked as a teacher; and for weeks leading up to Christmas break, I covered a kindergarten class so that those students could have some consistency prior to the holidays.

Not one area of staffing has gone untouched by the shortage we are now facing. Educators have gone above and beyond, and continue to do so at a rate that is literally burning them out. And when I say *educators*, I

mean all educators: teachers, paraprofessionals, social workers, speech therapists, nurses, secretaries, our principals, and supervisors. Everyone, every single person is affected by the shortage. And when we're affected, our students feel it.

Every quarter--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Lisa?

MS. CRATE: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: If you could wrap up -- because we still have several people to hear from, and clearly we're going to need another session. But I think we've received a lot of information about the shortages; what we're looking for now is solutions. So if you have something to add to that, I would really like to hear it.

MS. CRATE: Well, my biggest concern is how we move forward, and who's going to be holding the dominant narrative in this crisis. And my hope is that all of the stakeholders -- everyone here present; our educators, especially -- will be involved in what those fixes look like. And today's meeting is a great first step, and I appreciate your time for letting us have the time to speak.

So thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you; I appreciate your comments.

And yes, clearly it's going to take all of us working together to more than address, but also resolve these issues.

Next up -- Kenyon Kummings. Kenyon is the Superintendent of Wildwood City School District.

Kenyon, I would ask that if you have something new to add, we would appreciate that. Because I still have five more after you.

J. KENYON KUMMING S: Thank you, Assemblywoman.

I am the Superintendent of Wildwood Public Schools. I am also the President for Great Schools New Jersey, which is a partnership between ASA and the ELC, representing districts with 40 percent or more free and reduced lunch. So this is something that we've been focusing on in our own meetings. I actually came to know this issue pretty granularly when I testified before the Joint Committee in 2019, when we were talking about minority recruitment and the pipeline.

So if we're looking at this issue, it's really three phases. We're talking about recruitment, which we've heard a little bit about and solutions there. We're talking about the pipeline, and what's happening to prepare teachers. And we're talking about retention.

So we did hear about some data points. I can't share my screen, but as a former special ed teacher, I'm going to hack it a little bit.

So this is the EPP data, that was referenced earlier, from our State. And you can see we had some high watermarks; and I believe Superintendent Miceli said this is a decade-old problem, which it is.

If we go back to 2012, that is when the State changed the GPA requirement for students to enter an EPP; it used to be 2.77, it was raised to a 3.0. Then we introduced the Praxis Core, in 2014; and the edTPA in 2017.

So we now see that we have a decline in excess of 40 percent of what we used to prepare in the teacher workforce. And within that, if we look at the New Jersey Policy Perspective data from Mark Webber, these are enrollments by minority candidates in EPPs in the State of New Jersey. So

you can see that same decline for enrollment of Latinx teacher candidates and also Black candidates within the State of New Jersey. Which I think needs to be highlighted when we're talking about this, because we already had a representation issue prior to talking about this global teacher shortage.

I've continued to follow this; we heard about Montclair. Dean Robinson is there; has helped with this presentation, as has Dean Keenan from Stockton.

I'll talk about some solutions at the recruitment level. And this is not unique to Wildwood, but we do have Grow Your Own programs throughout the State of New Jersey, where we're trying to create CTE-type programs for high school students. So our high school students sit within our Early Childhood Program, and they assist in those classrooms as laboratory settings. They take -- will begin taking a three-course sequence next year, which will be credit-bearing at Stockton University. And Stockton also has teacher candidates within their program, enrolled at Stockton, mentoring our students -- paired with them as they navigate the Praxis Core and go into their program.

So in addition to that, we also are facilitating the students sitting for the Praxis Core -- which is much like an SAT test -- and we are paying for that as well. So we actually have them passing some or all of the sections before they get to college. So that barrier is being removed for them. We're also finding ways to fund that for them, and since doing so, 75 percent of our candidates who have gone to Stockton University are of color, and we're trying to aim at solutions that we can control at our level.

I will say that it's unfortunate that we have to create mechanisms like that, because we're dealing with barriers that were put in place, that we

can absolutely show are affecting our workforce, the size of the workforce, and the diversity of the workforce. So if we're talking about pipeline solutions, I would recommend that -- I'll echo some of the concerns earlier -- that we eliminate the GPA requirement. It seems that it was done arbitrarily; we can't show that it adds any value to the profession. That we eliminate the Praxis Core, and we eliminate the edTPA as a requirement for certification. We can't show that any of those three things have added any value to the profession or the quality of the workforce. Prior to those going into place, I'm actually -- following them going in place, we also incorporated Achieve NJ in the State of New Jersey. That can now be our mechanism for monitoring quality and making sure that we have high standards within the profession.

Teachers have to be observed multiple times a year based on a State-approved rubric. And then we also incorporated the SGO and the mSGP scores, which have come under their own criticism. But I would argue having a standard evaluation system across the state and monitoring what's happening with our non-tenured teachers, and whether or not they're effective or partially effective, would be a good mechanism to supplant that.

And then, also, which we heard earlier, we have issues of retention and the need for cultural competency at all levels. We have candidates going into the profession, of color, that find themselves in under-resourced schools. They find themselves experiencing bias in the new employment environment. Many educators of color are placed into disciplinary roles on their first posting.

So those things need to be highlighted and educated within our ed prep programs; and also keeping in mind that -- I think it was referenced

earlier -- that we have this issue at all levels. And we do pull our leadership professionals from the teacher ranks. So we're going to continue to have issues in staffing those areas, and that area is going to become even less diverse. Which is why we began on the same query in 2019 -- in looking at principals, and superintendents, and our representation at that level.

So Assemblywoman, you know that I'm available if you need me for anything. I have a lot more data that was included, but I just wanted to kind of home in on the highlights.

But again, this was very much predicted by our colleagues if you do a search of these different policy levers, and when we were warning what was going to happen as far as the outcomes that they would create.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you, Kenyon. I appreciate that. Your phone will be ringing, definitely, because we're only beginning to address this; although many of us have been talking about this, and anticipating this crisis for a while. And for some reason, we can never get things resolved before they become crises.

Tom Puryear is up next, followed by John Burns.

Tom.

THOMAS PURYEAR: Thank you, Assemblywoman Chairperson.

Tom Puryear, State Conference, NAACP.

For months Dr. Julian Heilig, Professor from the University of Kentucky, has been insightful in providing the NAACP components with quality research and insights on how to improve instruction in our nation's schools. That research was shown on the slides that Julian presented earlier today, so I won't repeat that.

So it's important that what is needed to provide quality instruction for New Jersey's students is known. My brief remarks are going to focus on only two areas: cultural responsive teaching and the current teacher certification process. In preparing for this presentation, I reviewed the legislation that was recently passed in the waning days of the last legislative session. I was quite pleased to find that S-2834 had been passed by both legislative chambers. And I think-- Madam Chairperson, I think you and Ms. Reynolds were also co-sponsors of that legislation that was signed into law by the Governor. This legislation mandates that all candidates for a teaching certificate must complete a course or training on cultural responsive teaching as a pedagogy. This recognizes the importance of including students' cultural references in all aspects of their learning. The adoption of this legislation is an excellent opportunity to expand the ability of our New Jersey teachers to provide instruction for all of their students.

But what about our New Jersey teachers who have already achieved teacher certification? The NAACP hopes that DOE and our legislative branches find a process or procedure to have existing certified teachers participate in a similar professional development component. Such an endeavor will improve the quality of instruction for more students.

My second point is that we hear a lot about obtaining a teacher's certificate in our State should be streamlined, but that process must not sacrifice existing rigor. The NAACP is of the opinion that New Jersey should review the teacher certification programs/processes to determine if current practices impede entry into the profession. It is well known that African Americans' performances on most standardized tests do not have the same bell-shaped curve results as other ethnic groups. We know that all New Jersey

school districts do not provide the same quality of academic readiness as other New Jersey school districts. As such, New Jersey should reexamine its entry criteria into the teacher education programs by allowing more interested students an earnest opportunity to achieve their dreams to become educators. Flexibility is needed, without sacrificing rigor, if our goal is to have a qualified and diverse teaching force.

Thank you very much.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you, Tom. It's always good to see you and to hear from you. And I pledge that we will continue to work together on these issues.

MR. PURYEAR: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Sometimes it takes a crisis to get us to focus and come up with real solutions. And I think this is such a moment.

John Burns; how are you, John?

And you'll be followed by Patricia Morgan.

J O H N B U R N S, Esq.: Thank you very much, Chairwoman.

I'm going to be very brief, as I'm going to be introducing to you our NJSBA's Educator-in-Residence.

I just wanted to mention to you that, as you know, the Legislature has begun to work on this issue. There have been various pieces that were passed in the last legislative session with regard to CTE, getting retired teachers back into the classroom, and, of course, a pilot program that would look at eliminating some of these barriers for teachers.

And in this session we have our bills with regard to the residency requirement, eliminating edTPA, and various loan redemption programs.

I want to introduce to you NJSBA's Educator-in-Residence. And Vincent DeLucia has been a teacher for 34 years, prior to joining the NJSBA nine years ago. He has experience in both South and North Brunswick as a teacher, a Principal, a Director of Professional Learning, Communications, and Assistant to the Superintendent and Director of Curriculum.

And with that, let me hand it over to Vince.

Thank you.

VINCENT DeLUCIA: Thank you, John.

Good morning, all; and I thank Chairwoman Jasey and the members of the Committee for this opportunity today.

I'm going to be as brief as possible. I understand the time limitations.

I also want to suggest to you that my colleagues have clearly defined the problem, and we have some significant appropriate suggestions for the Legislature and the DOE to consider.

In addition to my nine years as the -- at School Boards, I have had a variety of other experiences.

What I'm going to suggest to you is -- I'm going to give you the *why*; the *why* the revision of these various qualifications will actually not have any negative impact. And the reason is, is the work that was done in 2012. The Teach New Jersey Act has been a game changer when it has come to the public schools. The manner in which our teachers and other staff are getting performance appraisals is very different. No longer are we looking at what's the level of blinds in a classroom. Teachers are getting very constructive criticism. And the Administrators within our schools now are certified in a research-based evaluation system. All those things should give us comfort to

know that our teachers are getting significant support throughout their journey. And teaching -- like any other opportunity, any other profession -- is a constant process of learning and moving forward.

Another thing is -- it was mentioned by others -- is the rigorous interview process. Quite frankly, GPAs, edTPA, etc. -- they are not predictors of whether or not someone will be successful working with kids, or be successful in the classroom. It's just because that's not true in most professions. It's not about the coursework, it's about the application of that coursework, and the way it's internalized and way we continue to learn about it.

But in our job, teaching is no longer an isolated position; it is now collaborative. I emphasize the fact that teachers are working in learning communities, they're working in teams. And that coaches and supervisors and others are working directly with our staff in order to calve them on a path of continuous improvement. And they are collaborating together, which is also important.

I have to emphasize the importance of formal collaboration. You know, in 2013, NJSBA, NJASA, NJPSA, NJEA, and AFT established the New Jersey Labor Manager Collaborative, along with Professor Saul Rubenstein of the Rutgers School of Labor and Management. And what we have learned, and what Dr. Rubenstein has proven in his 20-plus years of research, is that with formal collaboration there's a greater opportunity to improve student learning. And at the same time, it also evens out retention of new teachers, and all teachers. That, for example, after five years it does not matter if it's a high-performing or low performing school; it doesn't matter if it's a high poverty or low poverty school. Teachers remain in those

schools, and kids are on this continuous path of improvement. So much so that last fall, the U.S. Secretary of Education visited Delran Township in order to recognize the work that's happening collaboratively among these leadership groups in New Jersey. And the NEA has provided the \$3 million grant to the NJEA Labor Management Collaborative to continue this collaboration training within the State of New Jersey and elsewhere.

So what I'm suggesting to you is, that Teach New Jersey has had a positive significant impact on changing. And that really is the support structure that you have in order to look at these false qualifications that are impeding the development of the teachers. And as other speakers have said, and the data is quite clear -- we do have our marginalized students who are attending high schools in New Jersey where they're not getting the same quality of education, and therefore, they are at a disadvantage when they enter our various programs.

Again, there's much more to say; but I thank you for the opportunity. And I do encourage you to relax and to eliminate these impediments to good teaching in New Jersey.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you; music to my ears.

Next up we have Ashley Bencan, from JerseyCAN.

A S H L E Y B E N C A N: Yes, you got it. (laughter) That's it.

Thank you so much.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: You're welcome.

MS. BENCAN: I know we have less than normal time, so I'm going to -- you have my testimony. I'm going to quickly introduce myself, and then blow through it as fast as I can.

So my name is Ashley Bencan. I'm here on behalf of JerseyCAN to share my perspectives.

I was a classroom teacher. I worked at the NJDOE for quite some time, and now I'm leading a statewide tutoring program.

So I wanted to quickly pivot to solutions, because I appreciate Assemblywoman Jasey's focus there, especially today.

So my testimony had three solutions; we're going to add a fourth. The fourth is, these conversations with this depth of feedback of information, of people all across New Jersey, is really critical to continue. One hearing is definitely not going to do it. So whether it's formal or informal, deep, robust conversations with all of us at the table are really important.

Next solution: The teacher diversity package that many of you mentioned in reference, as well as other policies that were recently signed into law; the first being the teacher certification pilot. NJDOE just released regulations, and all we need to do, as a collective group, if this is one of the areas in which we know being code red -- like David Aderhold said -- we need teachers now, getting that application from NJDOE out the door immediately will allow tons of districts to apply; and immediately be able to waive at least one of the barriers -- that I've heard several of you mention -- to certification.

The second one: The key to this conversation, from my perspective -- especially hearing five or six of you talk about the EPP Annual Reports -- is the data. So the State of New Jersey has never had demand data. Building on sharing your comments, I loved it. The Governor just signed a bill that will now enable us to get that data. But this collective group needs to put some pressure on just pulling the trigger. So the State already has existing sharing agreements; an existing longitudinal system where the

data that's been missing to inform our course projections can be shared. And in six months, we could have teacher workforce projections that tell us -- and answer that question -- how many courses are no longer going to be offered in the State of New Jersey within one year, two years, three years? How many computer science teachers do we actually need if we want all students to have access to a computer science course, right? The questions go on, and on, and on. How many paraprofessionals do we need? All of those things.

And then pivoting -- as my last comment -- back to the kids. So the statewide NJ Tutoring Corps was established out of philanthropy, out of the pandemic, last summer. We're running a school-year program now, and we're trying to keep it going for the summer. We reach 2,000 students, K-5. Everything that you're talking about has been happening, both from a staffing perspective, with our partners; and from the student perspectives, the students have been growing.

So how do we take the pressure off our teachers, paraprofessionals, and school staff; and also provide those immediate supports that all of our students need? And I think it calls for investing in one of those statewide programs, similar to Tennessee -- if we want to follow another state that's leading the way -- apprenticeships and tutoring. And they're doing that, hand-in-hand.

So thank you so much for the time, and I hope to continue this conversation.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: This is definitely a conversation that will continue because we have to come up with solutions. It's not enough to just talk about it; we've got to come up with solutions.

I have two more speakers: James Harris from the New Jersey Association of Black Educators, and Danielle West, from the New Jersey Public Charter School Association.

James, you're on. Your time is limited.

JAMES HARRIS: Good morning; and I'm accompanied by my wife, Justine.

And I want to thank the Joint Committee on the Public Schools for this very, very important conversation.

I represent the New Jersey Association of Black Educators, which is a statewide education advocacy group that's looking at equity and excellence in education throughout the State of New Jersey.

I have quite a few points, but I just want to start by saying teachers perform one of the most important jobs in the world. Teachers and educators should be paid as if they are the most important workers in New Jersey and the United States of America.

Clearly, if we're talking about a pandemic, we're going to have to take a serious look at the compensation that teachers get. Because as many speakers have said, it is now a five-year process for many students, and even longer for others. So if you invest the five years into the cost of going to school -- and New Jersey has some of the most expensive higher education in the country -- then you have to look at the returns on investment.

I'm going to go directly to what I believe are some of the most important recommendations.

First of all, we need to increase the pay to attract highly qualified, committed people. Two, we need to eliminate some of the significant barriers that discourage people from pursuing educational professions. And I think

it's already been mentioned that the GPA is not a predictor of success in the classroom. It never has been, and I don't think it ever will be. No one can convince me that a person with a 2.85 is a worse teacher than someone who got a 3.25.

Secondly, we obviously need to get rid of the practice exams. Because, as Mr. Puryear has indicated, on most standardized tests, African Americans happen to bottom out, then followed by Latinos. And the New Jersey Association of Black Educators, of course, is very concerned about the lack of diversity throughout the State of New Jersey, being one of the most racially segregated states in the country. We find that a disproportionately large number of our urban teachers happen to be African American or Latino. And unfortunately, some of the urban schools' environment is such that it is discouraging to see some of the conditions that students have to -- people have to work in.

We also want to say that we should require that teachers, who can get certified in the State of New Jersey, should have the experience of working in different communities so that they can understand the social, economic, and cultural/racial dynamic before they are certified to teach in the State of New Jersey.

I believe also that persons who get certified in the State of New Jersey should be well-equipped to teach the curriculum that's now required -- the mandates of the Amistad, the mandates for the Holocaust, the mandates for the Asian Pacific Islander curricular, as well as the LGBTQ. It makes no sense to send people into an environment where they're expected to obey the laws, but they're not prepared to obey the law or to know how to teach the curriculum that is now required.

And finally, I want to say that the accountability issue has to be in place. There has to be accountability, starting with teachers; there has to be classroom accountability, as far as principals, superintendents, boards of education, and, I daresay, the Department of Education, as well as the Governor's Office.

We now see how this pandemic has affected us; now it's time to have the will to address some of these very pressing issues.

The rest of my testimony is being submitted, so the full breadth of it. But I just want to say how absolutely important this conversation is; and the New Jersey Association of Black Educators stands ready to work with the Department, and all of my colleagues, to get this done with all deliberate speed.

Thank you very much.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you so much, James. I appreciate your comments, and I know that you are there to work with us as well.

Danielle West-Augustin.

DANIELLE WEST - AUGUSTIN: Yes; good afternoon.

Good afternoon, Assemblywoman Jasey and members of the Joint Committee.

I'm going to make this very brief, as I think some of my colleagues today really have covered the crisis that we have here. The bell has truly rung already for us, as a State educational community right now, in terms of our staffing challenges.

However, a Band-Aid for the immediate is to bring back the temporary certificate that was issued during COVID, which allowed

candidates to only have to hold a bachelor's degree, pass the physiology and hygiene test, and demonstrate the required number of credits. I think that certificate is needed today, more than it was during COVID when most districts were virtual and we really had the flexibility to deal with some of our staffing challenges.

Number two: Structurally, we have to look at what is happening on the ground. Back in 2012, there was a white paper that was published by the American Institute for Research, around structural transformations of schools and innovative staffing. That paper really talked about the flexibility that's even needed in the workforce. So here in New Jersey today, we're seeing teachers leave the profession, mid-year, unlike we've ever seen before. We're seeing teachers decide not to even enter into teaching. And I think a lot of that has to do also with flexibility that we're not talking about -- that teachers need to be afforded to make sure that they can carry on their home life responsibilities, as well as their work-life responsibilities.

So we really have to be innovative and creative when we're thinking about what's going to happen in the future, and how we attract people into this profession. If you go anywhere else in the workforce, especially after COVID, there is work from home opportunities at times. Teachers don't have that luxury. So that means that districts are going to have to begin to become much more creative and think about how do we bridge public-private partnerships, where our students are able to engage in additional activities with, maybe, other private organizations so that we can allow that flexibility in staffing.

And it also means that we, as districts, are going to be really responsible for how we train teachers. And I think we have the capacity to do both.

Those are some of the things I haven't heard today on our call, that I really just wanted to bring reference to. So again, it's bringing back the temporary certificate; and making sure that when we think about the structural changes that are needed, in addition to compensation and all the other things, you really need to think about flexibility and how to offer teachers flexibility.

As I look on this Zoom call, many folks are home today, right? They had the ability to work from home. The teaching profession doesn't have that as of yet. But they were introduced to it, most certainly, during the pandemic. And so some people have liked that luxury; what it's like to be able to walk to your bathroom and not have to find someone to cover for you.

So we have to think about -- how do we do that? How do we really humanize that experience of teaching as a profession, much like other workforce industries have done with work from home.

So that is my testimony. Thank you, everyone, for having me today. And I look forward to engaging in this conversation.

I'm also a building-level principal. I lead a K-12 charter school. And this is the worst year we've ever had with staffing. So this is very close and near and dear to me, and these calls really do allow us the opportunity to collectively come together with solutions.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you very much, Danielle. I appreciate it.

That concludes our speakers. We have a little bit of time left; I would like to afford my colleagues the opportunity to comment, ask a question, make a suggestion.

Normally, we don't have this many speakers at one session. But it was kind of a pent-up need that required us to have so many people speaking about this.

And I want to thank all of the presenters because each and every one of you presented information. We've been taking -- Mary is sitting to my left -- we've been taking notes. She's actually been making calls. And we have some legislation ready to go, in terms of TPA and some of the other issues that you've mentioned. Because this is-- Unfortunately, this is not news to us, but we haven't had a chance to address it.

So if any of my colleagues would like to make a comment, briefly, the floor is yours.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Just real briefly, Chairwoman Jasey.

I want to thank you for starting this legislative session off with such high energy and such advocacy for our public schools. Thank you to all the people who came on today to raise these concerns. And I just want to let you know that this -- we need another one, but we definitely have sounded the alarm, and I'm ready to roll up my sleeves and get this done, sooner than later.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you.

SENATOR THOMPSON: Madam Chair, if I may.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Yes, Senator.

SENATOR THOMPSON: We've heard a number of complaints

about -- when you're on the job and the problems that teachers encounter. We have a unique situation right now -- the number of people retiring and leaving the profession, etc. -- which has been aggravated by COVID.

But to me, from the testimony, the impression I get is the number one problem, really, is at the beginning of the pipeline. There are not enough individuals seeking to go into teaching.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Right.

SENATOR THOMPSON: I think that, for this, we need the help of the NJEA, the teachers. Thus, the teachers have the kids there for a number of years; they can judge them. If they select some kids in their class -- if they think, "Hey, you'd be a great teacher," and encourage them to start thinking about it. Because this is a decision they make at, roughly, 18, when they graduate. "What are we going to college for?"

I think few kids enroll in college, and then later decide, "I'll become a teacher." So we need a little help inspiring our children to seek a career in teaching in order to get the pipeline-- I mean, they spoke about how it's dropped off -- the number of applicants. And that's what we need to do -- is get the number of applicants built back up.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you, Senator.

Assemblywoman Vicky Flynn.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN FLYNN: Thank you, Assemblywoman.

You actually -- this whole topic picks up on something that I left when I was on the Board in Holmdel. We just had finished a Superintendent search, Assemblywoman. And during that search, there was a very small amount of female candidates, which was very concerning to me. And I did speak with the people who were doing the search about that; because I think

there's also this need to attract minorities and females into those administrative positions.

So that was one of the issues I found as well, in terms of doing that simple search -- that we need to do better in getting people into these pathways. We're talking here about teachers, but also the pathway of having strong administrators and making sure minority and women are well represented there. So that's another area I hope we could talk to at some point.

But it led me-- One of the last parting requests I had for our high school Principal was this area of creating this pathway for future educators within the high school component. And I think a few of our speakers talked about it. I think we're at a critical point where we need to identify who's (indiscernible) those programs and start implementing them.

Here in Monmouth County, we have a very strong Vo-Tech program. We lose a lot of our students in Holmdel to some of those programs, but we have really those high-performing students going there.

One of the things I think we could distinguish ourselves in Holmdel, as well as some of our other schools, is to have these academies -- future educator academies, which will push those kids into that field. And I think that's an area that we really -- Assemblywoman, I would really appreciate -- because I know you're so involved in education for so long -- your insight as to how we could push that along, legislatively; because I think that's a severe need right now -- is to identify those students now.

But also my other concern -- and I put this in an e-mail, then I'll sign off, because I know it's been a long -- a lot going on -- but I have so many thoughts in my head. The other area has to do with these kids, both college

students who were in college during the pandemic, as well as our high school students about to enter college who were in high school during the pandemic. They have lost a lot of instruction. I think everyone will agree. I understand everyone's talking about lessening the standards; I hear that. But I also think, as you probably can imagine, these kids who are in college are going to have to be -- take so much remediation coursework to catch up. Is there something that we can do to encourage colleges to not have to charge students for that, if they're pursuing a career in education? Because that's probably also something that's pushing people out of this field. Because if you're going to have to take all these remedial courses, they're not going to count towards your GPA; they're not going to count towards your ultimate degree. Are we losing students that way? Maybe. So since we've identified a substantial public interest in ensuring that we get more of these well-qualified, highly qualified, and well-intentioned students into teaching, maybe we need to incentivize it a bit by making sure that we're keeping them engaged, giving them that support of the remedial educational course work without having to delay their -- maybe have them choose not to pursue their degree in education.

So that's one idea I thought about as we were talking and listening today. I don't know how we could do that legislatively; again I look to the support of my colleagues here who are with more experience. But that was one of the ideas I had, because I don't want to derail anyone who's inspired to become an educator simply because they have to spend tens of thousands of dollars on remedial coursework to do so.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JASEY: Thank you, Assemblywoman.

We will definitely have a follow-up conversation.

Is there anyone else who would like to speak? (no response)

Seeing no one, I want to thank everyone for being on this call today. I know it's been a long one, but it's also long overdue. We have been seeing this crisis building, and my pledge to you is -- to all of you -- is that this is just the beginning of our -- not just a conversation. We actually have a number of things on our list that we can begin to work on immediately. And the number of people who spoke today, who have so much expertise, experience, and information -- we will be calling on you.

I urge my colleagues to read the written testimony that was submitted by the speakers, and to be in touch with me and my office as we move forward.

I'm thinking we probably will have a follow-up meeting on this issue once we have some action items identified that we can begin to move into place. Because time is of the essence here.

So I want to thank everyone for their time. I want to thank all of the speakers for giving us your time and your expertise.

And I wish all of you a happy afternoon.

I have another two-hour Zoom coming, so I'm going to break here, grab some lunch, and I will be in touch with all of you.

Thank you so much.

(MEETING CONCLUDED)