
Committee Meeting

of

JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

“The Committee will receive testimony from invited guests on how funds received from the United States Department of Education impact New Jersey school districts”

LOCATION: Committee Room 16
State House Annex
Trenton, New Jersey

DATE: January 21, 2025
10:00 a.m.

MEMBERS OF COMMITTEE PRESENT:

Senator Joseph P. Cryan, Co-Chair
Assemblywoman Verlina Reynolds-Jackson, Co-Chair
Senator Angela McKnight
Assemblywoman Linda S. Carter
Assemblywoman Carmen Theresa Morales
Assemblywoman Victoria A. Flynn
Assemblywoman Michele Matsikoudis



ALSO PRESENT:

Rebecca DiBenedetti
Executive Director

Ivy Pomper
Executive Assistant

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



SENATE

Hon. Joseph P. Cryan, Co-Chair

Hon. Renee C. Burgess
Hon. Angela McKnight
Hon. Shirley K. Turner
Hon. Joseph Pennacchio
Hon. Douglas J. Steinhardt
Hon. Michael L. Testa

ASSEMBLY

Hon. Verlina Reynolds-Jackson, Co-Chair

Hon. Linda S. Carter
Hon. Carmen Theresa Morales
Hon. Benjie E. Wimberly
Hon. Victoria A. Flynn
Hon. Michele Matsikoudis
Hon. Erik K. Simonsen

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MEETING NOTICE

TO: Members of the Joint Committee on the Public Schools

The Joint Committee on the Public Schools will meet on Tuesday, January 21, 2025 at 10:00 a.m., in Committee Room 16, State House Annex, to receive testimony from invited guests on how funds received from the United States Department of Education impact New Jersey school districts.

The public may address comments and questions to Rebecca DiBenedetti, Executive Director, at 609-331-2485, or by email at Rsapp@njleg.org

Issued January 7, 2025

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ASSEMBLYWOMAN VERLINA REYNOLDS-JACKSON

(Co-Chair): Well, morning everyone.

And, welcome to the Joint Committee on the Public Schools. We are here today to gather to talk about programs and services that New Jersey relies on for Federal funding. With the potential for significant changes or even dismantling of the U.S. Department of Education, our discussion takes on new urgency. We are here to listen and to learn from our esteemed Superintendents and School Board Administrators about the real and immediate impacts, such as the loss of funding that could be very harmful to New Jersey's schools, students, and communities.

These are challenging times, but they also present an opportunity for us to plan thoughtfully and collaboratively. The insight shared today will help guide our efforts to protect and strengthen the educational foundation for our children, regardless of the uncertainties ahead. We have a very robust lineup of speakers who are prepared to share their expertise and experience.

I want to turn it over now to my Co-Chair, Senator Cryan.

SENATOR JOSEPH P. CRYAN (Co-Chair): Thank you, Assemblywoman.

Good morning, everybody. Thank you all for coming. And, let me just say, you all look a lot better in person than you do on screen.

(laughter)

It is nice to see everybody be together, and I want to take a minute and thank Becky and everybody who helped put us together today. It's good to be together, even on a cold morning, although, I did see someone's screenshot from a car in Colorado with a minus-30 temperature inside the car this morning.

Just a couple comments. We're here to learn on what we believe potentially -- and, as we saw yesterday -- potential real change in terms of where education is moving from the Federal sector. We're not here for your politics. You're not here for ours; we're not here for yours. We're here for facts, all right, and, what potential will be there. I think it's safe to say that the administration, yesterday, made it very clear that if they make comments it's certainly going to try to fulfill those promises. That was, I think, quite clear from the movements yesterday. All we're trying to do is understand what that means for New Jersey. And, in particular, whether it's your school district or what you see at the rest. So, please, let's deal with what we know in terms of what the potential may be, in terms of what we know and the environment that we're in.

With that said, couple other things. If you could advise us not only-- Because, you're here. You're the experts; you're the folks who have lived this. What other comments you have that go with it besides the education that you give us about the funding is: What insight do you have? What ways can we do it a little bit better? What things should we keep an eye out, just in case things don't happen on day two or day three? What potential impacts would we be considering, and what kind of future should we actually consider in terms of what we're doing here in the Legislature? We're going to have, I believe, in this discussion over the next few months, a full discussion on school funding. And, your vision, your insight, and what you see here is certainly going to be part of our discussions as they move forward.

So, not only with how to do things maybe just a little bit better and things to look for, most importantly give us your vision. What things do

you think not only overall based on what we understand will happen -- potentially happen -- with the Department of Education with that funding; what it means, and humanize it, as best you can. I learned a lot more about Perkins Grants in the past couple days in reading, and I'm going to learn a lot more in the next few minutes than I have before. But, what does that mean in terms of the students themselves, and, IDEA and all the other things that we as a Committee talk about?

So, I'm honored to be here with all of you; I want to thank my colleagues on the dais for taking the time today. And, I really want to thank everyone who's joined us online and here in person, for making the trip. We look forward to a robust discussion. Thank you very much.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Does anyone from the Committee have anything they'd like to say? (no response)

All right. Well, let's get started. We'll bring up Hope Grant -- the Superintendent from Trenton Public Schools.

In Trenton, the red, when you push the button -- red means live.

H O P E G R A N T: Good morning.

A L L: Good morning.

M S. G R A N T: Thank you. My name is Hope Grant; I'm one of the Assistant Superintendents for the Trenton Public School District.

When we are talking about Federal money-- The Federal money assists us in creating a real level playing field for our students. It's not about even creating additional opportunities, but just laying a level playing field for our students. We receive Title I; Title I SIA; Title IV, Title II A; Title III; and Title III Immigrant. So, I want to talk you through what that looks like

for our school district, and what I would probably say for most other urban school districts.

So, I'm going to start with the money that we get from IDEA, which includes CEIS. And, that's the early intervention services. In the City of Trenton right now, a large percentage of our families do not get proper prenatal care. So, our children leave out of the hospital, at birth, already one step behind; already not on a playing field. In the City of Trenton, we have one open public library. We have about one or two bookstores that exist within our city. And, that is not even talking about if we even are able to get access to books in the students' native language. So, even if you are a parent who wants to support your child academically -- before they get to school -- the ability to access books in the City of Trenton is minimal. The City of Trenton *is* a book desert. So, when you think about our children before they even arrive to our doorstep -- if they get to us at early childhood, which is 3 - 4 years old -- they already have a gap in being able to have access to academic materials. Books where they're able to even flip through the pages and create some of those early learning opportunities that happen in home before they get to the school. So, we may get to us living in a book desert; we need those early intervention services that a lot of our students access when they get to pre-K or K to provide the needed support in order for them to begin a successful trek through the K-12 world.

We are seeing a spike in autism cases. When you think about autism -- especially at that early age -- a lot of times our families may not understand that they are seeing autism, but they -- what is -- a behavior that needs academic intervention or regular childhood developmental behavior. And, those early intervention services provides information to our parents

about what to look out for; how they can identify behaviors that may not be an average growing behavior, but may relate more directly to something that is going to need other services. Right now, we wait until we are way far behind. Because, if our parents don't have that information, that means we're not seeing the children until they get to K or first grade; we're not identifying an issue; and now we are multiple years down the road with a child not getting the services that they should've received in their early years. So, we're not even in the true K-12 realm yet. Our Federal programs and the Federal money that we receive also helps us with parent engagement. We have a whole parent connect series; we have a lot of our families who struggle with homelessness; who struggle with being transitional. And, sometimes, especially in this world, it is difficult being a parent and navigating all of the things that are happening in our community. And, so, in order to make our children ready for school, we've had to go into the homes and provide support for those homes, especially post-COVID, in order to support our families so that they can provide the structure and homes for our children to be successful in schools.

We've been doing a lot of work with social-emotional learning, and we have kind of gone into the realm of trauma-informed care. So, the belief on trauma-informed care is not asking what's wrong with the child, but is asking what happened to the child. As a school, that's something different. We've never-- We're usually focused on reading, writing, and arithmetic, but, we realize that the student is not ready to learn, and we're not going to be able to move and move successfully. So, we've had to stop and start to identify the supports that we need to create spaces where children are emotionally and mentally ready to sit in a classroom, and to sit in that space.

And, the trauma-informed care is just one of those aspects that we are doing, and those Federal funds help to support that into -- to provide those supports. But, that doesn't stop. So, once we identify what's wrong with the child or the other barriers to education, it is our goal to create programs to support our families; to teach our families: What does trauma look like? How does that trauma translate from home into school? And, to teach our teachers when you see a student who may be experiencing trauma, how we are able to change what is happening in our classrooms, in our hallways, to support them.

Just on a quick side note, we have a large number of our schools that now have these weighted blankets and weighted stuffed animals. If you know, they kind of help to calm down. One of the things we've done to look at that is because we have high chronic absenteeism in the City of Trenton. Our Number 1 grade levels that have the highest number of chronic absences is K-3. So, K-3 these-- That's not a student problem; that is a family problem. Because we saw such a high number of students who were absent in the grade K-3, we developed a program, which is called our CARES program: Chronically Absent Response and Engagement Teams. As a part of those CARE teams, we dig a little bit deeper to identify the barriers to education. We meet with families; we meet with the teachers; and we meet with the students and ask, "Tell us, why aren't you coming to school every day, on time?" And, what we saw last year-- Last year, we had 586 in-person CARE team meetings just to talk about chronic absences. And, what we found from the K-3, parents came in and said, "My child has anxiety." Using the language of anxiety in K-3, "My child is crying; my child-- It's a struggle to get them up and get them to school." And, when you have a young person

and a family that is telling you that their child is already struggling with stressors with anxiety, we've had to develop and pivot what we're doing just so that children see school as a place that is comfortable; that is fun; someplace where they want to be. And again, we're still recovering from COVID, where everybody was kind of home and a lot of these children may not have received early intervention and preschool opportunities. And, so, we've now just started getting a lot of weighted blankets and weighted animals. So, we may know what weighted blankets and weighted animals are, because we have that privilege. We have the opportunity to go on Amazon, purchase a weighted blanket. If you've never had one, *get one*, trust me.

(laughter)

On a day-- And, they do provide calmers. We use them now, K-12. When we see students who are struggling, the first thing we do when they get into the principal's office or to a guidance counselor's office, we sit a weighted animal in their lap, just to allow their stress to come down. So, this is kind of some of the things that we're doing. And, by the way, I've been talking for a couple minutes-- I haven't even started talking about the classroom yet. These are just all of the supports that we need to have in place to make sure our students are emotionally ready for the classroom.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Can you talk a little about the Federal funding part?

MS. GRANT: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Thank you.

MS. GRANT: So, the Federal funding part.

All of these supports that I'm talking about are all funded and supported through our Federal dollars. So, our Title II and our Title III, we provide opportunities for multi-language learners, to provide more fluency in English. Our Title IV is our professional development. So, everything that we've been doing with our CARE team meetings -- with our trauma-informed care -- is to support our teachers to make sure our children are better supported. Our universal free and reduced lunch-- That's one of the main things that is funded through Federal dollars. And, I want to stop for a minute and talk about universal free and reduced lunch, and what that means.

Isn't it a wonderful opportunity that each of us has that we're able to get up, go downstairs of our house and get a cup of coffee, or a piece of toast, or eggs. Our children, without those Federal dollars, without having the opportunity to get the free and reduced lunch, our children may not have that opportunity. Our free and reduced lunch gives our children their guaranteed meal of the day. *A guaranteed meal.* Without universal free and reduced lunch, without those Federal dollars ensuring that children have breakfast and lunch for free -- without those dollars, we are now saying that your ability to have breakfast and lunch is a privilege. And, our children should not have to see breakfast and lunch as a privilege. That should be a right that is embedded in every single student in our district and in our state.

The last thing I want to talk about is finally talking about academics. And, all of the things that support our Federal dollars academically -- sorry-- Everything that we are doing in order to support our students getting emotionally and mentally ready all support the funding that we get to support children academically. We also receive our High-Impact

Tutoring Grant that is through Federal funds. The High-Impact Tutoring Grant provides money for us to give supports to students in grades three or four to reduce some of the impact that was felt by COVID. And, we do before- and after-school academic intervention; we have tutoring programs. And again, when we are talking about a school district -- an urban school district where the opportunity to get those supports inside of the home may not exist -- that means that the onus and responsibility falls to the local school district. It falls to the local school district to ensure that our students are able to compete. It falls to the local school district to ensure that our students are ready to just get on a level playing field to provide supports and resources for students -- remediation services for students -- that are needed. And, to just provide the basic level playing field.

Our tutoring program right now, we have them operating in every single school. Every single school to provide outside -- outside-of-the-classroom opportunities for students. We also have a pull-out program during the school day for students who are of higher need that are paid for through some of our High-Impact Tutoring Grants in grades three and four where we have retired educators come in to help us to get our students reading on grade level. And, we also have a weekend learning lab that we've created. And, that's again, to provide as many opportunities for our families to seek out the resources that either A., they may not have the ability to do, or they may not have the resources to do. But, as a school district, we know that that's our responsibility.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Thank you so much.

MS. GRANT: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Senator McKnight.

SENATOR McKNIGHT: Hi, good morning.

Sorry about that, technical issues.

Hope, thank you so much for your insight. And, I just have one question. To sum up all of these programs and resources that come from the Federal Government, if you can put a dollar amount-- What is that dollar amount that potentially you can lose from the Federal Government?

MS. GRANT: That is a great question.

I would say that we are probably looking at about \$7-10 million that the Trenton Public School District would be losing.

SENATOR McKNIGHT: OK.

MS. GRANT: And, that may be conservative.

That's one thing I don't have, but as I'm kind of doing a very quick calculation.

SENATOR McKNIGHT: \$7-10 million.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON:
Assemblywoman Carter.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARTER: Thank you, I'll just talk loud.

OK. \$7-10 million--

MS. GRANT: I don't have the exact number, so that is a true ballpark.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARTER: --right, correct.

Can you-- I'd like to see it in a percentage-wise. How does that affect your overall budgeting for the district, percentage-wise? Is that .1% of

your budget; is that 50% of your budget? Is that-- Because I think that would give me a better-- Because, I don't know what your overall budgeting is for your school district.

MS. GRANT: Right.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARTER: And, thank you for highlighting a lot of the services. Because, living in a town that is very similar to Trenton, and also teaching in a town that is very similar to Trenton, when we look at it, these services truly do hit hard and everything. But, to understand Federally if it was cut, a lot of those services would go away. And, we don't-- We know that we can't really pick it up as well from our constituents in those towns and everything.

MS. GRANT: Correct.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARTER: And, how it really gets us to more of inequity in our towns. Because of the fact that a lot of our students don't have that luxury of when I wake up in the morning, you know what, hey, I don't have an iPad or anything that's convenient to me that I can make sure that I'm getting my work done or to be able to do the research that I need to do. Or, even getting up and going downstairs and being able to have that breakfast. Because, we have a lot of students who, like you said before, rely on that free or reduced meal. And, some of them that is their only meal for the day.

MS. GRANT: Correct.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARTER: But, I would really like to see not just the number, but the percentage. So, thank you.

MS. GRANT: I can get that; I don't have that now.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN

REYNOLDS-JACKSON:

Assemblywoman Flynn.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN FLYNN: Yes, I just want to-- I thought it was good for you to identify all the programming that's so Federal-dependent.

And, I think what it would be really helpful to this Committee for us to be able to articulate the issue, by like separating the Federal -- for each program, what percentage is Federal; what percentage is State; because some of this stuff is also funded by the State, for us to really see the potential issue as well. Because, I'm afraid that if any money does get cut, it's going to fall to the State to fund it and we would need that information sooner rather than later. Because, in reality, the programming can't really cease. So, we need to figure out a way -- if it does. And, the only way I think we articulate it to the Federal Government to ensure that maybe that doesn't happen is that we have that true data.

MS. GRANT: OK.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN FLYNN: And, also, if you can, I would think it would be helpful, too, to show the data with the tutoring, the early intervention plus the intensive tutoring programs. If you could also provide us how that's assisting the students with data that shows it's helping, Federal intervention, because, that's the only way I think anyone-- If we have that data in hand, and that information in hand, we can make a better case as to why these issues would happen. So, through the chair, if you could provide that--

MS. GRANT: Absolutely.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN FLYNN: --to the Chairwoman.

I'm sure if we get it, then we could really start highlighting it and talking about it, and putting a light on it.

By program.

MS. GRANT: Yes.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Thank you so much.

Senator Cryan.

SENATOR CRYAN: So, thanks.

Thanks for the overview. I will tell you, the K-3 absenteeism stuff is stunning to me. Maybe not to everybody else, but it blew me away. And, nearly 600 in-person meetings from the team, and talking about a kid who's 7 or 8 having anxiety going to school whatever that is. I mean, we all had a tough first day at school, but the idea that's an ongoing, continuing thing is-- Thank you very much for the perspective.

I have a couple others. Any grants-- We've talked today about what I believe are mostly mandated programs that would require changes and we need that visual and things that the folks talked about. But, are any of the monies coming into Trenton from Federal grants that are -- for lack of a better way to put it -- more subjective, and not quite as mandatory? Is there any of those kind of dollars coming in?

MS. GRANT: So, the High-Impact Tutoring--

SENATOR CRYAN: Is that--

MS. GRANT: --is a grant that we receive.

Yes.

SENATOR CRYAN: Do you happen to know the value -- this isn't trivia time -- but, do you happen to know the value?

MS. GRANT: Six-- I wrote the grant.

So, it's \$671,000, round about, that we receive.

SENATOR CRYAN: OK.

And, I see some of them mentioned. You've documented it in terms of -- we've, as a Committee, have had hearings and so have both of the Education Committees in terms of the importance on learning loss. And, what we've been discussing and how we all understand that it's an impact.

MS. GRANT: Yes.

SENATOR CRYAN: I don't think any of us can quantify it, but we all know it's real.

Some of the solutions -- I just want to make sure I jotted them down correctly -- you talked about a weekend learning lab?

MS. GRANT: Yes.

SENATOR CRYAN: Is that right?

And, additional tutoring, high-impact tutoring? Did I get that correctly?

MS. GRANT: Yes.

SENATOR CRYAN: Is there-- Are there other things that you're using that grant program for, just so that we can understand?

MS. GRANT: So, we do pull-out reading intervention, with our high-impact tutoring.

We have our weekend learning lab. We also have a 24-hour -- (indiscernible). A 24-hour tutoring program; as well as an after-school program.

SENATOR CRYAN: And, are those programs focused on particular -- you spent a few minutes educating us on K-3 issues.

MS. GRANT: Yes.

SENATOR CRYAN: Are those programs across grade levels?

Or are they--

MS. GRANT: So, the high-impact tutoring is specific to grades three and four.

SENATOR CRYAN: OK.

MS. GRANT: And, so, for our school, it hits our K-3 schools, because then we have 4-6.

So, it goes from-- We are able to support our students in grade three, and, when they get to the intermediate school, which would be a different school for those students.

SENATOR CRYAN: Last question.

Specifically, why? Why 3-4 vs. any other? Just to know it.

MS. GRANT: I think-- Students in grades three and four, because those are the very students who were greatly impacted by COVID, so, the High-Impact Tutoring Grant is to support students with that learning loss that they experienced in COVID. So, students in grades K and three would have either been in preschool or Kindergarten during COVID, and we're still trying to play catch-up with those students.

SENATOR CRYAN: OK.

Thank you very much for your perspective.

MS. GRANT: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Thank you so much, Ms. Grant for coming in and giving us that perspective.

You can send your information to Becky, and she'll make sure we all get. But, thank you so much.

MS. GRANT: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: I appreciate you coming today.

Next, we'll have Melanie Schulz, Director of Government Relations, New Jersey Association of School Administrators -- along with Dr. Jamil Maroun.

M E L A N I E S C H U L Z: Good morning, members of the Joint Committee on the Public Schools.

My name is Melanie Schulz, and I am Director of Government Relations at the New Jersey Association of School Administrators. Thank you for your kind invitation to have our members come before you today and articulate their concerns and their questions about the new administration in Washington and what potential impact it could have on Federal funding that our districts receive. The Joint Committee is the perfect platform to discuss this and other issues, and Senator Cryan, we certainly look forward to having more discussions with you about funding as we move through our budget season in New Jersey. But, back to today. None of the proposals that we have heard have been clear, nor is there an anticipated timetable. NJASA members are here to tell you specifically what kinds of impacts they are bracing for, and they're doing this all on speculation. We appreciate your support in hearing and addressing our concerns. And our hope is that none of this will come to pass, and that the people in Washington will work to improve the Federal DOE, and not tear it apart in a way that will be both confusing and concerning for the school leaders of this state, as well as possibly negatively affecting our students and their families. We have representatives here from all over the state to address you.

I'm now going to turn the mic over to Dr. Jamil Maroun. He is the Superintendent in Manville, and at NJASA he is Co-Chair of our Government Relations Committee. He is going to lead off and tell you about how we put this program together today, which we hope will make sense to you -- bringing folks before you. And then, he is going to pass it to others. So, I'm going to turn it over to Dr. Maroun.

JAMIL MAROUN, Ed.D.: Good morning, everyone.

On behalf of NJASA, I want to thank you for allowing us to be here with you, and to provide testimony on the impact of Federal funding in our school districts. To Senator Cryan's point before, I just want to make one mention regarding something you had said. One of the concerns overall is that if Federal funding were to change or if the Department of Education were to go away, one thing that we would say is that, as a whole, we would encourage the NJDOE to continue to be responsive to meet the needs of our school districts. Because, we believe that more responsibility will end up falling on their shoulders.

But, with that said, during today's testimony, you will hear from a variety of educational leaders from across the State of New Jersey, who will present on the various revenue -- or, various ways Federal fundings are used in their school district and how they directly impact their students throughout the state. Please note that we all use our funding differently, so, as you're hearing our testimony, we're going to share with you how we're using them in our districts. To help coordinate today's presentation, our team will address the following topics in the following order:

First, we want to present Title funding, and how it's utilized in our district. From there, we'll provide information on how Federal dollars

support our mental health programs; career and technical education through Perkins funding; special education supports through IDEA; and then impact aid. Through this testimony, we aim to provide you with a comprehensive understanding of how these Federal resources support our students.

Now, I'd like to take a moment to provide you with a brief history of Title funding. As you're aware, Federal funding in education has played a crucial role in educating -- or, in addressing -- educational inequities for nearly 60 years. As part of Lyndon Johnson's war on poverty, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 laid the foundation for Federal support to schools serving low-income students with the goal of closing achievement gaps and ensuring that all students have access to quality education. Over the years, Title funding has evolved through significant legislative changes. In 2001, the No Child Left Behind Act placed a strong emphasis on accountability and student performance through standardized testing. And, in 2015, Every Student Succeed -- the Every Student Succeeds Act restored more decision-making and power to the states and districts while maintaining a focus on educational equity. Today, Title funding under ESSA is structured into four key areas: First, Title I, which supports disadvantaged students by providing resources to help them succeed academically. Second, Title II focuses on strengthening teacher quality through professional development. Title III, provides critical support for English learners and immigrant students. And, Title IV promotes well-rounded education addressing student health, safety, and access to technology.

A key governing principle for the use of Federal education funds is the concept of supplement, not supplant. This is a requirement that we all are bound by. This principle requires that Federal funds add to, rather than

replace, State and local funding in our school -- schools -- meaning Federal dollars are meant to provide additional resources and opportunities whether through extra tutoring, technology, or expanded academic support. However, they cannot be used to replace the existing local and State expenditures that schools already are obligated to provide. So, should the money go away, these programs, in theory, should be going away, too. This distinction is critical in the funding were they to disappear. It would mean that many of these programs would disappear since they're not supported by our local budget. They continue-- The continued availability of these funds remain vital, as their absence would significantly impact our ability to sustain crucial educational services, and supports for our students.

Now, I'd like to introduce our first group of panelists, who are going to give you more detailed and specific testimony on how they utilize Title funding in their respective communities. We have Ms. Kelli Eppley, from the Manville School District, Assistant Superintendent; Mr. (*sic*) Barry Bachenheimer, the Assistant Superintendent from Pascack; and Mr. Dan Smith, Business Administrator from Egg Harbor Township.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Thank you, Dr. Maroun.

DR. MAROUN: Thank you.

B A R R Y B A C H E N H E I M E R, Ed.D.: Good morning.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: You're going push--

Becky's going to come down and help you.

DR. BACHENHEIMER: So, good morning.

My name is Barry Bachenheimer. I'm representing the Pascack Valley Regional High School District, located in Northwestern Bergen County, this morning. Our district, as far as Federal funding goes, we receive approximately 1% of our budget as Federal funding, which dollar-wise it equals about \$640,000 a year.

Just to give you some context, though, what we do with those dollars certainly is very important in terms of serving the needs of our students in several areas. As mentioned earlier, Title I is for our disadvantaged students. That monies allows us to give one-to-one tutoring for students who really fell behind during the pandemic; students who are underserved. And, that money would not be available, again, if not for Federal funding.

Title II is for our staff development. We've been using that money lately to educate our teachers on AI, a growing area, certainly, that we want our students to be aware of. And, certainly training our teachers in the uses of and the impact on our students; very important area.

Title III, we are part of a consortium, because Federal rules basically mean that we can't spend all that money ourselves. We are part of a consortium of several districts in Bergen County, who pool that money together for use for students for bilingual education.

And then, lastly, one area that we have a unique use for is our Title IV monies for safety and security. We are -- at least to my knowledge -- the only school district in the State of New Jersey that not just trains, but certifies, every one of our students and staff in CPR and bleeding control. It's been 10 years we've been doing that with Federal funding. I like to say we are the safest district in the state to have a cardiac event in. And, in a more

realistic sense, we've actually saved four student lives in the past 10 years because of this program, with staff or students either taking instant action to save a colleague or a peer. And then, one final point, just to mention, also, it's not just public school dollars. As part of the Federal rules, this money funds non-public and parochial schools as well, and we administer that as the public school in our area for any-- Non-public and private schools also get some of that Federal funding as well for areas such as student safety and staff development.

So again, though it is only 1% of our budget, we make a strong use of that monies, and certainly it impacts students on a very real level. Thank you for hearing our points today.

KELLI EPPL EY: Good morning.

I'm Kelli Eppley and I'm the Assistant Superintendent in the Manville School District.

The Manville School District is unique, and it has about 65% of our students receiving free and reduced lunch. We have about 1% of our budget made up of our Title funds, and we receive money in Title I; II; III; Title III Immigrant, and Title I SIA. These grants allow us to create equitable opportunities for our students to help prepare them for life after high school, whether that's college, career, or the military. In Title I, we use a large chunk of our funding -- about 70% -- for before- and after-school tutoring and summer school opportunities. These tutoring programs allow us to reinforce key concepts and aid in credit recovery. We also address learning gaps. As of our recent benchmark data, 85% of our students who participated in tutoring have showed accelerated growth, which is a great statistic that we're very proud of. Summer programming also allows us to provide food to our

students, which is very important for those facing food insecurity. Without these programs, disparities in academic achievement would likely grow. Title I funds are also used for an important program, dual enrollment courses, which is done through a partnership with William Paterson University. We're able to pay for college credits for our high school students who receive free and reduced lunch, and, for many of our students, this is their first step towards a higher education. Many of our students don't have family members who have gone to college, and the research shows that when students are involved in dual enrollment in high school, they're much more likely to pursue college credits after graduation. We spend about 10% of our Title I funds -- or, \$20,000 -- allocated towards paying for these dual enrollment classes. And, we have seniors who will graduate having completed almost one full semester of college.

Title III funds are used to support our ESL students. In Manville, we have about 14% of our population classified as ESL, and about 20% of our families have immigrant status. Many of these students are coming from really challenging Central American countries, and have experienced quite a bit of trauma and gaps in their education. So, this money allows us to help fill in those gaps. We have a large number of students who come at the high school level, and, so, in order to graduate them by the time they turn 20, we really need this programming to help fill in the gaps so that they can receive their required credits. This funding also helps us to graduate about 40% of our students with the Seal of Biliteracy, which is a great-- It's a great asset in today's workforce.

Title II funding is used for teachers, and we know that teachers are the backbone of education. Without highly-trained teachers, we really

have nothing. And, this year we've been able to take our \$40,000 in Title II money and send teachers to a variety of programs to support with things such as multi-tiered systems of support; harassment, intimidation, and bullying; social-emotional learning; and other effective educational practices.

The loss of these funds would create significant gaps in the services our students depend on, further widening the achievement gap. We have limited flexibility in the general fund to absorb these costs. And, so, protecting these funds is essential. These programs will end if we lose our funding. This is not just an investment in education, it is an investment in equity, opportunity, and the future success of every student.

Thank you.

DANIEL SMITH: Good morning, my name is Daniel Smith.

I'm the School Business Administrator of Egg Harbor Township School District, in Atlantic County.

So, our total budget is just over \$200 million. We have 7,500 students; 1,500 staff members, and nine schools. We received \$2.1 million in Title I funding; another \$2 million in IDEA funding; and \$65,000 in Perkins funding. In addition to the benefits of those funds in our district to what my colleagues mentioned, we utilize a lot of our funds for our math curriculum, and our math program in our middle school and high school settings. We're also a targeted-assistance district, so that -- those Title I funds, that \$2.1 million, goes directly to the students who are identified as being in need of services. So, there's an assessment; there's also a free and reduced lunch application. So, those funds follow those students through the entire district from K-12.

If we were to lose 30% of our Title I funds, for Egg Harbor Township, it would be a loss of \$629,000. So, that equates to about seven teaching staff members. We would have a reduction in our Tier 2 and Tier 3 services, which are part of that multi-tiered system of support. We would also see higher class sizes in our math courses through our middle school and high school settings. If we were to lose all of our Title I funding, which is that \$2.1 million, we could lose up to 23 teaching staff members. We would really have no Tier 2 and Tier 3 MTSS system in place, and we would also have to decrease our parent engagement, which is totally funded through Title I as well. Losing that funding would be detrimental to the district, like we've already said. Seven to 23 staff members; services for our neediest students; and our gains that we've made academically, in the past four to five years would start to be erased as well.

And also, the one last item: If we do lose that funding, it not only affects the students, but it affects the families as well. So, over the last few years, the programs have expanded so much that now -- with part of our Tier 2 and Tier 3 services -- we're working with the entire family, not just a student in school. So, again, for Egg Harbor Township, it would be detrimental; seven to 23 staff members. And, that would just be Title I, so, we're just focused on Title I right now.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN

REYNOLDS-JACKSON:

Assemblywoman Flynn.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN FLYNN: Yes, thank you so much.

Thank you all for your comments and information, and being so prepared with all that information which allows me-- Because, you picked up

on what-- You've expanded the programming that you talked about? That are funded by Federal dollars? Do any of your school districts end up using State dollars for it? Because it's so successful, and-- There's a limited amount of dollars for Federal that you end up trying to duplicate that with some other State dollars or that just doesn't happen?

MR. SMITH: In Egg Harbor Township, we do utilize State dollars for some of our programs.

So, our Tier 2 and Tier 3 program went into place when we had our ARRA funding. So, and then once that funding started to go away, we do supplement part of it with our general fund, which is our State aid. But, with our Board in particular, they've been very cognizant of the taxpayers. So, we haven't increased taxes in the last five years. So, that's something that our Board is very proud of, and the community's proud of. So, keeping that in mind; trying to balance going forward. There are some blended resources, but the majority of our after-school tutoring; remedial academic programs are all funded through Title I.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN FLYNN: Thank you-- Yes, go ahead.

MS. EPPLEY: In Manville, we actually had some money we received from the State for the High-Impact Tutoring Grant that we have since transitioned to using Federal funds to pay for.

The money is -- was just like a one-year grant. But, we saw such great impact from it that we've actually transitioned it into our Federal funding. So, sort of the reverse example, but the State set such a great -- such great criteria with that grant, that we were able to transition it over.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN FLYNN: I think that's important to highlight, because I do think -- while I understand the Federal funding is not

supposed to replace what you're supposed to be doing but, provides a service -- I think it's great that you're also then trying to find ways.

And, I can understand Boards like yourself who are trying not to impact the property tax dollar; that you're still finding a way to provide those programs. So, I think it's really critical that-- Again, any other information or data that you could share with the Chair; that would be helpful for us to be able to articulate what we need to articulate to the Feds on this issue. When you show success, and all that, I think that helps make the argument that we still need these dollars to be used for these critical services, so thank you all.

SENATOR CRYAN: I'd just like to follow up on that if I can, and Kelli, maybe you first.

But, all of you have mentioned this idea with tutoring and with special supports, you're able to show academic achievement. Hope mentioned it, in the first, as well. Are there-- Is there measurable data to that-- Say you were like, a Legislator, and, you were trying to say, "When we invest these dollars, we can show this performance." Is there actual-- Are there reporting requirements on this? Is there hard data that somebody can pull to? Is that-- Is it part of it? I really don't know. Is it part of it?

DR. BACHENHEIMER: I can start with that.

So, yes. So, with all -- any of these grant programs -- thank you.

With any of these grant programs, there's absolutely reporting data where we have to show either progress or lack of progress, with this particular idea. With all these Federal grants, it actually has to show a research base as well. So, it's not just, "Hey, here's an idea I came up with." But, you do have to show a -- a defined research base with literature that's

available to show why you engaged in the program that you did. And, certainly the research very much supports that the more high-impact tutoring you can provide to students, the more progress they're going to make.

SENATOR CRYAN: You mentioned tutoring supports, right, Barry? I think as well?

DR. BACHENHEIMER: Yes, correct.

SENATOR CRYAN: So, you provided the report that said, "We provided support X amount of children, and we were able to show this as a result." And, you have that as well?

MS. EPPLEY: Yes.

So, we were able to provide high-impact tutoring to about 55 students; we have about 200 students in our third and fourth grade. And, of those 55 students, about 85% of them made more than a half of a year's worth of growth in a half of a school year. So, we might say that if a student grew like, .4 of a grade level or .5 of a grade level, that's sort of like expected growth for them. About 85% of our students grew .7 or higher of a grade level. So, that means they're moving faster than just the amount of months that they're in school, which helps them to close the gaps between where we want them to be and where they currently are.

SENATOR CRYAN: You can show A to B?

MS. EPPLEY: Yes.

SENATOR CRYAN: Quick question for you, if it's easy, we're not looking to give you homework here.

But, if it's easy, with the Assemblywoman's consent, I'd like to ask if you could just send over last year's report. It would be great just to have some sort of -- something to take a look at. If it's easy, send over a link.

MS. EPPLEY: Sure.

SENATOR CRYAN: And, secondly.

How is the data reported? Like, how much of it's an impact from COVID?

One of the things I suspect here would be what does it mean pre- and post-COVID? Can you just talk about that very quickly? I don't want to tie the Committee up, but can you just give us an insight?

DR. BACHENHEIMER: Sure, yes.

So, very briefly. As we are a high school district, we're dealing with lots of students grades nine through 12. So, students who had COVID impact that we're dealing with now were certainly in upper elementary or middle school when the pandemic hit. So, with a lot of these students, we absolutely see some gaps, and so, the one-to-one tutoring that we're able to provide is especially important when it comes to their readiness for State assessments, whether it's the NJSLA or NJGPA testing that are required for these students. So, we're definitely seeing gains for these students. At this point, it's a little hard to quantify what it would be different without the tutoring, but, at this point, our gut reaction is saying it absolutely is making a difference.

SENATOR CRYAN: OK.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Senator McKnight.

SENATOR McKNIGHT: Thanks so much.

Just to follow up with Senator Cryan's question, in reference to the reporting that you have to report back, every year do you get an increase from the Federal Government, or is it stagnant?

MS. EPPLEY: I would say it varies, based on enrollment; the Census data; the percentage of students that are MLs.

So, last year we did receive an increase. The year before, I believe, we stayed relatively flat. So, I think it depends on--

SENATOR McKNIGHT: Yes.

So, I just wanted to know if you are reporting high numbers of impact. When you report that back to the Federal Government--

MS. EPPLEY: Oh.

SENATOR McKNIGHT: --do you get an increase?

MS. EPPLEY: No.

It's based on-- It's based on poverty status, generally.

SENATOR McKNIGHT: OK, thank you.

DR. MAROUN: Just one thing I also would want to caution, in terms of measuring the quality of the programs.

So, there's a wide array of activities that can be done. So, if your program is feeding students, your data is going to be how many kids came and ate meals. If your data is providing enrichment trips, it's how many students participated in the program. So, it's kind of tough to quantify back to the State.

From a budgeting standpoint, the general rule of thumb -- and, Dan, you might want to speak to this a little more -- is, you budget 80%. And actually, we're budgeting even less with the coming year, the recommendation's to budget less. Because, the Federal Government may say that they're going to fully fund it, but they never actually do. And, you budget a little less because you don't know what that number is going to be until later in the budgeting process.

MR. SMITH: Right, that's correct.

So, we do our application in May, and we get our allocations from the Federal Government after our budget is already approved and passed and sent to the county, and things like that. So, a lot of these programs are kind of up in the air until we get those allocations. So, it is hard, sometimes, to plan from year to year for that reason. But, that's just - - the timing of when our budget is due; we have March 20 it's due to the county office for initial preliminary approval. And then, really at that point we're kind of locked into what our plans are. And then, we'll have a contingency plan and say, "Well if the Federal funding doesn't come through, we have some general fund money, or whatever, another grant that we might utilize." But then, a lot of scenarios, it's well, if we don't get the Federal funding, we're not going to do that. And, that's just what we have to go with. And, it's kind of out of our hands at that point. Once we strike our budget and have our public hearing in April, then we just wait for our allocation to be finalized.

SENATOR CRYAN: I apologize for jumping.

Can you just -- you all do this -- timeframes, just for us. When do you-- So, essentially the Federal money comes directly to your district, right? Essentially. So, when does it come? Like, when do those checks arrive, that sort of thing? Can you talk us through the process a little bit?

DR. BACHENHEIMER: Summer.

Typically summer.

SENATOR CRYAN: Summer, OK.

And then, you strike your budgets in April? Right?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Correct.

SENATOR CRYAN: OK, thank you. Sorry to jump that.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Good question.

DR. MAROUN: Senator Cryan, you had mentioned some suggestions or ideas.

One of the areas that would be helpful for school districts is the timeline in the budgeting process. We receive our State aid numbers the first week of March, and we have to submit our budget by the 19th. So, that could be as early as the first; as late as the ninth; depending on how the week falls. So, that's a really tough challenge, especially if we're anticipating cuts or changes in our school budgets.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN FLYNN: You speak for all the business administrators out there, right now.

(laughter)

DR. MAROUN: And, the superintendents.

And, the assistant superintendents.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN FLYNN: And, the (indiscernible).

I'm going to give the BAs their due.

(laughter)

Their hair is falling out during that time period.

DR. BACHENHEIMER: Worth falling out.

(laughter)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: We've definitely heard that before about the calendar timeline; trying to get it better -- streamlined.

The thing that I'm hearing, also, from all of our Title programs is that you all are doing a really good job at being able to show how these

programs are running efficiently and effectively. And, I think because of that, is why we wanted to hear this; what that impact might look like to us, coming down the future.

But, thank you so much-- I don't know if any of-- Senator -- Assemblywoman Carter.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARTER: Thank you.

And, I wanted to also say that you guys are presenting a lot of data and information, and when I look at this, I look at also the size of the district. Mr. Smith, when you talked about 7,500 total students in your district, and the impact that you would have; it's great. But, I also look at some of our districts that have 15,000 students total, or more. And, really looking at the demographics of those students, and how many ESL students that we have, and the programs that we're running. Listen, I live in the City of Plainfield; I teach in the City of Passaic; and all. I'm right next to, in Passaic, to Paterson. I work, also, down here in Trenton, and I see the impact. And, when we have the impact of the students and we have-- When we have students who come in at high school level, also, and with our ESLs, it's a tremendous impact. And, I know even -- the Perkins Grants -- that we also receive is tremendous, of trying to make sure it's that equity. And, I say that because of the fact that I want everybody to realize that you're seeing-- A lot of what we're hearing here are-- Let's look at some of those districts also, and the impact that they would have on districts that are twice that size, or higher. And, I just want to make sure that we're very mindful of that, because it's also -- the impact that it has on those communities, which, I know the impact is great for you, but I don't want to lose the -- fact it's even greater for some of those communities.

Thank you.

DR. MAROUN: So, next we have Dr. Michelle CarneyRay-Yoder, the Superintendent of Central Regional, who's going to talk a little bit about the effects of Federal funding and mental health.

SENATOR CRYAN: I just want to say a big thank you.

ALL: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARTER: Thank you, guys.

We really do appreciate the data that you gave us.

MICHELLE CARNEYRAY-YODER, Ed.D.: Good morning.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Good morning.

DR. CARNEYRAY-YODER: Before I start my--

Before I start, I wanted to just introduce myself. My name is Michelle CarneyRay-Yoder; I apologize for all the last names. I am the proud Superintendent of the Central Regional School District. We are a 7-12 regional middle school/high school district, and we have five sending districts that are elementary pre-K-6. In addition to some numbers for our district, we-- Our Federal funding is about 3% of our budget. And, we have approximately 40% of our students are on free and reduced lunch.

So, to talk about mental health in Title II, our public schools are at a crossroads; Federal education policies are shifting towards the focus of the workplace readiness, parental choice, and decentralization. While these goals have value, they risk undermining two of the most critical pillars of student success: mental health supports and educator development. Our children are facing unprecedented challenges. Anxiety, depression, and trauma are skyrocketing, yet, Federal-- Reduced Federal oversight threatens of the mental health services of many of our most vulnerable students who

rely on these services. Without robust education and -- excuse me -- without robust state action, districts will struggle to provide the counselors and resources that mean the difference between a child thriving and falling through the cracks. Let's discuss our educators. Title II funding is -- for professional development -- is the lifeblood of our teachers' growth, and that is also at risk. This threatens vital training in areas of trauma-informed instruction and social and emotional learning. If we don't invest in our teachers, how can we expect them to meet the complex needs of their students? New Jersey has always been a leader in public education, but now we must act. Please prioritize our State funding for mental health services, and also for ensuring equity for our students as far as their teachers' instruction. Our students and educators are counting on us, and we need to act at this time.

Are there any questions about mental health and Title II?

(laughter)

SENATOR CRYAN: Yes.

DR. CARNEYRAY-YODER: I'm ready for it.

(laughter)

SENATOR CRYAN: So, can you talk about the process?

So, how are students selected? Because, we had heard both earlier -- I mean, K-3 -- never mind what you-- If I got it right, you've got five districts sending your seven--

DR. CARNEYRAY-YODER: Correct.

SENATOR CRYAN: So, your age experience is higher -- for lack of a better way to put it -- than some of the stuff we heard earlier.

How does the process work? You get Federal money; how is that student selected? How does it work? Can you take us through that a little bit in terms of--

DR. CARNEYRAY-YODER: Sure, sure.

So, we-- One thing that I've noticed in the past year that I've been the Superintendent of Central -- I just came on last January -- is that we're really recovering from COVID, as far as mental health services and the requirements that our students need. We have a lot of students who are home-bound instruction that have 504s for anxiety. About 50% of my population has 504s for anxiety; generalized anxiety disorder.

SENATOR CRYAN: A 504 is?

DR. CARNEYRAY-YODER: A 504-- I'm sorry, I'm talking in acronyms, my apologies.

SENATOR CRYAN: Oh believe me, we're flying in acronyms today.

(laughter)

DR. CARNEYRAY-YODER: So, 504s are basically the Americans With Disabilities Act of 1973. It's providing accommodations and modifications for our students who might not qualify for an IEP -- or an Individualized Education Plan who are special ed. -- but need services and supports in the classroom. And, a lot of those right now are for anxiety. Probably about 50%. And, right now I have 169 504s in my district, and only 2,200 students.

SENATOR CRYAN: How many?

DR. CARNEYRAY-YODER: 169.

SENATOR CRYAN: Out of 2,200 students?

DR. CARNEYRAY-YODER: Yes.

And, basically what we do is we go through the process of identifying students who are in need, making sure that we're servicing them and documenting things that we're putting in place for them, and if they're not working, then ramping up those services that could turn to a Section 504 plan. Because, a lot of students, if they don't have goals and objectives, and require the really intensive services, we still want to put those things in place for them when they're -- struggling in the classroom.

SENATOR CRYAN: Is-- I'm not asking to be the psychologist here, but do you have -- I don't want to lose sight; this is a Federal funding hearing -- but--

DR. CARNEYRAY-YODER: Of course.

SENATOR CRYAN: --is there a derivative of anxiety that seems to be commonplace across the board?

Is it a post-COVID reaction, or is it more--

DR. CARNEYRAY-YODER: Some of it is a post-COVID reaction; a lot of it is our students were at home for so long that they're having trouble transitioning back into the classroom.

I don't know if my colleagues feel the same way, but that's something that we've seen.

SENATOR CRYAN: There's heads nodding behind you, I can tell you that.

DR. CARNEYRAY-YODER: OK, good.

I figured as much. And, that's the really hard part right now, is making sure that our students are getting back into our walls, and some of that's been very, very difficult. And then, you have outliers like-- Our

students are going to their general practitioner rather than a psychiatrist. And, that's causing some difficulty for us when we're putting supports in place for them in the classroom.

SENATOR CRYAN: Last thing for me is, you mentioned it's 3% of your budget.

Is there a dollar figure associated with that?

DR. CARNEYRAY-YODER: About \$1.1 million.

SENATOR CRYAN: Thank you.

Sorry, Chairwoman.

DR. CARNEYRAY-YODER: You're welcome.

SENATOR McKNIGHT: I have a question--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Yes, Senator.

SENATOR McKNIGHT: --Madame Chair.

My question is, how are these students being diagnosed with anxiety if they're going to mixed doctors, or not the correct doctor, or is this the nurse?

DR. CARNEYRAY-YODER: Well, the hard--

SENATOR McKNIGHT: Like, who's diagnosing them with anxiety?

DR. CARNEYRAY-YODER: Well, a lot of them are going to the general practitioners; a lot of school districts are moving to where we're requiring a psychiatric nurse practitioner to be the one doing the diagnosing, or a psychiatrist.

I know that recently -- thanks to Federal funding -- I've actually been able to put in place-- We use InSite Health. So, we have a way to refer them. Because, a lot of times when you have students who are in crisis and

you refer them out for services, it can take four to six weeks before they're even seen. So, we knew we needed to get them back into our schools quicker. And, we put something in place so that we have a direct referral and they're seen within four days, and I can have them back in school if they're not in crisis.

So, you know-- I'm sorry.

SENATOR McKNIGHT: So, can you have one in the school?

We have a school nurse; we have a school counselor.

DR. CARNEYRAY-YODER: That's what I'm working on.

SENATOR McKNIGHT: Can we have a school psychiatrist?

DR. CARNEYRAY-YODER: That's what I'm working on for next year.

But also, too, if Federal funding goes away, I'm not going to be able to provide that. So, I'm looking to have a psychiatric nurse practitioner onsite twice a week so that we can do a direct referral, and they're right there on campus, instead of having to send them out.

SENATOR McKNIGHT: So, will you be able to use -- because, Federal funding *may* go away-- So, will you be able to use some State funding to have that position in school?

DR. CARNEYRAY-YODER: We can, but then you know, when your budget's 90% -- when your staffing is 90% of your budget -- 85%-90% of your budget -- adding another full-time staff member, or a part-time staff member that's coming in at about \$150 per hour -- it makes it really, really difficult to do that.

SENATOR McKNIGHT: Yes, I understand what you're saying.

But then, hearing the numbers of third graders; seventh graders; all graders having anxiety, that's something -- in my opinion -- that's something -- someone should be on staff.

DR. CARNEYRAY-YODER: Well, we've gotten creative.

So, when I started last year, we had a retirement in our guidance department. And, our guidance counselors normally will see students, but they're normally helping them with their academics and things like that. So, what we did is instead of replacing them with another guidance counselor, we replaced them with a Licensed Professional Nurse. And, we have somebody on staff now who is in the guidance department, but they're that next level of support.

SENATOR McKNIGHT: And then, last question.

DR. CARNEYRAY-YODER: Yes, ma'am.

SENATOR McKNIGHT: I'm seeing that this may be a potential partnership with some of our hospital institutions.

Maybe partnering with them and they can have someone who's -- come to the class; come to the school two to three days a week. Just -- I know, because budget is tight -- but, we should have some type of shared services to help our students. That's just my opinion.

DR. CARNEYRAY-YODER: Absolutely, thank you.

DR. MAROUN: So, I think--

SENATOR CRYAN: I'm sorry; one other quick follow -- same conversation.

We had had a hearing on hub and spoke and the idea of support services that way, if you recall. Has that been part of what your experience is at Central, at all?

DR. CARNEYRAY-YODER: That is; but, the problem is finding those clinicians, because, right now, there are not enough clinicians to service our students.

So, it's a lack of clinicians in those specialized areas that's really hindering these shared services possibilities for us.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARTER: And, that's what I was going to bring up in reference to availability of clinicians.

Because, what I've seen -- even over the last couple years -- is it's very hard. Even those who are trying to do it on their own. And, not even you have so many that are -- want to go through the school because it would make it easier, if the resources are there, but you guys still have a lot of families who don't go through the schools. And, we have to also be very mindful of that, because they are going and trying to handle some of those things on their own, because they also don't want to bring it outside of their home and everything.

DR. CARNEYRAY-YODER: Correct, correct.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARTER: And-- And, those individuals are not identified in your number.

And, I know we're talking a lot about like the K-3, and the younger grouping, but we also have those -- the middle school and high school students who are-- You know what, it's also lingering, continuing to going on. And, there's more of a focus now than it has been in previous years. But, a lot of the districts also utilize the school-based youth services. And, I know that we had an impact on that a couple years ago where it was -- the funding not being there and removing them out from the schools. But, that's also a very big part of it. Do you utilize that kind of grouping? Because, I haven't

heard you talk about it, but your district may not utilize school-based youth services; you may do it a different way.

DR. CARNEYRAY-YODER: We actually do.

We have a-- We have a ton of supports that we're putting. I've only been there a year, so, I'm trying to-- And, they're coming off some major, major trauma themselves, as a district. So, I'm really trying to slowly add -- through attrition -- as things change, then restructuring to be creative, because I know those supports are needed, but I also don't want to burden the taxpayer. And, I don't want to overspend, so I'm trying to be creative with our services. But, I'm a former Director of Special Education and a special education teacher, so that part is very--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARTER: That's why you have that health part so down pat, and you can answer any question.

(laughter)

DR. CARNEYRAY-YODER: Well, I was on a child study team, too.

So, I just-- I really am passionate about putting supports in place for students, and having them within our walls. And, that's something that's been a priority for me.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARTER: Thank you.

DR. CARNEYRAY-YODER: You're welcome.

DR. MAROUN: And, just to add a little more.

I think the BAs and the superintendents -- and, the assistant superintendents -- will appreciate this. I think one of the big challenges is ultimately, these are financial choices that districts make. In our district, we've partnered with Rutgers UBHC to have one clinician. We have four

buildings; we have three clinicians who are rotating between our four buildings. We've been able to do that because we were recipients of an increase in State aid over the last years. We went from being the eighth-most underfunded district to being adequately funded now, through SFRA. So, we have that ability to do that, but our colleagues, who've been losing funds, don't have that ability because they're capped at the 2% cap, and so on and so forth. So, ultimately, those are where a lot of the challenges lie.

One other thing that lies as a challenge is for our students -- particularly our students who are coming from families who might be undocumented; or have less resources; or don't have access to medical care - - going to a doctor to get a 504 is a challenge.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Oh, yes.

Yes, yes, yes.

DR. MAROUN: So, we want to keep that in mind, as well, as we're working through mental health challenges for our students.

So, are we ready to go to-- Oh, sorry.

DR. CARNEYRAY-YODER: Any other questions?

Thank you very much.

ALL: Thank you.

DR. CARNEYRAY-YODER: You're welcome.

DR. MAROUN: So, our next presenter is Dr. (*sic*) Jacqueline Burke.

She's the Executive Director of the New Jersey Council for Career, Vocational, and Technical Schools. Dr. (*sic*) Burke?

JACQUELINE BURKE: I got promoted.

I didn't even go through a Ph.D. program.

DR. MAROUN: Oh, congratulations.

(laughter)

MS. BURKE: Thank you.

Good morning. And, I have to start by saying I think the Federal Government should buy us all a weighted blanket as we get through this transition.

(laughter)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARTER: I'm going to get me a weighted stuffed animal (indiscernible).

And, be like, here you go.

(laughter)

MS. BURKE: Co-Chairs Cryan and Reynolds-Jackson, members of the Joint Committee on Public Schools, thank you for the opportunity to testify about the ramifications that would result if the Federally funded Perkins Grants -- which are administered through the U.S. Department of Education -- were eliminated. My name is Jackie Burke, and I'm the Executive Director of the Council of County Vocational and Technical Schools.

Each year under Perkins, Congress appropriates roughly \$1.4 billion in State formula grants, and over \$30 million in competitive discretionary grants specified in the law for the improvement of Career and Technical Education, or CTE programs, across the nation. In FY2025, this amounted to an award of over \$29 million to New Jersey's Department of Education. I'm just adding some numbers in, since you've been asking. Eighty-five percent of that is distributed as entitlement grants to secondary with 100 eligible recipients, and post-secondary, with 19 eligible recipients -

- for career and technical education. So, that amounts to \$24.7 billion is going directly to these schools. Almost \$9 million of the total was awarded directly to county vocational and technical schools. Simply put, Perkins is the lifeblood of our schools. It not only pays for industry-standard equipment necessary to provide the education and technical training students need to transition into the workforce, but it also funds additional enhancements to provide high-quality CTE opportunities to all students. For example, districts have purchased an anti-gravity treadmill for their sports medicine program; virtual reality training modules for their bio-medical and science program; laser welders for welding programs; industrial ovens for culinary programs; and more.

Districts have also used the funds to cover the cost of CTE college courses for special education students; to provide tool kits for economically disadvantaged students; and to fund middle school and summer enrichment programs to expose students to career exploration opportunities. None of this would be possible without Perkins. Loss of this aid does not solely affect schools. It would also be detrimental to the many businesses and employers who rely on the education and technical training our students receive to fill positions that allow them to continue to grow and operate in our school, thereby meeting the economic demands of the State.

Direct funding to our schools is not the only way -- is not the only -- way CTE would be affected if Perkins is eliminated. CTE program standards and requirements are all governed by Perkins regulations. The regulations provide the framework for the delivery and quality of CTE programs. Those are built with industry professionals and are monitored through the Department of Education employees, in the Office of Career

Readiness. These employees review the CTE offerings to make sure they meet all requirements and are delivering relevant coursework. The employees of the Office of Career Readiness are mostly funded by Federal funding. There aren't that many employees who are State funded. So, that would eliminate a lot of staff positions in the Office of Career Readiness.

I cannot overstate the devastating effect the elimination of Perkins funds would have on the ability of our schools to provide high quality CTE programs that both students and employers demand.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and for your support.

Any questions?

SENATOR CRYAN: (Indiscernible) -- Assemblywoman Carter and I have the privileges of chairing higher ed. committees, and just a couple unique challenges. One's the demographic cliff; we all made less babies after 2008--

(laughter)

--after the recession. It's a significant portion of the higher ed. discussion. But, the other, and probably the more longer term is the consistent growing amount of choices that young people are making not to pursue higher education. For a variety of reasons, most importantly-- I think there's a significant debate, not only here in New Jersey, but nationwide, in terms of the value of that higher education. I happen to be a staunch believer in, and it's something we need to work on. But, this is that alternative, career and technical. And--

MS. BURKE: Well, yes, in career and technical education.

And, I will say that our schools are experiencing a huge demand increase for the traditional trades programs that allow you to go directly into

the workforce. But, CTE encompasses so much more. It's opportunities for students to take whatever pathway they want. Seventy-five percent of our students go on to higher education or -- through some community college higher education; technical training programs; so they do pursue additional education opportunities when they graduate. There's really -- bioscience; there's aeronautics engineering. So, they're a range of programs; it's not just those programs that allow students to go directly into the workforce, but it also provides those skills that students need when they're finished their training to transition directly into the workforce. But, to your point about options other than going to college, there has been -- like I said -- an explosion in demand and growth in the traditional trades programs that allow you to go right into an apprenticeship or the workforce.

SENATOR CRYAN: As anybody knows, you can't get an electrician or a plumber, right?

We all value that.

MS. BURKE: Exactly.

As someone who's working on a house built in 1910, I can attest to that.

SENATOR CRYAN: Yes, I'm sure you can.

So, just to finalize the thought. If this was part of it -- and, it's a big if, like all of this is -- but if this was part of it, we would lose potential opportunities to show students and provide students ample opportunities for alternative career paths, which are necessitated just by the laughter among the room--

MS. BURKE: Yes, and, not only that, but the schools would have to teach kids on antiquated equipment.

So, if they're going to an employer and saying, "Hey, I have this background in career and technical education, you can hire me right away," and, they're going to say, "But, you were trained on obsolete equipment. Like, you can't come in here and transition to the workforce because you don't know how to use our machines or our equipment."

SENATOR CRYAN: Good point.

Thank you very much, eye opening, thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Yes, thank you.

Wait. Not yet, not yet.

(laughter)

Assemblywoman Morales has a question.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN MORALES: Hello, thank you so much, Ms. Burke.

I am a product of career technical education. I also led the school in career technical education, and I can attest to really preparing the next workforce in using equipment that is, really, not only so advanced for high school students, but we have people -- adults -- who come into our school districts and say, "Oh my God, my workers don't even have this type of equipment." They're so impressed with how our equipments are so advanced. An example of that is that we have a medical career program, which is preparing students to be EMTs and nurses. And, we're probably the only high school who has a simulated ambulance for students. And, those are fund -- monies that is being used by Federal dollars. So again, if we are talking about ensuring that we are preparing the next workforce and that they are -- when they leave our schools, they become competitive with others; that's exactly what we want. Because, a lot of the students do not choose to go to

a four-year college. They do choose to grow within the careers that they -- they're developing in, in the CTE programs. And, it's amazing how some students never even thought about certain careers until they enter these schools and see that they are extremely skilled in those areas. So, it would be a detriment to many schools if this funding is lost. And, as you spoke, \$1.4 billion that ultimately will be taken away from these school districts, school districts would be impacted.

My question is -- especially at county vocational schools which rely on these monies heavily because they are created based on this -- how would that impact the county vocational schools?

MS. BURKE: Well, it would have -- the impact on the equipment.

They would lose all of that funding which is \$9 million every year. And so, for example, you wouldn't be able to have that ambulance that was purchased with Perkins money. And, I know Essex also provides summer enrichment programs. That would not be possible without money. And, I know-- You do a lot of outreach with women in construction, which is fantastic, and purchasing boots that construction needs; you need specialized boots; you need specialized tools. And, for economically disadvantaged students, those are provided through Perkins funds. As I stated -- with Perkins, the schools, I don't know -- they would cease to exist as far as providing quality career and technical education. You simply can't do it on antiquated equipment. And, I will also say that -- Assemblywoman Morales did not mention this -- but, the actual -- the U.S. Secretary of Education did come to visit their district as a model of exemplary vocational schools.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN MORALES: I didn't want to brag.

(laughter)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Anyone else have anything to add?

Assemblywoman Carter.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARTER: Thank you.

I also have to echo what Assemblywoman Morales said. This funding is *paramount* to what we are exposing our youth to, and what their potential is. Being in a district who has the pathways. We have the biotech, the biomed; we have graphic design; we have radio and TV; we have automotive; we have a lot. And, when you look at it, not being able to have this funding to make sure that we're staying up to date-- We have students who are working on the CAD. And, we have -- not just employers, but we also have exposing them to some of the jobs and everything that they can also get governmentally. And, working with the city-- The City of Passaic is very good with working with our kids and giving them those internships.

This means a lot, a lot to our students. But, it's also this funding. We talk about the exposure; we talk about the impact and them being able to go from high school and being into the workforce. We have students who are phlebotomy, come out and are phlebotomists -- and everything, able to get a job. But, they're not stopping there; they're not just saying, "Hey, I'm getting this." But, they're able to-- At that point, they've been exposed to it; they can get in; they're getting it. And then, they're able to go-- A lot of them are still taking classes at community college to get that associate's degree and move on. The impact is a lot, and I thank you for the work that you're doing. We do have to continue to push for it. But, it also gives them a level -- a playing field. We don't have enough carpenters; we don't have

enough builders; we don't have enough automotive. And, it's the exposure also to our girls; Girls Who Code. Also, the exposure we're giving them, and we have had two girls who come through our automotive program and able to get -- and move on. But, with the world changing that it is, and what they did a couple years ago, yes. A lot went into the vo-tech schools, but there's a limited number of students who can go to the vo-tech schools. What about the rest of them, who are in the gen ed. schools, who need to also have the same type of training? So, it's important, and I'm glad that we're getting that funding, and what it does.

So, thank you.

MS. BURKE: Yes, thank you.

And, I just wanted to mention one thing in response to Senator Cryan's remarks about exposing more students who might not want to go to college or any additional training after school. The middle school programs that are funded by these Perkins Grants for our district are very important for that. Because, I will say, if you educate students and parents about the opportunities that are available that they don't know about, then you have a lot more of interested people entering the CTE field. I mean if they-- You have one employer come in and say, I have an advanced manufacturing student come in; transition to an employee making \$50,000, \$60,000 a year, the parents are going to say, "Oh my God, wow. I just thought of it as like, a dirty machine job." So, really those sorts of programs really are a benefit to the State, and the students.

SENATOR McKNIGHT: I just want to echo my colleague's comments.

Thank you so much for all that you do. And, as you were talking and I'm like loss of the workforce. And, just -- listening to what Senator Cryan said about higher education, this right here will allow people to get a career; become a carpenter; become an electrician; and then use the funds that they have with this job to go back to get that higher education vs. getting a loan to pay for school. So, we really need to keep this Perkin (*sic*) program in place, the funding in place, so that we can create a workforce and not decimate it. So, thank you again for your comments.

MS. BURKE: And, I will say a lot of students who are entering the workforce have employers who will continue to fund their education. So, that is also -- no cost to them.

DR. MAROUN: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Thank you so much, future Dr. Jackie.

(laughter)

DR. MAROUN: So, next up we're going to transition the conversation to talk about IDEA funding.

IDEA funding is directly supporting our students with disabilities. To begin this conversation, I'd like to call up Julie Borst, the Executive Director of Save our Schools New Jersey.

Julie?

JULIE LARREA BORST: Good morning, everyone.

ALL: Good morning.

MS. BORST: Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. It's nice to be here, with some of my favorite superintendents. I'm sure many of you recognize them as the ones who always turn up for our kids. I'm Julie

Borst; I'm the Executive Director of Save Our Schools New Jersey Community Organizing, and the Board Chair for the New Jersey Community Schools Coalition. Melanie Schulz from ASA is one of my partners in crime for community schools, so I just want to say, in this discussion -- even though it's not part of this particular discussion -- community schools go an awful long way to mitigating some of those effects. Passaic just has now become-- Passaic High School is now a community school--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARTER: Yes.

MS. BORST: --with the support of Paterson, they were able to land that Federal grant, which is about to go away. In order to create that--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARTER: And, we just took our kids to the African American Museum.

MS. BORST: Yes, I know, right.

And, there's also the Dodge Foundation and the million dollar grant for Montclair State University to turn Eastside High School, which is across the Bay from the ballpark. And, they're-- And, Montclair State is managing the museum and all the artifacts, and all that kind of stuff. So, a great example of a public/private partnership, for sure.

But, I wanted to talk about IDEA. For those of you who don't know -- and I've been coming before this committee for an awful lot of years by now -- I am the mom of a daughter who is now 26 years old with traumatic brain injury. And, her entire school history was in New Jersey, from K through transition to age 20. My experience in New Jersey for special education was not a good one. But, pulling on all the various threads locally -- I live in Bergen County -- and wealth resourced schools who don't do a good job with special education. And, what I eventually came upon was just

the idea that the funding just really isn't good. And, that's in two parts. So, New Jersey hasn't done a good job of funding our schools, generally, for a very long time until recently. And, the Federal money just simply is not there. So, I want to give a little overview of IDEA so everybody is kind of on a level playing field before the superintendents come up and tell you exactly what this is going to mean in their districts. So, IDEA was a public law 94-142 was created in 1975. And, it was passed in order to support states in protecting the civil rights and providing education for infants, children, and youth with disabilities. The name was changed to the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act when it was reauthorized in 1990. So, IDEA is what we all know it as now. Funding for IDEA since its inception was never meant to be more than 40%. But, it has never been funded at more than 17%. Which means that, even the promise of IDEA was never even realized, but it was never meant to be something that was going to support states anymore full in partnership sort of a way. And, I will just say that, effectively, -- 14.7 -- Sorry. So, the last year, which was the 2024 number we have, 14.7% was the amount coming out to all states. So, that's billion and billions and billions of dollars. And, we're talking about this over a period of 49 years. So, school districts and states have been on the hook for the vast majority of special ed. funding.

The provisions (indiscernible) in IDEA is come in four parts. The first part is really about terms and definitions. You all have IEP, FAPE, least restrictive environment, and things like that. Those are all defined in law. And, that is to help parents get those services for their kids and also for school districts to make sure that the State understands, so they can support you in providing those things. Part B is about funding. And, this is probably

represents about 90% or so of where IDEA funding goes to. So, this is about directly providing instruction to students. Section 611 provides grants to states for students with disabilities, age 3 through 21. Section 619 is the preschool grant part of this, and that's for students with disabilities age 3-5. Part C provides funding for children with disabilities ages birth to 3 for their families; it's early intervention, or as we -- in the parlance. And, that includes things like family visits; training; occupational therapy; medical support for diagnostic and evaluative services; and transportation for families to those services. Part D is bigger grant funding. This is really about the U.S. Secretary providing support nationally. Actually, SPAN, our organization here, which supports families, and students with disability, part of their funding comes through in part D. And, they also, newly in the last few years, the National Center For Parent Information and Resources. So, this is something that any parent, or anybody could access to find out what the laws are; how to access them; how to protect your child's rights; and so on and so forth. I would also strongly suggest to think about the Department of Education. The U.S. Department of Education, primarily is a civil rights organization. That's what this funding is all about, ultimately. So, if we're talking about getting rid of it, and-- A Senator from South Dakota already does have a bill to end the Department of Education. And, it would effectively move out some of this programming back into Federal agencies where they lived before. Because, when the Department of Education was created, they were just taking the education parts out of the Department of Labor, out of Health and Human Services, and so on and so forth, and putting them all under one roof. This would disperse some of that back out

and other things completely. But, that bill is available; it's up on the Federal website.

So, how much IDEA funding does New Jersey receive? Not a lot. A little bit further in my testimony, I reference the '22-'23 school year. And, that's mostly because the Education Law Center, last April, put out a report on special education funding -- in regard to SFRA and some recommendations they were making. So, I'll just reference the '22-'23 school year below. I attached the spreadsheet from DOE with the district allocations from that year. Part B and C funding was about \$410.5 million. The question is, what happens when a significant portion, if not all of it, goes away, and how is the State going to make that up? And, what are we going to do to make sure that school districts are resilient *now* in case this comes down the road? One of the things -- even though we are talking speculatively here -- the history has been, there have been attempts to cut Title funding, anyway, by 80%. That would be the number that I would be looking at. That's the number that's been tried over and over and over in the Federal budgeting process; fortunately that's never come to pass. But, who knows? So, if you're going to think about what this looks like, what do you do when you only have 20% of the funding that you've been getting, and that wasn't enough to begin with? There is nothing with regard to what IDEA funding might need.

So, special ed. funding-- I was also going to say, too, I gave you a link in the testimony; you can see what the IDEA funding allocation is by district, going back to the school fiscal year of 2012. So, you can really see what those numbers look like. And, so, funding for special education in New Jersey, and here's where I think the idea of, what are we doing with Federal

funds; how does that braid in with what the State's doing here? We have a big problem with SFRA. Our School Funding Reform Act, when it came into being in 2008, it changed to a census-based formula. I think we've had this discussion before; it seems like we talk about this a lot. In doing so, it created a system where about 60% of school districts in the '22-'23 school year did not receive funding for the kids who they were educating who were classified. That represents about \$378 million that was underfunded to those districts who are far above the state average. The other thing that going to a census-based formula did is it treats every disability as though it costs the same to educate, and that is *absolutely* not true. And, Vicky's smiling here, because she knows, as a former School Board member, that can be very, very expensive as opposed to just having -- with just quote unquote in need of speech or is dyslexic, and that can be addressed by a reading program and so on and so forth. As opposed to a child like mine, who has traumatic brain injury, or yeah, it was a lot more significant; her supports were a lot more significant. So, when you're treating those the same, you're basing the funding on -- the State funding -- on a classification rate where the lowest classification rate that year was 3%, which, to me, is not statistically possible -- and that's a whole other discussion -- all the way up to 33%. But, we also know at the building level, it can be much higher than that.

So, we have examples in Newark where it's approaching 40%. You have to really understand this in the bigger context. You're talking about a state average, and you're talking about district averages. That's the money that it's based on, and then there's a multiplier for wealth. So, you might fall -- if you're lucky -- you're falling somewhere close to that state average so that at least you get that money. It also meant that there were some districts that

were overfunded by \$108 million. That money could have been spent somewhere else. At \$378-- Really think about that; what does that mean? Does that mean that you didn't have the right specialists for the kids in your building? Did that mean that you didn't have enough staff? That you didn't have enough support staff? Kids who really needed aides, were you able to do one on one? Did you have to combine them with somebody-- Whatever those choices are being made, that hurts kids. And, that's really what we're talking about here.

So, that's it on that. I also included in my packet that report from the Education Law Center. And, they really lay it out for you, exactly why this has been a problem. They give you very specific examples, including Manville was in that. And, what some suggestions for those would be. And, those would be -- that would be really to go to tiers. I think having tiered funding based on your -- on classifications for the kids that you actually have in your building and the number of kids that you have in your building will at least right size that amount of money for the kids who you're trying to educate, OK. It also might mean that you might not need so much extraordinary aid at the end of the day because you are upfront giving the districts what they have. I think that creates a level of resilience to loss of Federal funding in the way that our current funding structure provides absolutely no resilience for anybody.

I also want you to keep in mind something, and this is something that somebody has said to me, many, many years ago. We have been living in a scarcity mode for so long, that it's been normalized. And, the stories that you hear here from these superintendents and business administrators, and if you've been to budget hearings over the years, they will all tell you that

they are doing this by the seat of their pants. They have the minimum number of teachers; the minimum number of nurses, if they have a nurse. If we-- We don't have librarians in every single school building in the state, this is crazy to me. We're one of the wealthiest states in this country, and this is how we're living. My fear is, is that if we lose the Federal funding, the State is not in a position to step up to provide the resilience that's going to be needed for school districts. And then, this is going to be all of what everybody's been experiencing, on steroids. And, do we really want to do that to our kids? What does this mean for our kids?

Bottom line: Money matters. I include this every single year. It's kind of cheeky, but I include it every year with my budget testimony about why money in schools matters. There's two of them, there's an older report, and then an updated one. Dr. Mark Weber is actually a New Jersey school teacher, and Federal funding in general is his specialty. Really, really understand the funding really matters, for a variety of reasons. And, as Assemblywoman Carter was saying, in those larger districts, especially the ones that are poorer, it's not just the learning conditions inside of those schools. What's affecting those kids is all the stuff outside, which, brings me back around to community schools, and I'm so happy we're having that discussion on Thursday, Senator. You have to be organized about how you're spending your money, and obviously that's going to be really necessary going forward. But, what is the State doing to raise money to be able to make sure these districts are able to provide programming for their students when or if this money goes away?

So, thank you for your time.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: No, thank you.

No, thank you. Thank you for the education.

Does anyone have any questions? (no answer)

MS. BORST: No, OK.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Thank you.

DR. MAROUN: So, next we're going to bring up Dr. (*sic*) Scott Feder, Superintendent of the South Brunswick School District; Ms. Kara Huber, Business Administrator for the Lenape School District; and Dr. Jim McLaughlin, retired superintendent and Interim Director of Special Services for the Manville School District.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Welcome, welcome, welcome.

SCOTT FEDER: I also want to thank Jamil for making me a doctor, I appreciate that.

(laughter)

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Spitting out degrees left and right.

MR. FEDER: That's really good.

So, based upon the questions you've asked and the testimony everybody provided, I'm going to take a little bit of a different tactic. I want to point out a couple quick things that we all know, but we might forget we know. Schools are funded in only one way. Only funded in one way. They're funded by taxes. Period. Either they're local, they're State, or they're Federal. So, the questions about what would happen if -- the question is going to be, "Does the State of New Jersey still want those things to continue?" Whatever "those things" might be. Whether it be -- are related to grants for special education; Title grants; CTE programs-- That really is

the question. Because, there is no other magic pill out there; it's taxes. The State of New Jersey has a 2% cap on tax increases at the local level. With that, when questions are asked about, "How will you cover it if--" The answer is, we won't. That really is the correct answer. We won't cover it. I'm South Brunswick School District; I'm the Superintendent of Schools; we've been an S2 district for six years. If we lose the \$5 million or 3% of our budget from Federal funding, we will simply not do that \$5 million worth of things. That will come to about 70 teachers. You can calculate that any way you want. We can talk about how that affects certain programs; we can talk about various things; we can talk about class size. But, in the end of the day, whether it's Title money, whether it's Perkins Grants, whether it's IDEA money-- I'm \$5 million and I'm a large district for a number of students; I'm not a large district for poverty. That means districts that are 8,500, 8,000 kids with high poverty are looking at a heck of a lot more than my \$5 million. It's nothing. I got to imagine Newark, Paterson, Trenton are running on primarily State and Federal funding. Very little local funding. So, the question has to shift, and I can tell you the answer is, we're not going to. I am speaking just for South Brunswick. So, yes, we will do all of our magic moves, and we will do all the best we can and we will restart this, and redo that. But, in the end of the day, South Brunswick will not find \$5 million to replace the Federal funding. It just won't.

The second part I want to share, if you listen to all the things we're talking about, most of these funds-- We're not even talking about the amount of money; my district probably gets between \$700,000 and \$900,000 a year for free food. So, you heard Trenton. Trenton's got about 10,000 students, I think, and they're probably primarily free and reduced

lunch. So, my district is 7,600 kids with 11% of free and reduced lunch, so you can do the math. Just that alone in Trenton, there's probably \$7-8 million for that. So, when we think of the amount of money we're talking about and who it's targeting, most of the Federal money -- and, I think Julie talked about -- it's civil rights. This is targeting our most marginalized -- Historically marginalized -- students are the ones who will be the most impacted by the loss of Federal funding. So, in South Brunswick, I can talk about our programs that will be lost and I could do that as long as you want me to talk up here, as I'm sure we all can. But, at the end of the day, to try and keep this short for my part, the money -- the kind of money we're talking about is not replaceable unless the State of New Jersey is going to fork up about probably -- estimated between both IDEA, for all of it -- \$800 to a billion; \$800 million to a billion. Somebody behind me probably knows the numbers better than I do. I'm just shooting from the top of my head about what I think it probably is. So, that's another billion, let's say, of funding -- to keep doing what we're doing today, tomorrow. I can't remember who asked the question, but someone asked -- it might've been you, Senator McKnight, does the money ever increase or decrease?

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Yes.

MR. FEDER: Yes, we get decreased.

Increases, forget it; we don't even think about increases anymore. We're looking for flat funding; it would be wonderful. But, just remember, because of the 2% cap, in New Jersey -- this is just important -- flat funding from the State means we have less money the following year. That's flat funding, is less money, not flat. Because, we know everything costs more than 2% -- everything. So, districts start without -- getting all of our Federal

funding next year, which I do predict we will. But, if it doesn't, of course that's why we're here. If we stay flat, no new State aid, no new Federal funding, nothing else, everything's flat, and we maximize the tax levy impact, most districts will be down somewhere between 2% and 4% of their operating budgets. That's about what it comes out to be. My district's somewhere around 4.5% to roll over a year; other districts will be a little higher, some could be a little lower. But, it's not a bad estimate. So, that means a district like mine with a \$170 million budget; we start on July 1 minus \$3 million. *With* full Federal funding; *with* full state aid; *with* full everything. We start minus \$3 million.

Everybody can probably tell you a similar story. But, I think it helps to maybe help frame the question-- If we're talking about losing Federal funding, that's \$5 million on top of minus \$3 million, just for one district. That's minus \$8 million. There's no magic solution to minus \$8 million. So, here's what happens: Special ed. class sizes will go to the max and then we'll ask for waivers to put-- We'll put aides in classrooms to have more students than we should have in those classrooms. That's what we'll do. We'll pull kids back who need out-of-district placements, because we can't afford to keep the out-of-district placements. We'll be in wars with parents, constantly. Remember, in New Jersey also, we're one of the few states -- if not the only state left -- the burden of proof in a lawsuit is on the school, not on the parent. We have to prove that our placement is correct. So, what happens, and why New Jersey is the Number 1 highest ranked state for classifications, because of that law, in my opinion. When a parent says, "I want this," a district has to decide, "Am I going to fight? Because, we don't believe that's correct. But then, I have to prove it, which costs me money,

and then of course, if we lose, we have to pay the other side as well.” So, the question of what happens with all this is pretty extreme. It’s pretty extreme, but, also, it’s extreme because it all comes from one place: Is it’s taxes. And, I can’t imagine there’s one of you up there, or one person on my Board, or me, who wants to go to the public and say, “Hey, we need you to spend more money.” Yet, schools are only funded by taxes. If the Federal Government pulls some of its tax-earned money from New Jersey, or from whatever, it’s got to come from somewhere. Or, the district -- or the State has to say, “We have to change something. We have to not do what we’re doing today. Because we won’t be able to afford it tomorrow.”

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Right.

MR. FEDER: Thank you.

ALL: Thank you.

DR. MAROUN: See, that’s why you’re a doctor.

(laughter)

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Thank you.

K A R A L. H U B E R: I don’t know how I’m going to follow that, but I will try.

My name is Kara Huber; I’m the School Business Administrator for the Lenape Regional High School District located in South Jersey. We serve over 6,500 students, grades nine through 12. Our district encompasses eight municipalities and spans over 326 square miles of South Jersey.

This year, we have 1,196 special education students. So, if you do the percentage, that is 18.4% of our population, is classified. As Julie pointed out previously, the state average for funding this year was at 15.9%, so, according to the School Funding Reform Act formula. So, therefore, we

are not being funded for 168 special -- 167 special education students this year. The gap represents a loss of approximately \$3.6 million in State funding for our district. Additionally, the State provides special education funding through extraordinary aid. Unfortunately the funding has been steadily decreasing each year, despite increasing costs and enrollment. Last year alone, our district faced a shortfall of nearly \$2.2 million in extraordinary aid. So, right off the bat, we are underfunded in special education by over \$5.8 million, right off the bat. I bring this to your attention because the Lenape Regional High School District receives approximately \$1.5 million in IDEA aid. Without this essential support, our ability to provide the required services for our special education students would be compromised, placing even more of a burden on our general education programs. So, special education is very dictated -- the programs, the requirements. The only way that we make up those funds is by taking it away from, essentially, our general education population.

Our district has faced seven consecutive years of state aid cuts, as well we are an S2 district. We've lost \$10 million. So, our district, with those State aid cuts, are seeing comparable State aid numbers to the 1990s, the early 1990s. So, 35 years ago, the funding we received was equal to what we're receiving today, despite having 1,500 fewer students at that time. At that time, we had 5,000 students in our district. So, I just want to point out one thing: As the School Business Administrator, I actually submit the budget. So, one of the requirements in submitting the budget is showing how the IDEA funds are going to be used. That is not a requirement of the Title funds; however, if you're utilizing your funds to pay for the tuition of out-of-district students, the State does require us to show them a specific

spreadsheet of all of the students, what those total costs are minus our IDEA funding. So, right then and there, I know a majority of the school districts do this; this funding is actual funding that we have to have. There is no choice. Otherwise, we're exactly where, "Doctor"--

(laughter)

--Feder had mentioned earlier. So, with that being said, I don't want-- He did a very good job at explaining the circumstances and the results that could come out of this. But, thank you for the time to speak.

JAMES McLAUGHLIN, Ed.D.: Good morning.

ALL: Good morning.

DR. McLAUGHLIN: My name is Jim McLaughlin, and as Dr. Maroun mentioned, I am a retired Superintendent currently working as an Interim Director of Special Services in the Manville School District. I've been an educator for 40 years in the New Jersey public schools, and my first job I've been a special educator, and I always considered myself to be a special educator, even as a Superintendent.

The pieces that Julie brought up about IDEA and its inception, I think, are important to emphasize. Because, the commitment that was made back in 1975, 40% of funding obviously has never come close to being realized. And, what that means is a significant misperception many times, about special education. I've spoken with parents who sometimes feel that if we're recommending eligibility for their child, it's because we're looking for funding. But, there is no increase in funding the amount of students who you classify. I wanted to give a picture from Manville, in terms of what this means, in terms of actual expenditures. The total budget for Manville is \$49 million. Manville spent \$7.7 million on special education. The amount of

funding that comes from IDEA this year is \$500,000. So it-- It is significant in that it would be very difficult to replace that \$500,000, but, is also not close to the amount of commitment that has to be made by the district if it's running not only a compliant, but a high-quality special ed. program. And, there's been some allusion to what will happen if special education funding should go away or be decreased. And, it has been decreased, even with the support at the Federal level that we've heard. In the past, we've seen that decrease go from 18% to -- I think what Julie mentioned -- to 14.5%. So, even within a supportive environment we've seen the decrease. In a non-supportive environment, I think it's scary because what will happen is we will see changes, as has been alluded to, in terms of Titles for classes. Classes that can't accommodate more students, because every type of class that you have is regulated in terms of the ratio of staff to students. So, for example, if you're running a class, an autism class, that requires a 3-1 ratio; three students to one staff member. Although, oftentimes, if it's a high-quality program, it's even greater. It can be 1-1 in many instances. So, you would not want to see those autism classes become -- multiply-disabled classes, where more students can be in there with less staff. And, that's the type of thing that we risk if there is a less of a commitment, because it's already a battle that's underway as people try to be creative in using funding and serving students.

I also wanted to just hearken back to something that was mentioned before. There was a little bit of testimony in regard to Section 504, and, not meaning to sound historical, but I will say that when I began in the field, we didn't even hear about 504 in schools. It existed because it was part of the 1973 Civil Rights Act, which was-- The intention of that was for returning veterans from Vietnam who couldn't get jobs because they came

back disabled. And, these were protections for those veterans. But, the way that the law was written, it extended beyond that circumstance and through case law and through directives, over time, 504 has become commonplace in the school. So, it's another way of serving students with disabilities; however, there is no funding attached to 504 because 504 is a Civil Rights Act. It's not an educational law. So, that's an area that we haven't even quantified. When we hear about services that are being provided through 504, they can be very significant. I know there's already been a reference to some of the mental health services that are being provided in school districts. Many times these are not to students with an IEP, but to students with a 504 or students who don't even have a document, necessarily, behind them.

In Dover, where I most recently was Superintendent, we expended \$1.2 million on Rutgers mental health commissions in the district. And, I do want to thank the support of all the legislators who got behind the SBYS and keeping that program intact, because we had -- and, continue to have in Dover -- an in-house program. That fund is about \$250,000, and then an additional \$1.2 million spent on mental health clinicians. For students who have experienced severe trauma, *severe trauma*-- We're a heavy immigrant community, and continues to be a heavy immigrant community where many of the students are fleeing some really terrible, terrible conditions and had seen some terrible things on their journey and before their journey. And, they carry that with them. So, no one's available to learning -- as we know, and as we've already said -- without those -- those services being intact. Trying to find a psychiatrist -- because we did add a half-day psychiatrist -- is very difficult. There's a scarcity of psychiatrists; people who specialize in that field. But, it is-- It's become, I think, a necessity for every school district to

have a psychiatrist who at least serves in a consultive role, if not, an in-house role.

So, with that being said, I just wanted to give a continuing picture. We spent \$7.7 million on special education -- in the district, and \$500,000 comes from IDEA. Local spending over the past year rose \$50,000; there was a slight increase to the basic portion of IDEA, and we've heard a little bit about the difference between preschool and basic. I want to shift slightly to preschool and, really, again, applaud the State's commitment to preschool education. It's really critical for so many of our students; getting that start that's going to result in eventual achievement, and being really readers; being learners by third grade; and certainly, we believe in that. However, the complication is that with every preschool class, you reserve up to five seats for students with disabilities. Students with disabilities because, they could be funded through IDEA; cannot be funded through the PEA grant. So, those students essentially are being offset either locally, or, if you had enough money for IDEA, you could philosophically spend it. But, nobody's spending money there because it's being taken up by tuition. Almost every district that's been mentioned spends their money on out-of-district tuition. And, one big reason is because, if you spend it on personnel, you have to set aside money for FICO, which is usually inflated, and you are left with money that's unexpended; it's not a good budgetary mechanism, or at least I've been told that by the school Business Administrators I've worked with.

(laughter)

So, it is spent dedicated to out-of-district tuition. It does not cover your out-of-district tuition expenses. But, all of it can be expended, I

would say, in a clean budgetary fashion. So, preschool, just as an example, and Manville's very proud of the fact that its preschool has expanded. And, as it has-- One of the great benefits is we're finding kids with disabilities who we wouldn't have found otherwise. As an example, we've increased from the Fiscal Year 2023 from 17 special ed. students in our preschool program, to 36. So, it has more than doubled, but at the same time the portion of IDEA that is reserved for preschool has remained absolutely flat. So, that has not increased. And, it creates issues in terms of really supporting those students and providing-- If we're finding students at that level, what we want to do is intervene, and make a difference. Because, all the research tells us that if you-- The earlier you get to a student, the more difference you make. Right now, that's a challenge that goes along with this, that I think that we are trying to be creative with, and to come up with answers to.

I wanted to mention one piece that hasn't come up yet, and it harkens back to the earlier discussion on Title funds. So, in my role, I am the McKinney-Vento facilitator for the district. And, as I'm sure you all know, it's been publicized that our homeless population and identification is increasing significantly. When I left the Dover schools, we were up to 37 students who we had identified, and it was increasing monthly as we did that. Now, the only funding the districts have for McKinney-Vento -- and there is a long list of services that families are entitled to: school supplies; travel vouchers; food scarcity supplements -- the only funding that you have is from Title I. So, you-- There's a set-aside in Title I that you can put for homeless. In many cases, it's minimal, because Title I has already been taken up by all the programs that you've heard about already today. So, essentially, McKinney-Vento, I'll say is an unfunded mandate. It's an important

mandate; I think we really do have to make sure that our families are supported so the kids come ready, fed, and able to learn without those other pieces that can hold them back. However, there is no funding mechanism there, and the Title I piece is just a further wrinkle in terms of that piece of funding.

So, I think those are the pieces that I wanted to share today. And, it's attached to funding. I do want to mention -- and I don't think this is going to, again, be a surprise to anyone -- we've heard about the teacher shortage. I think one aspect of the teacher shortage that has not received enough attention is, as we have a real scarcity of candidates for positions, and I want to emphasize scarcity; it is *small*. We're talking about-- Having done this for a period of time and hired teachers as a part of the position that I've been in, we're used to seeing pools. You'd like to feel that you have 20, and 10; six people to choose from. But, many cases, whether you're in a high socio-economic district or a low socio-economic district, you're seeing candidates five or less. And, for any position, not science and math, foreign language -- which have always been tough -- but elementary positions. And, we certainly see it. I serve as an adjunct professor; I've been doing that for close to 25 years. And, so, the amount of folks in the pipeline is small. But, the point that goes along with that and the piece that affects expenses, is that now -- which is good for them -- new teachers are in a position to really bargain for a much higher salary, which also puts an impact on district funding. One of the pieces, again, one of the devices that Business Administrators have always hoped for is that when you have a retiring teacher who's at the top of the scale, that the person who comes in below will make much less and that you have some money to work with. That's no longer the

case, because many times the person who is leaving -- the one who's coming in behind them -- is making, if not the same, pretty close to the amount. And, it's become a little bit of a bidding war between districts. Again, good for the candidates, but not good for the fiscal picture.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Thank you so much.

DR. McLAUGHLIN: So, I just wanted to share those thoughts with you today, I hope they were beneficial, and thank you for listening.

DR. MAROUN: I did want to add one more item, specifically in regards to certificates.

One of the things that we hope to do as a group, is have some more conversations around certificates, and the requirements in certificates. One the areas of most concern -- and, I know we've spoken about it -- is the Teacher of the Handicapped Certificate. This is a certificate that allows a special education teacher to teach students who have multiple disabilities all of their content areas. Where now, those certificates are aging out, and we're having really difficult times finding teachers to serve our neediest students for -- in the school, because there are no more Teachers of the Handicapped. And, there's lots of different areas where we would want to have conversations around certificates. And, that creates a financial cost for a district, because now, you're either putting two teachers in every classroom - - the content classrooms, for the students with multiple disabilities -- or you're paying that premium for a Teacher of the Handicapped to come to your district, and leaving a hole somewhere else because they've lost that teacher.

DR. McLAUGHLIN: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Thank you.

Thank you so much. Good point, thank you.

DR. MAROUN: You guys left them speechless.

(laughter)

Next, we have Helen Payne, from North Hanover, who's going to talk to us about impact aid.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Future Dr. Payne, please.

(laughter)

Welcome.

HELEN PAYNE: So, thank you for having me.

I feel a lot of pressure to be dazzling, because we've been here for a long time, and I have a PowerPoint presentation. My colleagues really, I think, dropped the mic on a lot the other funding issues. So, I'm here today to talk about a very specific type of Federal aid that some districts received. I am Helen Payne, I'm Superintendent in North Hanover. I serve on the National Association of Federally Impacted Schools as a Board of Directors member. I am the State Chair for that organization, for New Jersey. And, I am the Vice President of the Military Impacted Schools Association.

So, when we talk about impact aid, I'm going to give you a little information about what it is; why we have it; who's eligible; a tiny look into how it's calculated; and the role of the Department of Ed. in that process. It only affects about 20 districts in our state, but the effect on those districts is pretty substantial. So, what is impact aid? Impact aid is the longest running K-12 education program in the Federal Government. It was signed into law in 1950. It currently lives in Title VII of ESSA. And, it is a property tax

replacement program. It's very different than the other education programs that we talked about today. It provides payments to school districts across the country when there is a Federal presence in their school district that prevents them from collecting property taxes. Otherwise, if you had a Federal presence in your district, or, if you were an LEA that educates students who are Federally connected, you would be at a significant financial disadvantage. You lose the taxes when there's Federal land in your district. There are two elements to the program; we affectionately call them 7002 and 7003. 7002 deals strictly with school districts that have Federal land within their boundaries. And, 7003 deals with districts where the Federal Government puts students on that Federal land, and they get educated in the public schools. So, it's a \$1.7 billion program nationwide. For New Jersey, we receive currently about \$27 million. When the Federal Government owns land, it takes them off the tax rolls; schools cannot receive property taxes from that land. And, as I said, additionally students may be present in the local schools because they live on that land, and both may impact a school district.

Some examples of it are military installations; they can be 7002 or 7003. Federal low-rent housing facilities; Federal parks or recreation areas; and also, not applicable to New Jersey, but Indian lands, Indian reservations. All within the same program. Specifically in New Jersey, we have the Delaware Water Gap and a reservoir; some land that was taken for a reservoir up there. The Picatinny Arsenal; Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst; Naval Weapons Station Earle; the Coast Guard in Cape May; and some Federal low-rent housing throughout the state.

I'm from Burlington County, so here's some specific examples there: My district is an impact aid district because 74% of my students live on the military installation. We do not receive any property taxes for those students. Beverly City, also in Burlington County, has 20% of their students in Federal low-rent housing. And, New Hanover in Burlington County lost 50% of their land mass that was taken for the military installation that they cannot tax. And, there are examples throughout the state like that. This is a list of the districts in New Jersey in FY24; what they've received in impact aid. This is the 7002 list; these are the districts that had just their land taken, they did not have any students put on that land. They're entitled to almost \$36 million in lost property taxes they're receiving, just about four because the program isn't fully funded; there's a theme here. But, that \$4 million is significant to them.

To be eligible for the 7003 funding -- that's the section where you have students on the Federal lands -- you have to have at least 400 students, Federally connected or 3% of your average daily attendance. An annual student survey is required; parents have to sign off attesting that they live on the Federal land, and they also have to indicate where they work, because that is a factor in the formula as well.

Funding then gets paid out; you take the number of students that you counted and they get weighted, depending on a variety of different factors: where they live; where their parents work; what kind of students they are. Another factor is the local cost of education. Another factor is the school district need, which is measured by the amount of funding that impact aid makes up in your budget, plus the concentration of students that you have who are Federally connected. And then, the unknown every single year is

what Congress will appropriate for the program. That's always uncertain. But, that determines how much of a percentage the program pays out at.

Just to reiterate a little bit there, impact aid is not an allocation per student; it's a formula that is determined by a variety of factors. We take the student count and they're converted to weighted Federal student units. That's an important distinction, because it has come up in the past. We'll do away with the program and just give every military family a voucher. It doesn't work because there are other factors that are involved in the formula, and it's important because it's not a student support program, it is a tax-replacement program. These are the districts in New Jersey that receive Federal impact aid under Section 7003, and this is what they received in FY24. As you can see, my district, North Hanover, is the largest recipient in the state. That is because we have such a high concentration of Federally connected children. That \$15 million that you see that we received represents about 40% - 45% of my operating budget. So, when we talk about what does it fund, well for me, it pays the electricity bill; it pays the teachers; it pretty much does everything that we do in the district -- transportation, any number of things. We simply couldn't function without it. We have 1,100 students who come from the military installation, and only 400 local students. It's a small town, 8,000 residents total. There is no way the local tax base could make up that money.

Additionally, I'd like to mention, because military students move every 2-3 years -- some less than that; they get to stay with us even less -- they do come with a variety of needs and academic backgrounds depending on where they went to school. We could have a student walking in today who just flew in from Germany; parents decided not to put them in a DOD

school; put them in a local school; they've only ever learned in German. So, we take them in right away; you walk in the door; you start in the classroom that day. But, we have to have a host of supports in place to meet that need. Impact aid supports that.

So, what's the role of the DOE in this process? The DOE does all applications, calculations, verifications, audits, and payments for us. They assign an analyst to work impartially with every district throughout the country. As you can imagine, there are a lot of different types of districts that want to get their full share of this money, so we need those analysts to make sure that everything is done in the best interest of everyone. The department monitors Congressional appropriations, whether they're working with an actual budget, or they're working with a CR, and a CR, and a CR; the Department is on top of that. They release payments as they're authorized by Congressional action. They understand the needs of the different districts, and they are prepared to implement a very complex Federal law in a way that's fair and accurate for everybody. I've been in North Hanover 14 years; the office there right now is responsive and knowledgeable. There are some educators on staff, so not only do they understand impact aid, but they also understand schools.

So, what makes impact aid different than everything else you've heard about today? Well, it's property tax replacement. It's actually owed to the taxpayers in the LEA because they are educating Federal students. Or, they are unable to tax Federal land. It's not an assigned amount of aid per student; it's funded in the current year. We have to lobby for it every year; we spend a lot of time in DC doing so. It has to be well managed or districts like mine simply can't function. The amount is based on weighted Federal

student units; it's not exactly per pupil. It's prorated because the program's not funded; that's actually not different than the rest of the programs we've talked about today. And, losing it would result in staff, programs, transportation, and capital. And, I want to talk a minute about capital. Impact aid can be used for any purpose that a school needs it for. And, because there are so many different types of impact-aid schools across the country, that's really important. In a district like mine, where very small local population might be asked to fund a referendum for capital needs of a school that's located on a military installation that they can't even access, that'd be a really tough sell. I would like to say it would be impossible. So, we are able to use impact aid for the capital needs of our facilities, as well. Impact aid flows directly to the LEA that lost the tax revenue, and it's unrestricted. And, I want to make the point that impact aid is not just for military students or Indian land students, it's for all the students in the district that lost the revenue. It funds programs for all kids. And, it meets a need that would not exist if there wasn't a Federal presence. I think Senator Cryan asked earlier about discretionary and competitive grants as well. We do -- military connected districts, anyway -- do have the ability to apply for some of those. My district has received \$5 million in the last six years from competitive grants from the Department of Defense. The data *is* tracked, and we are required to have an outside evaluator to track that data and report it. So, I just wanted to point that out.

I can take any questions that anyone has.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Senator.

SENATOR CRYAN: First off, thank you.

I'll admit I had no idea.

MS. PAYNE: No one does.

SENATOR CRYAN: So, (indiscernible).

Just a very quick one for you. I did want to talk about capital a little bit, because one of the challenges we'll all have here is whether it's SDA, one of the things we don't talk about here is the lack of investment in the maintenance of our schools overall. And, anybody's got a 100-year-old school, or more, in their district knows what I'm talking about. So, this weighted funded student unit -- that's the term of the day. How do you get capital money in there? Is it just part of that formula that you-- Or, how does it work?

MS. PAYNE: So, the formula funds an overall impact aid payment to the district.

The district is allowed to use those -- that impact aid -- for any purpose at all. It is not restricted in anyway. Because, it's equivalent to what the district would collect in property taxes, which is also unrestricted use for districts.

SENATOR CRYAN: Right, but many --

MS. PAYNE: So, it's very different than the other Federal aid we've discussed today.

SENATOR CRYAN: So, depending on where you are in New Jersey, you have to go out for capital funding, vs.--

MS. PAYNE: Yes.

SENATOR CRYAN: --what your district is.

So, in your-- How does it work with you guys?

MS. PAYNE: Sure.

We're able to go out for capital funding. I just know we've never passed a referendum.

SENATOR CRYAN: Yes, it's a false premise, right?

MS. PAYNE: Right.

SENATOR CRYAN: OK.

And, if you don't mind me asking, do you have the investment in your actual capital maintenance? Is your district -- are your schools -- and, I say this without, as somebody who just doesn't know -- are they in pretty good shape?

MS. PAYNE: Yes, our schools are in excellent condition.

SENATOR CRYAN: Good to know.

Thank you, thank you very much. And, thanks for sending that ahead; it's helpful.

MS. PAYNE: My pleasure.

DR. MAROUN: So, finally, I'd like to bring up Tony Trongone.

He's the Executive Director for Great Schools New Jersey, and a retired Superintendent, who will close out our comments.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Can we bring up Matthew Clarke, also?

You can come together. Together. Together. Tag team.

ANTHONY TRONGONE: So, I am Tony Trongone, and Melanie has assigned me as the final act closer.

And, I can tell you that I wasn't really good in church, back in the day, and I wasn't good here, so pardon me for my behavior. But, I do really respect that you're all here, caring about what's going on with kids. Again, I'm a past President of the Superintendents Association. I've served

marginalized environments with students for over 14 years, in Pemberton and in Millville. Knowing what goes on, I also served the other half of my career in Cherry Hill, and also in Northern Burlington. And so, I see both sides of the impact that funding has on all students in the State of New Jersey, and on the taxpayers. But, what my purpose for today is, to the Committee, is to provide some follow-up feedback. So, when Senator Cryan talked about facts -- we give us some facts, and I think there's a level of uncertainty because of the executive orders that President Trump will put forward. So, a lot about what we're going to make conjecture on, we really don't know yet. But, I can tell you that we have to have planning, like you mentioned, and that planning leads to credibility, and also competencies of the people who we serve. Because, we know that there's something going to happen down the road. And so, Dan Smith was my BA at Pemberton; he talked earlier about the budget cycle. So, I'll repeat it again. And, I also talked to the Commissioner of Education, Kevin Dehmer, about the State aid notice that comes at the end of February. And then, you have the preliminary budget that's submitted three weeks after. And, then you have-- The local Board has a hearing, and what's in what's out. But, in that time period, we've always been for -- I've been 27 years now -- if you have 100% of your Federal money, you budget 85%, because you never know which way is it going to turn, up or down. I would recommend that we go at least 70%, because we have to eliminate that uncertainty, and here's the reason why: We've noticed many people here talked about people. People. And, the people who serve our kids, and it's sad to say this, but we have to give them notice, and that notice is May 15. And so, we have to look at that and say, "We have to prepare from that Board

hearing all the way to May 15, what are we going to do for tenure, that's a reduction in force, or non-tenure where there's a nonrenewal?"

And, then as Mr. (*sic*) McLaughlin talked about, it exasperates -- if that's the proper use of the word -- the staffing issues. Because now, the young kids are getting into trade, and they're like, "I don't know if I want to be in this district, because they're losing money." And so, this whole perfect storm is going to hit those kids to say, "Hey maybe I don't want to stick around in Millville; maybe I think that Egg Harbor Township's getting more money; I want to go there." And then, it hurts the kids who need it more. As you all know, I'm preaching to the choir. But, here's some things I wanted -- just going over the notes of what happened. For clarification, Assemblywoman Flynn, you talked about the State or the local people already absorbed those services. EHT, Egg Harbor Township, and also Manville, they were severely, severely underfunded by State aid for many years. And so, when they're getting that State aid bump, they're putting things in place because their local people were overtaxed; their local fair share was *way* over what they should have been paying. And, that's why some of it goes to taxpayer relief, but some of it was to reinstitute things that should be providing a thorough and efficient education. But also, when we talked about the CTE, we talk about providing a thorough and efficient education. But, Larry Lustberg from the Law Center; he came across one thing and he said, "You have to provide a thorough and efficient education, but you also have to make sure our kids are competitive in a modern society." And, so, we talk about all those things; that's what we have to look at, too. We have to add that to the T and E piece, because we have to have our kids competitive.

Also, there was mention about at-risk kids. So, in Title money, you get your money because you have kids who are financially or economically disadvantaged. But, they don't necessarily get the services. So, I'm being coy, but Donald Trump's grandsons or granddaughters can actually get Title 1 services, because they are academically at risk. The school gets the money because of the population, but then the services get directed and deployed to the kids who need it academically. So, it's for all kids. It's not just for (indiscernible), "Oh the poor kids, the parents don't do stuff at home." No, that's-- It's for all kids who are academically at risk. And, pardon me as I look at my notes, because I just want to close it up and respect my colleagues who did a great job.

Also, reimbursement. So, Senator, you don't get the money up front. We always have like districts. We have a float of a balance of money in our account, and we pay for services; we pay for payroll. And then, the BAs submit to the State of New Jersey for reimbursement, and then we get the Title money back. So, we don't get-- Districts do not get the money up front, we get the money after those services are rendered. So, that's another issue.

D., Helen talked about Military Impact Aid. I was at Pemberton; we had about 1,000 kids at the time, and Helen didn't mention it, but Helen can tell you, we've been through this before -- Helen and I -- because-- Because, when Trump 1.0 wanted to move the impact aid towards vouchers, and that's what you're hearing now. We don't know what that is, but we know that it's going to go-- And, we had to go to Washington. So, a lot of people -- and, we went how many times, Helen, to make sure that we -- we knocked on doors to say, "This is what the impact is going to be if this goes

to vouchers.” Because, the school districts that are military impacted will be depleted financially. So, I think that when we look at what we have to do, we can’t do nothing; we have to plan accordingly, like I said. But, we have to get our shoes on, go to Washington, and talk to our Republican senators and Congressman, and say, “Hey listen, this is what’s going to happen in New Jersey, and what can you do to help us with this legislation?” No one-- The President, the executive branch, and Congress and Senate are all Republican, as you all know.

Also, we’re anticipating cuts, but we’re also anticipating the use of the money. So, right now, it’s used for what everybody talked about, whether it be academic, social-emotional. How about if it’s used for vouchers, or tax credits? That money goes down even lower now available for meeting the kids of needs. So, we don’t even know what the money-- It goes from the Federal level, to the State level, and they have a plan. And then, districts have to follow that plan. And, if that plan includes a voucher program, or a tax credit program, that’s even less money that’s going to hit districts.

And so, again, I don’t know. But, I’m giving you what someone who’s retired but is worried about our kids-- And then, the Department of Ed. is over -- I’ll put it this way -- it’s significantly funded through the U.S. Department of Ed. for Title monies because of compliance. So, we’re going to see -- I’m going to say over 30% of the staff in the New Jersey’s Department of Ed. -- will be affected by it. I don’t know how they’ll be affected, but they’ll impacted. Because, when you get money for Federal funding, you have to do that job. An example is, I was at Pemberton my first year, and they came and did an audit -- they have to do an audit every so many years -- and a teacher who was paid fully through the Title I was doing lunch duty. Well, guess

what? We had to repay that money back, because that money should have went toward helping kids. And, here they were doing lunch duty. So, when they did the audit, Pemberton had to give back \$100,000. So, the same thing holds true for the Department of Ed. Those people who are getting Federal funding and working on those grants; they have to work on those Federal grants. They can't just slide in-- I mean, HR can slide them in a new position, but those positions have to be eliminated because they're funded through the Federal Government to do Federal work. So, that's going to be another issue.

And then, some grants I have-- I was superintendent at Millville, so, 21st Century Program, after-school program for kids. I'm telling you, it's a great program for kids. It's academic, but it's also social-emotional. It's also some activities for the kids after school, and that was \$600,000 at Millville a year. This is the last year of that grant, so I don't anticipate them having that at Millville next year. High-impact tutoring, we also had that. We'll see where that goes; same thing was mentioned from my esteemed colleagues. And then, SEMI -- special ed. medical insurance. So, we have kids who are special-ed. students who are economically disadvantaged, who we provide services for through our Special Ed. Department, and then we get reimbursed for it. And so, we're not going to get reimbursed for that Medicaid payment, I don't think, or it will be less, OK? And then, mental health. I'm going to be-- With mental health, I can tell you that we had a grant, a federal grant. We work with Rowan University. First thing we did, we did universal screening, but it was not mandatory. Parents were given the right if you want to have your kid take it or not. So, we had 641 high school kids take it at Millville last year. And, 82 kids were at risk. 82 kids. Seven had to go to crisis that day. And, it wasn't because of some overzealous

guidance counselor, we actually had to-- After they get screened, they have another assessment by a Rowan-trained personnel on the Columbia assessment.

We had to wait another month, but we wanted to do it the next week with the middle school. Same results. Six kids had to get sent to crisis. We weren't looking for trouble, but, we found it, and we felt pretty good that day that we met the needs of those kids. And, out of those 13 kids that cycle, 12 of them did not fit the profile. As a Superintendent, I see, I come in and I go (indiscernible). No behavior problems; nothing like that. Eleven were female, quiet kids; a lot of issues at home. So, as far as that Federal grant to have a universal screening tool; having a Rowan professor train our staff, and provide four staff people to provide it. Because, I said, "Let's treat mental health like reading." So, if kids are not ready to learn, they need to have some type of cycle of built resiliency on a weekly basis. It'll be triaged by their need. And so, we have that and it's \$700,000 a year. It was a \$3.5 million grant for five years. We have three more years left. But, these are the types of things we're going to lose, and also, they train their interns. So, we talked about staffing; we're building a pipeline where we have mental health specialists in the school, and we can hire them. After they've done their clinical work, they'll work for us. So, you're building a pipeline. These are the things that are progressive, and meeting the needs of the kids-- If you're in a school right now and seeing what's going on with these kids.

So, I think we need action. And -- it's just my opinion, and that our group, together, we have to look at not doing nothing -- I don't know if that's a proper term -- but, we have to do something. So, we have to be prepared for the worst, and we have to get a band of people together, go to

Washington, and then tell them what the impact's going to be for these kids. Because, I think it'll be a revisitation of 2010 when there was a billion dollar shortage, and we had to make draconian cuts. And, the public's going to come after the administrators and the politicians for why is this happening, and we have to be pre-emptive with our message.

So, thank you, and I'm open for any questions.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Thank you, Tony.

Thank you so much.

MATTHEW CLARKE: Well, good afternoon, my name is Matthew Clarke.

I won't-- Only because everything's been touched on, and that's what I was going to mention, other than the last couple slides. But, I wanted to mention a few things. My name, again, is Matthew Clarke, I'm with the New Jersey Association of School Business Officials, and I am the Assistant Executive Director. I served in a few districts as the Business Administrator for nearly 29 years in Union County. All right, we're right there.

(laughter)

And, I grew up in Union County, so I have that also on my record.

SENATOR CRYAN: So, you're handsome, too.

(laughter)

MR. CLARKE: I appreciate that.

And, matter of fact, Senator Cryan, you were one of my first speakers as President for Union County Association of School Business Officials at our meeting that I brought in in 2005. That's dating myself.

Real quick on the slides that were provided-- The first slide gives you an overview of how much New Jersey is receiving; it's just north of \$1 billion in the entitlement grants. So, you have that information, along with an introduction. I think that the NJASA and the panels that they put forth really gave you a flavor of what's going on in the State of New Jersey, and what may be needed in the future. What I want to go to is to the end, and that is really talk about the school meals; reimbursement; and the summer EBT; that's the Electronic Benefits Transfer. This year was the first year of the summer EBT, and I'll get into a few figures on that. What I do want you to look at is that -- it's slide 11. Slide 11 is the Federal for food security. The U.S. DEA reimburses lunches; after-school snacks; breakfasts served to children participating in the National School Lunch and Breakfast programs. Current reimbursement rates are shown on the slide, that way you have them. So, that you have a little knowledge, statewide, approximately 700,000 lunch meals are served daily. In addition, half of that number -- breakfast meals -- are served. So, you're looking at over a million meals being served. And, if you do that calculation and you go ahead and extrapolate that out to 180 days -- if you are feeding on 180 days -- you're looking at, both programs together, \$189 million. That big number.

In addition, there are three summer feeding programs; a preschool program; and after-school snack meals program that are within that. On slide Number 12, we have the summer EBT program. The summer EBT program -- this was the first year, 2024 -- and New Jersey had one of the highest results nationwide. Thanks to the Executive Director for the New Jersey Office of the Food Security Advocate, Mark -- I always say his last name incorrectly, and I apologize if you're watching, Mark -- Mark Dinglasan.

But, he put together a team that formed to -- for school nutrition advocates from a number of organizations that would go ahead and roll this out with success. And, in addition, we had Rose Chamberlain, Division Director for Food and Nutrition, and her team at Child Nutrition that helped spearhead the paperwork. 711,000 students served during the summer. And, that was \$40 per child, per month, for three months and that brought in \$85 million for the families who were in need.

With that, I would turn it back over to the group, to the dignitaries, if you have any questions. Otherwise, I really commend everyone who's presented before me.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON:
Assemblywoman Flynn.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN FLYNN: Yes, thank you.

Matthew, I wanted to just say, thank you for this beautiful presentation; I've been utilizing it the entire time. You really distilled it down to dollars and cents while also talking about the specific issues in this one document. So, I wanted to commend you for that, because it made this hearing so much easier. And, I just have one question. Is the total dollars in this -- because I was adding it up along the way, or looking at-- Is it \$1.8 billion of Federal funding, approximately? Or, was it more or less?

MR. CLARKE: Well, on the entitlement.

Your entitlement is the 547, 435-30--

ASSEMBLYWOMAN FLYNN: Yes.

MR. CLARKE: --you're looking at \$1 billion and change.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN FLYNN: \$1 billion and change?

Thank you. All right. I appreciate it, and you did a really good job with this, so thank you.

MR. CLARKE: Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Senator McKnight.

SENATOR McKNIGHT: Hi, I just want to say to everyone, thank you so much for being here today and sharing your insight.

And, especially to Scott; Scott, you still here?

ALL: No.

SENATOR McKNIGHT: Oh.

He was clear; he was the cherry on the cake. The cherry on the cake. But, I want to say again, thank you. You have enlightened myself with so much knowledge; I've been writing notes and taking notes. And, we look forward to furthering this conversation and pray -- I will say that -- pray that we do not lose Federal funding.

Thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON:
Assemblywoman Carter.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN CARTER: I also want to thank all of the presenters.

Mr. Trongone, also, thank you for your information with the wrap-up. And, kind of like hitting like a lot of the points that we really need to make sure that we're paying more attention to. I also hope that we don't lose any Federal funding, but, we also have to really look at the impact that any loss of funds that our districts get -- the magnitude of the impact that it really does have. And, it is great. And, we need to really make sure that we're

looking and fighting to make sure that, you know what, we get additional because flat funding, like you said, still we're at a loss and we're at a deficit. And, it impacts all of our districts that are in-- It impacts some even more, but -- and I say that in a relatively -- when you look at dollar-wise -- but the impact is still great on all of our districts.

So, thank you to you, and thank you to all of our presenters today.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Anyone else?

SENATOR CRYAN: A big thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON:
Assemblywoman Matsikoudis.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN MATSIKOUDIS: I also wanted to say thank you, this was like, "Wow."

There was just so much information; I, too, was taking quite a few notes. And, Federal funding is so important, and the thing that I heard throughout, which is the most important, is this is all about our kids. This is all about our marginalized, most disadvantaged kids and making them happy, productive citizens. So, my hope as well is that Federal funding isn't cut, so thank you.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN REYNOLDS-JACKSON: Senator Cryan.

SENATOR CRYAN: Just a great big thank you.

You came to ask to be educated, and you educated us. Thank you. Thanks a lot.

ASSEMBLYWOMAN JACKSON: We're all done.

Thank you everyone.

(MEETING CONCLUDED)