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July 6, 2000, Thursday

KR-ACC-NO: NW-TEACHER

LENGTH: 790 words

HEADLINE: State Wants to Give New Jerseys New Teachers a Hand, Mentor

BYLINE: By John Mooney

BODY:

About 6,000 men and women join the ranks of New Jersey's public schoolteachers every year.

As many as 2,000 first-year teachers don't make it to their fourth, be it from the strains of daily lesson-planning and homework to those of inattentive students and supervisors.

"This high level of attrition cannot be sustained in New Jersey if we are to meet the ever-increasing demand for new teachers in the years to come," said state Education Commissioner David Hespe.

Hespe presented a plan yesterday to the state Board of Education to remove at least some of these obstacles by providing new teachers stronger and more consistent guidance in those initial years.

[Under a nearly \$ 15 million plan, the state -- for the first time -- would supply money and assistance for veteran teachers in each district to serve as formal mentors to first-year teachers.]

The mentors will be in place for a full two years and be trained in the best ways to provide such support.

New Jersey was the first state to require mentors for new teachers, starting in 1985, but they are now only required for one year and have few guidelines.

For instance, a mentor now must meet with a new teacher nine times a year, but that can be in almost any form, from a quick visit to a long consultation.

Under the new program, "We are hoping it will be much more intensive than that and much more frequent," said Ellen Schechter, the assistant education commissioner who will oversee the new program.

Proposed by Gov. Christie Whitman in her State of the State address in January, the expanded mentor program is part of a national push to improve the first years of a teacher's career, both to enhance the overall quality of instruction and to keep the good teachers in the classroom.

LEVEL 1 - 42 OF 87 STORIES

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The Record (Bergen County, NJ)

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January 6, 2000, THURSDAY; ALL EDITIONS

SECTION: NEWS; Pg. A1

LENGTH: 694 words

HEADLINE: STATE GETS TOUGHER ON ASPIRING TEACHERS ;
RAISES MINIMUM FOR COLLEGE GRADES

BYLINE: JEAN RIMBACH, Staff Writer

BODY:

College students will have to crack the books a bit harder if they want to teach in New Jersey schools.

Under new rules approved Wednesday by the state Board of Education, teacher candidates will now have to earn a 2.75 grade-point average in college, a quarter-point higher than the current 2.5 required GPA.

The higher grade requirement will begin with teacher candidates who enter their junior year in September. It also will affect those who want to become teachers after careers in another field. Until now, there was no minimum GPA requirement for so-called "alternate route" teachers.

"We're focusing on teacher quality in New Jersey," state Education Commissioner David Hespe said.

Hespe first proposed the change to the state board in July after Governor Whitman last year called for increasing the minimum GPA for teacher candidates from a C-plus to a B. The standard approved Wednesday requires a B-minus average and falls at the low end of the range of the 2.75 to 3.0 GPA that Whitman had suggested. 1 NEX

"It is my belief that raising the standards for entering the teaching profession will ensure that school districts will have a higher-quality pool of teaching candidates to choose from," Whitman said.

State officials have conducted two surveys on the possible impact of the new requirement. Although each survey found that about one-fifth of those involved would not have made the grade when the new standard was applied, Hespe doesn't believe the requirement necessarily will diminish the pool of available teachers. Rather, he said, it gives a push to those seeking to enter the classroom.

"A lot of teacher candidates will have to work harder to get there," he said.

In one of the surveys, 19 percent of the 294 people studied would have failed to meet the 2.75 GPA requirement.

Assistant Education Commissioner Ellen Schechter said the survey did not deleteriously affect minority candidates when the 2.75 standard was applied.

Twenty percent of the 180 white candidates, 18 percent of the 60 African-American candidates, and 7 percent of the 30 Latino candidates would not have qualified, the study found.

James Harris, a first vice president of the New Jersey chapter of

the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, questioned the change. He said there is no evidence that those with higher averages make better teachers.

Nicholas Michelli, dean of the college of education at Montclair State University, called the change "very minimal, most of our programs have a high requirement already.... For most of our programs, it's 3.0.. But Michelli also called it "an important change."

"We always thought the 2.5 is quite a low standard for individuals to understand the content they teach," he said.

Annell Simcoe, associate professor of Rutgers University's Graduate School of Education, said the new standard will "obviously raise the public's perception that teachers will be improved."

"I will be optimistic and say it may well encourage individuals to come into the profession because they would have a higher regard for it," Simcoe said.

Others also saw it as a step in the right direction.

"I think the state is in line with what schools are trying to do: We're all looking to place higher standards on ourselves as professionals," said Carol Lisa, principal of the Bergen County high school academies.

Another licensing change approved Wednesday makes it easier for certified out-of-state administrators, superintendents and principals, to be hired in New Jersey schools even if they lack a master's degree or higher in management or leadership. Officials believe this will increase the pool of talented candidates.

In other business, Hespe gave the state board a revised code of standards and assessment that proposes toughening district certification requirements. The new code calls for boosting the number of students who must be proficient on the state's fourth- and eighth-grade tests from 75 to 85 percent. Districts would have five years to reach the new mark.

LANGUAGE: English

LOAD-DATE: May 26, 2000

LEVEL 1 - 3 OF 3 STORIES

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December 27, 1998, Sunday, Late Edition - Final

SECTION: Section 14NJ; Page 6; Column 3; New Jersey Weekly Desk

LENGTH: 814 words

HEADLINE: EDUCATION;
Voters Approve \$170 Million for Schools

BYLINE: By KIRSTY SUCATO

BODY:

It has been a bountiful season for school budgets. In a spate of special elections this month, voters in 16 districts authorized a total of \$170 million in borrowing for school building and renovation projects.

Another seven towns denied similar measures, which would have raised local property tax bills by as much as \$90 a year. But the approval rate -- more than two-to-one -- was the highest ever recorded in this tax-weary state, where voters from June 1996 to December 1997 turned down half of all school bond questions.

School boards can hold special elections at any time, and usually do when they are seeking approval for large-scale building projects. This year, December was the most popular for referendums, according to the New Jersey School Boards Association.

The unusual willingness to raise taxes reflects what school officials say is a widespread concern about cramped classrooms and outdated equipment at a time of rising enrollment and evolving technology.

"People are finally getting it," said Jeanne R. Smith, a spokeswoman for the 5,100-pupil Evesham district in Burlington County. "They are understanding that the state is not going to change its funding formula in the foreseeable future, and that somebody has to pay."

Voters in the fast-growing, once-rural district approved \$34.4 million in bonds on Dec. 1 to build a new elementary school and pur additions on five existing schools. Similar measures were defeated twice before, but this time the effort was propelled by parents who blanketed the town with signs and leaflets, Ms. Smith said. The district's enrollment is growing by 175 students a year, mainly due to the migration of young, upwardly mobile families who "have a vested interest in making the schools better," she said.

Ridgewood, a well-established district in Bergen County, faced a somewhat different situation. Officials anticipate only modest increases in enrollment in the 5,050-pupil district, but the high school, built in 1919, has not been renovated since the 1960's. On Dec. 1, voters there passed a \$19.9 million borrowing plan to build 15 new science laboratories, a multipurpose room, a new gymnasium and weight room as well as to transform existing classrooms into an arts center with orchestra space and a television studio.

"The curriculum outgrew the building," said the superintendent, Fred J. Stokley. "It was program driven as much as population driven." He credited an aggressive campaign by residents, including a telephone survey and three town meetings. A proposal last year to raise \$25 million for renovations failed.

In South Brunswick, where enrollment is growing by 400 students a year, voters defeated two measures that would have raised \$21.8 million to build a new elementary school and a 10-room addition to the middle school, among other

things. The 6,700-pupil district will probably buy several more trailers to house an overflow of students, and the school board will most likely confront voters with a second referendum next year, Samuel B. Stewart, the district superintendent, said.

Mr. Stewart attributed the defeat to poor communication with residents. One voter criticized him for not doing more to stem the enrollment growth, he said, while another group of parents campaigned for a staggered, 12-month school year to conserve classroom space.

"People don't want to pay more taxes," Mr. Stewart said. "Many people feel that a more equitable way for paying for schools should be developed."

New Jersey spends about twice the national average on education, about \$10,000 per pupil. Property taxes finance about 60 percent of the bill. Municipal officials have long called for a new spending formula, such as a move to state-financed education, but so far the Whitman administration has supported only partial reform.

Governor Whitman announced a plan this year that would create a special authority to oversee school construction. Under the plan, which would require legislative approval, the authority would borrow \$5.3 billion, and distribute the money among school districts. About half would go to the state's 28 poorest urban districts. But some estimates put the state's total needs at \$10 billion, said Frank Belluscio, a spokesman for the New Jersey School Boards Association. Districts are also concerned that they would lose control over building designs, he said.

Whatever the outcome, voters should expect a growing number of requests for school aid in the coming years because of a sharp increase in the number of children born in the last decade after a steep decline in the 1970's, said James W. Hughes, the dean of the Edward J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy at Rutgers University. According to the United States Department of Education, school enrollment in New Jersey is expected to reach 1.34 million in 2006, from 1.25 million in 1997.

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: December 27, 1998

Demand for teachers could surpass supply

By CRISSA SHOEMAKER
Staff Writer

With area schools opening soon, one of the first things on students' minds is who their new teacher will be.

Eventually, some school districts may be wondering the same thing.

As teachers from the baby-boom generation enter their 50s, more and more are expected to retire in the next decade — at the same time the number of students will be increasing.

That exodus could leave vacancies

across the nation that districts are unable to fill, or, some fear, will be filled with personnel unqualified to be teachers.

An estimated 2.2 million teachers will be needed nationally in the next decade to cover retirements and an increasing school population from the "baby-boom echo," officials said.

With nearly 27,000 of New Jersey's 84,000-member teaching staff eligible to retire, some experts worry there won't be enough teachers to fill the void.

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Others, however, say the state is in no danger of a widespread teacher shortage.

"My office frequently gets calls from frustrated candidates because they have applied for jobs ... and have been told there were literally hundreds of other applicants," said Ellen Schechter, assistant commissioner for the Division of Academic

and Career Standards of the state Department of Education.

"We don't anticipate having a teacher shortage anytime soon in New Jersey."

But others are worried that the number of teachers — especially in the areas of world languages, math, science and special education — won't grow as quickly as the demand.

Lynn Maher, spokeswoman for the New Jersey Education Association, the statewide teachers union, predicted a "targeted" teacher shortage.

"We have a shortage of special education teachers, and to some degree English-as-a-second-language teachers," she said. "But on the whole, there certainly is no shortage."

Maher said districts that do not pay competitive salaries will find it especially difficult to fill vacancies left by retiring teachers.

But those same schools may be able to improve their pay scales when the highest-paid teachers retire and new teachers with smaller salaries make up a higher percentage of the teaching staff.

"IT BECOMES an issue of money," said Ewing school district spokeswoman Tarry Truitt. "If you look at the whole education market, the schools that have more money are going to be able to hire the people on the shorter market. As the market gets smaller and smaller, they'll be able to offer more money for that person to come."

The nine teachers who retired from Ewing last year are in line with the district's average, but there is no way to predict future retirements, officials said.

Under the teacher pension program, teachers must be over 60 years old or have 25 years of experience to get their full benefits, according to the state treasury, which administers the program.

So far this year, more than 3,000

teachers have retired, in line with the 2,558 who retired in 1998 and the 3,152 who ended their careers in 1997.

Officials with the Education Commission of the States report that in 1998, 41 percent of all teachers were in the 40-49 age range — and one-quarter of the teachers were 50 years old or older, with the average age at 43.

The average amount of experience among New Jersey teachers is 16 years, according to the New Jersey School Boards Association.

"Our own observations with teaching vacancies is there generally have not been a shortage of applicants, especially at the elementary level," said association spokesman Frank Belluscio. "There have been some superintendents who are experiencing difficulty with special education teachers and also science."

"The markets are a little tighter than usual, but it seems to be specifically in the secondary special education, the physical sciences. ... Media specialists are really hard to find and home (economics) teachers are really hard to find," Truitt said.

Claire Sheff Kohn, Lawrence school district superintendent, was also concerned with the availability of specialty teachers.

"We're lucky we jumped on the world languages a bit ahead of neighboring districts," Sheff Kohn said. "But as more districts implement those standards, the competition will increase."

PROFICIENCY in a world language was added to New Jersey's core curriculum standards two years ago, making it necessary to begin learning a language in elementary school.

But Schechter said while some schools are trying to meet the world language requirement by hiring new teachers, there are alternatives.

Those include using people in the community with a knowledge of foreign languages, using high school language teachers or high school students proficient in world languages.

And so far, Lawrence has not experienced a teacher shortage.

"So far we've had a nice, steady retirement-replacement process," Sheff Kohn said. "We haven't seen a huge overturn at this particular

point. In general, people like teaching here and tend to stay a long time. But we do kind of keep our eye on that to anticipate any large-scale retirements."

State officials are going to be "taking measures to keep an eye on" looming retirements, Schechter said.

In her 1999 state of the state address, Gov. Christie Whitman introduced several teacher-quality initiatives, including hiring recruiters for the education department.

Schechter said the department will hire two recruiters in September to visit colleges with teaching programs and liberal arts programs, where prospective teachers can be brought in through an alternate route.

The recruiting effort also will focus on minority candidates, which some fear will decline as the teacher population falls and the diversity of children increases.

"About 35 percent of our school-age children are from racial-minority or linguistic-minority families," said Jennifer Robinson, director of the Teacher Education Advocacy Center at Montclair State University. "That is expected to increase at the same time we need new teachers."

So far, the supply of teachers in New Jersey has been keeping up with the demand.

THERE ARE 21,000 prospective teaching candidates, and schools of education continue to increase enrollment, Schechter said.

Rutgers University's graduate teaching program has maintained a steady enrollment and has seen students interested in teaching math and science increase over the past few years, said Annett Simcoe, director of teacher education.

But it still has not been enough to meet the demand for math and science teachers.

"The schools do need math and science teachers," Simcoe said. "There's not enough being prepared right now to offset the demand."

Simcoe said as curriculum standards have changed to require more math and science courses for students, the supply of teachers has not increased at the same pace.

"I think there is a cause for concern," she said. "We could always get a teacher in the classroom. But we need good teachers. And that's the real concern."

The secret to battling the teacher shortage is to make teaching more attractive.

"We can count the number of bodies we need for the teaching force. The trick is we don't know how many people are out there in terms of the supply side," said Gerry Wheeler, executive director of the National Science Teachers Association.

Many of those who have graduated with teaching degrees don't end up going into teaching, Wheeler said.

In the 1992-93 school year, the latest figures available from the National Library of Education, 144,000 students earned teaching degrees but 82,000 actually went into teaching.

"There's a body of people out there who could step up to the plate if teaching was an attractive option," Wheeler said.

Science teachers are hard to find because there are more attractive and prestigious options.

"A science major can go into industry and make a lot more money and (have) a lot more prestige than if he or she goes into teaching," Wheeler said.

But Wheeler remained confident that no classroom will be without a teacher.

"THERE WILL BE an adult in the classroom," he said. "The question is what that adult is going to look like in terms of qualifications."

State officials have not only blamed the shortage on a greater number of retirements, but also on increased standards for teaching.

They are questioning whether there will be enough certified preschool teachers in the coming years to meet a 1998 state Supreme Court order that the 28 poorest districts in New Jersey provide preschool education for 3- and 4-year-olds.

"At this time there is a serious, serious shortage of preschool teachers," said Judy Savage, spokeswoman for the New Jersey Commission on Higher Education.

Over the next few years, all preschool teachers must be certified, but that certification does not yet exist, Savage said.

"It's difficult to project, once the certification is in place and the programs are in place, whether there will be a long-term future shortage," she said. "This new mandate creates a new demand for certified teachers at a time when we already know the existing teaching force is moving toward retirement and the population of children in schools is growing."

T. Times
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Jersey's pool of teachers dwindling

Salary in state ranks second in the nation

By John Mooney
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

New Jersey's public schools continue to pay their teachers well in comparison with other states, but still haven't escaped the potential shortage of teachers in coming years as more retire and student enrollments rise.

New Jersey's teachers last year were again the second-highest-paid in the nation, with an average salary that topped \$50,000 for the first time, according to the annual survey by the American Federation of Teachers.

But even so, New Jersey is starting to experience what other states have: a dwindling market of new teachers in certain specialty fields, like special education and science. And state officials concede new worries about possible shortages in broader areas, too.

As part of her annual budget, Gov. Christie Whitman proposed \$200,000 for the first statewide teacher recruitment effort in a decade to keep up both the quantity and quality of the teaching corps.

"I think we're in a better position

Teacher pay lags

A comparison of starting salaries in several professions

Education	\$42,682
Computer science	40,920
Mathematics	40,523
Economics, finance	36,658
Engineering	36,036
Business administration	34,831
Health care	33,600
Sales, marketing	33,252
Law	25,735

Jersey teachers near top of pay ladder

Top and bottom five in average salaries for teachers for 1997-1998*

1. Connecticut	\$51,727
2. New Jersey	50,284
3. New York	48,712
4. Michigan	48,361
5. Illinois	46,275
47. New Mexico	30,309
48. Indiana	30,090
49. Mississippi	28,891
50. North Dakota	28,221
51. South Dakota	27,839

*Survey includes District of Columbia

SOURCE: American Federation of Teachers
THE STAR-LEDGER

than other states, but that doesn't mean we won't have to deal with shortage issues," said Ellen Schechter, assistant commissioner of education. "It's no crisis by any means, but in looking at some of the numbers, in five years or so, we could be in serious straits."

Predicted now for several years, the looming nationwide shortage of teachers is raising alarms, especially in the Sun Belt and other fast-growing states where an aging teaching

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Teachers

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Jersey's pool is dwindling

force and booming student rolls have forced schools to increasingly hire untrained and uncertified staff.

The shortage was a focus of the AFT's annual salary report released yesterday, in which the teachers union urged states to especially boost starting teacher salaries to attract more college graduates to the field.

The AFT reported that the average salary nationwide in 1997-98 was \$39,347, a 2.4 percent increase over the previous year. But the typical starting pay was just \$25,735, in comparison with first-year salaries in sales of \$31,253, computer science of \$41,920 and engineering of \$42,882.

"To attract college graduates to teaching, salaries must keep pace with other professions that are hiring people from the classroom," said Sandra Feldman, AFT's president.

In New Jersey, the average starting salary of \$28,319 last year was sixth in the country, according to the AFT report. But the survey also showed New Jersey's starting pay

was the second-lowest in the country as a percentage of the overall average, at 58.3 percent.

School board leaders said the discrepancy may be due to the high overall pay and also the classroom experience of New Jersey's teachers, who typically have 16 years on the job.

"It just could be a function of the age of our teachers," said Frank Belluscio, spokesman for the State School Boards Association. "The salary guides (in union contracts) are usually structured more to where the market is."

Yet others said that could prove an impediment for New Jersey. Kean University has one of the state's largest teacher education programs, and its dean said the relatively low starting pay can drive students to New York or other neighboring states.

"Or you lose them to another career altogether," said Ana Maria Schuhmann, dean of Kean's School of Education. "Not only are starting salaries not very high, but we have such a high cost of living to go with it."

The superintendent of Montclair schools sees the schools' disadvantage firsthand.

"My daughter just graduated from college, and she'll be making \$40,000 a year," said Superintendent Michael Osnato. "We can't pay like that, and that's got to be a deterrent

for a young kid (considering a teaching career) who has a few college loans or maybe has to take some graduate courses to teach."

New Jersey schools have so far been able to escape the most acute shortages that have gripped states like Florida, Texas and California, in part thanks to its "alternate route" process that allows uncertified college graduates into the profession while gaining on-the-job training.

About a quarter of all new hires last year were through the 15-year-old program, state officials said.

"We've had this pool for a number of years, and buttressed with recruitment and outreach, I think we will have a significant enough interest that starting salaries wouldn't be as important," said Schechter, the assistant commissioner.

Local officials concurred that they have yet to see a shortage in most of their academic fields, with dozens if not hundreds of people applying for a single position in some districts.

"Especially something like elementary education, we had two or three openings and saw 110 or 120 applicants," said Thomas Pagano, superintendent of Ocean Township schools in Monmouth County. "We get résumés every day, and then when we advertise a position, we get that many more."

Urban districts have a tougher time, and several superintendents said they have seen retirements start to creep up in their districts.

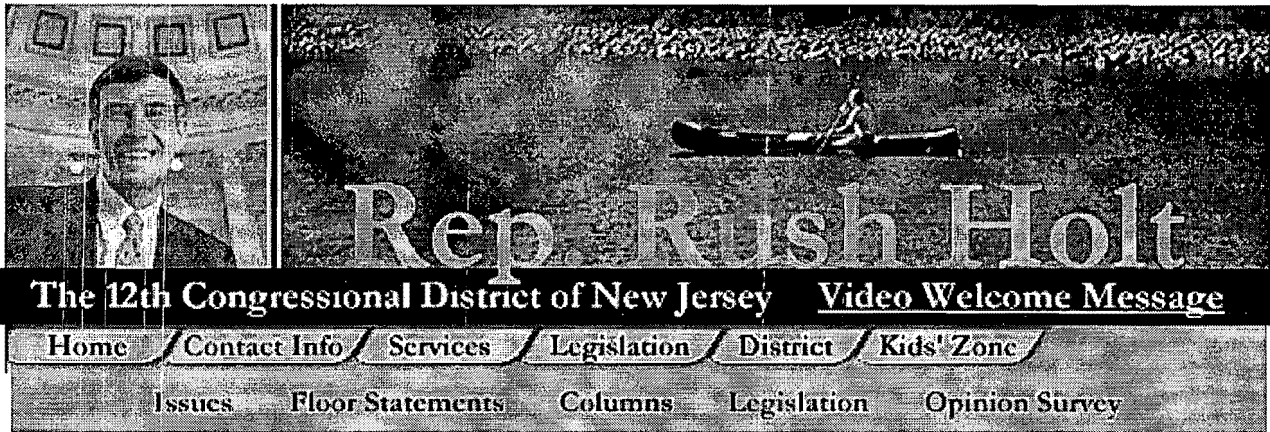
And while elementary education sees an abundance of interest, there is less in areas like high school science, elementary-level foreign language, and special and bilingual education of all grades.

In special education, the dearth of qualified instructors has forced the state to continue to provide some certification on an emergency basis, a practice that officials previously had disclaimed and hoped to halt under the alternate route process.

"We certainly don't think highly of it as a matter of practice, but at other times, it still has been necessary," Schechter said.

H. Bdo. - Teachers

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New Jersey

Education

As a teacher, Congressman Holt cares deeply about education. Holt serves on the Committee on Education and the Workforce, and is dedicated to working on ways to help local school districts in New Jersey to provide the best education possible. To this end, he has cosponsored bills to reduce class sizes, increase resources for science and math teachers, and to finance technology literacy programs. He has also spoken on the House floor in support of America's teachers, and he has prepared an action plan to combat violence in schools. In addition to winning more than \$750,000 in appropriations for model programs to train educators in science, math, and technology education for Rider and Monmouth universities, Rep. Holt also has been named to the prestigious National Commission on Mathematics and Science Teaching for the 21st Century chaired by astronaut and former Sen. John Glenn.

- [Action Plan: Safer Schools--Safer Children](#)
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Legislation cosponsored by Rep. Holt: The School Anti-Violence Empowerment Act

Environment & Livability

Protecting open space is an important priority for Congressman Holt. Holt serves on the House Committee on Resources and is committed to working with the Clinton Administration in its efforts to create and maintain livable communities, in which environmental planning helps combat sprawl and all of its associated problems, such as air pollution and traffic congestion. Congressman Holt has spoken before the House floor on livability, has sponsored an amendment that will help states and local communities to preserve more open space, and has cosponsored bills on topics ranging from airport regulation to resource conservation.

Rep. Holt holds livability town meeting, reveals plan to fight sprawl

Legislation sponsored by Rep. Holt: An Amendment to Increase Funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund

Letter by Rep. Holt to his colleagues explaining his amendment

Floor statement by Rep. Holt arguing for his amendment

Press Release: Rep. Holt Holds Livability Meeting in Clinton

Press Release: Rep. Holt Unveils Quality of Life Initiatives

Press Release: Rep. Holt Fights to Stop Sprawl

Press Release: Rep. Holt unveils protection plan for Delaware River

Speech on the House floor: Livability

Legislation cosponsored by Rep. Holt: The Lower Delaware Wild and Scenic Rivers Act

Legislation cosponsored by Rep. Holt: The Resources 2000 Act

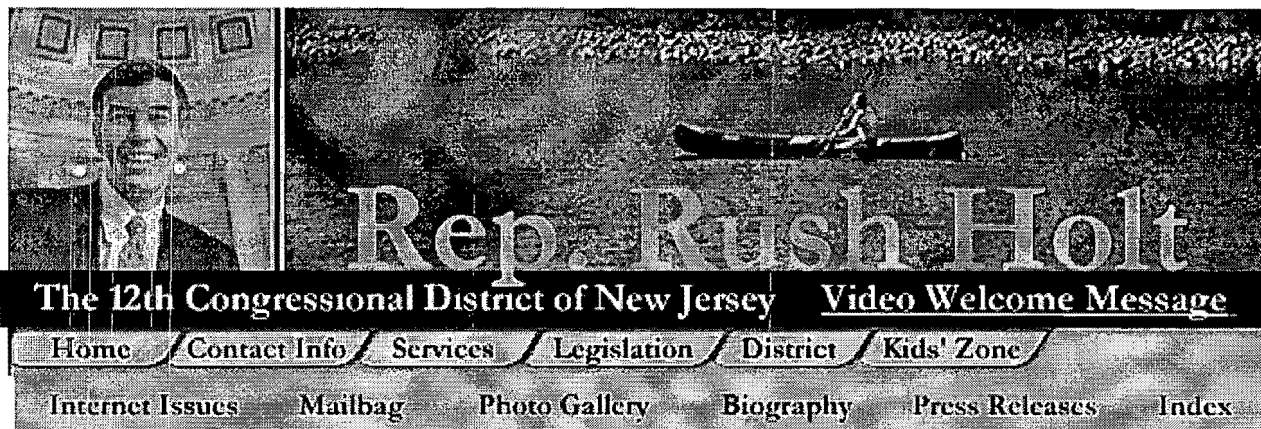
Legislation cosponsored by Rep. Holt: The Right to Know About Airport Pollution Act

Legislation Cosponsored by Rep. Holt: The Children's Environmental Protection Act

Legislation cosponsored by Rep. Holt: A bill to perform a study of Newark Airport

Legislation cosponsored by Rep. Holt: The Endangered Species Recovery Act

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8/4/1999

**REP. RUSH HOLT SUPPORTS THE DISCHARGE PETITION EFFORT ON SCHOOL
MODERNIZATION LEGISLATION**
Bill would bring \$526 million to New Jersey schools

Washington, D.C. - Rep. Rush Holt (D-NJ-12th District) joined more than 170 of his colleagues in pushing for swift consideration of legislation to provide New Jersey communities with federal assistance for school construction and modernization.

"Congress needs to act on this bill before the first school bell rings in September. We need to make sure that classrooms in central New Jersey are a place where teachers can teach and children can learn," Rep. Holt said.

"But the House leadership appears unwilling to bring this important piece of legislation to the floor. This is why I joined other supporters of school modernization in taking the unusual step of signing this discharge petition, a little used legislative vehicle, to force a timely vote on meaningful school modernization and safety legislation."

"The Public School Modernization Act of 1999" would provide \$24.8 billion in interest-free funding for school-construction and school-modernization projects over the next two calendar years. School districts would issue bonds for the money, and the Federal government would pay the interest on the bonds through a Federal tax credit.

There would be no Federal involvement in the selection, design, or implementation of the school-modernization projects. All these decisions would be made at the State and/or local level. The only Federal role would be providing tax-subsidized financing under the same procedures currently utilized for tax-exempt bonds.

"The bill is a cost-effective way of helping local school districts help themselves," Holt said. "Here in New Jersey, 87 percent schools report a need to upgrade or repair a building. Over 40 percent of New Jersey's school buildings are more than 50 years old. The Public School Modernization Act of 1999 would bring \$526 million to New Jersey to help upgrade or repair school buildings."

This is an official Web site of the United States House of Representatives.

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Header photos courtesy of New Jersey Division of Travel and Tourism

New Jersey

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Why I Crossed Party Lines on the Education Bill By Rep. Rush Holt

Crossing party lines in Capitol Hill's bitterly partisan environment - particularly on a crucial bill - always raises eyebrows in Washington. But despite intense lobbying from the White House, I recently was one of just 24 Democrats to join my Republican colleagues in supporting a sensible approach to reducing class size and improving teacher training.

I broke from the party ranks because the "Teacher Empowerment Act" serves New Jersey teachers, students, and taxpayers best. The legislation provides nearly \$2 billion annually over five years, consolidating federal professional development programs for teachers and President Clinton's class-size reduction initiative into a single program. This way, the bill gives local schools the flexibility to use these funds according to their specific needs.

Class size and teacher quality are both important issues in central New Jersey. School systems such as Hunterdon Central, Montgomery, West Windsor-Plainsboro and Colts Neck are just a few of hundreds throughout the state that are facing skyrocketing enrollments.

In Montgomery Township, for example, 1990 school enrollment was about 1,500 students. When they open for class this September, Montgomery schools will have to provide desks for 3,500 students - an increase of 134 percent in just a decade. Enrollment is expected to rise by another 1,500 students during the next five years.

Similar enrollment trends are prevalent throughout our nation. Our schools will have to hire more than two million new teachers over the next 10 years to accommodate this growth and to compensate for teacher retirements. If we do not hire two million new teachers, class sizes will grow, and studies show that large class sizes hamper learning. It's easy to see why: teachers can't teach in crowded classrooms and students' dreams can get lost in a crowded room.

President Clinton's education proposal called for sending federal dollars to school districts in two separate pots: one specifically for reducing class sizes and another for teacher training. In comparison, the proposal I support provides the funds in a way that allows local school districts the flexibility to decide in what proportions to use their resources: Some schools cannot hire new teachers because they do not yet have classrooms to put them in; other schools have just enlarged their teaching ranks and thus want to focus on teacher development and training.

Unlike the President's one-size-fits-all formula, the legislation I support allows schools districts to decide for themselves how much money should go to hire more teachers and how much should go to provide professional development.

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As a scientist, I am especially concerned about opportunities for teachers of math, science, and technology. Many of the two million new teachers to be hired in the next decade will have to teach math and science at the elementary grades. Unfortunately, many of today's teachers, especially in elementary school, do not feel prepared to teach these crucial and dynamic subjects. It's not much better in secondary schools: 28 percent of New Jersey's science teachers do not have majors or minors in the subject they teach.

In supporting this legislation, I worked with both the Administration and the House Education Committee leadership to increase the overall investment in math and science teacher training. I also included language to ensure that all school districts are meeting the training needs of all of their math and science teachers, including elementary school teachers.

While I voted for the Republican version of the bill in the House, I am optimistic that a compromise can be reached with the Senate and the White House that includes the President's commitment to hiring 100,000 new teachers and reducing class sizes. Our children's education should not be a partisan issue; I am working in Washington to make sure it isn't.

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**NATIONAL TEACHERS DAY
(House of Representatives - May 04, 1999)**

Mr. HOLT: Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure on behalf of my colleagues today to recognize National Teachers Day and National Teacher Appreciation Week. We know the old bumper sticker that reads, "If you can read this, thank a teacher." Well, tonight I would like to thank teachers.

The gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. Menendez) organized this special order, but was unable to be here tonight because he had to attend a funeral. But on his behalf and my colleagues', I would like to talk a bit about teachers.

According to the National PTA, the origins of National Teachers Day are somewhat unclear but it is known that Arkansas teacher, Mrs. Mattie White Woodridge began corresponding with political and educational leaders around 1944 about the need for a national day honoring teachers.

One of the people Mrs. Woodridge wrote to was Eleanor Roosevelt who persuaded the 81st Congress to proclaim a National Teacher Day in 1953.

In the late 1970s, the National Education Association as well as many of its local affiliates persuaded Congress to create a national day celebrating the contributions of teachers and such a day was established in 1980. In 1985, the NEA and the National PTA established a full week of May as National Teacher Appreciation Week, and to make the Tuesday of that week National Teacher Appreciation Day.

It is only right that we take a moment to honor the dedication, hard work, and importance of teachers in our society. As a teacher myself, I know that teaching is a hard and sometimes unrecognized job. But of all the important jobs in our society, nothing makes more of an impact on our children than a well-trained, caring and dedicated teacher. No job ultimately is more important to our society.

Each of us has had teachers who have made marks on our lives who have pushed us to achieve more and challenged us to excel. While these teachers may not command the celebrity of a sports star, they continue to work every day often under difficult circumstances to guide our children to a better future.

We here in Congress, on both sides of the aisle, continue to debate ways to improve our public schools and to boost the educational achievement of our young people. Experts have suggested all kinds of ways to strengthen our education system. But as we talk about these programs and policies, we may forget that one of the best ways to improve our education system is to show respect and support for our teachers.

Teachers across our Nation are doing an outstanding job. As I have traveled around my central New Jersey district, I have met hundreds of teachers who are working hard every day to prepare students to succeed in this economy and it is not often easy.

Compared with many professionals, teachers are underpaid and overworked. The Education Testing Service pointed out in a recent report that despite the importance of the work they do, teachers still earn less in median weekly wages than doctors, lawyers, accountants, public relations professionals and even many service workers.

Studies consistently show that teachers earn less than other professionals with similar educational requirements, and that is just not right. As long as this country continues to pay teachers less than it pays others, we will not get all we need. In the next decade we Americans must hire two million new teachers to fill vacancies and to keep up with student school growth, and we need the best people.

Teachers often perform miracles in the classrooms, which too many of us take for granted. We forget many times

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teachers are called on to undertake other tasks in addition to teaching. Teachers today often have to enforce discipline and guide troubled children to the help they need. Our Nation can improve its education system by showing respect for teachers and by letting them know how much we value their work. All of us should take time to thank our teachers.

Later this week, when I return home to New Jersey, I will visit a teacher at West Windsor Plainsboro School on Friday morning, the first morning I am back, and I will teach a class in physics. But we need to do more than simply reflect on teachers' contributions and drop in occasionally. We need to undertake policies that will make their jobs easier. We need to work together to find ways to support teachers, to help them continue to grow professionally, to help our school districts hire more qualified teachers, to help our school districts modernize and update their classrooms with technology. That is how we thank our teachers. That is how we show respect for our teachers. That is how we show respect for our children.

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