

Written Testimony for the Department of Education
Re: Fiscal Accountability, Efficiency and Budgeting Procedures
Contracts of District Superintendents
Proposed Amendments: N.J.A.C. 6A:23A-1.2 and 3.1

To: Eric Taylor, Director
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The members of the Ridgewood Board of Education are opposed to the proposal to cap superintendent salaries and are concerned about the unintended consequences that will result should these caps be imposed.

Ridgewood is the largest school district in Bergen County with an enrollment of 5,800 students. We are a J district. By any measurement Ridgewood is an efficient and effective district. Last year our students had the second highest SAT scores in the county. We outscored most of the I and J districts on the state standardized tests for 3, 4, 8, and 11 grades. Our cost per pupil is lower than the average state per pupil cost and lower than the other Bergen County K-12 and regional districts. Our administrative costs are significantly lower than that allowed by the state and we maintain a higher number of students to administrators when compared to similar size districts. Families move to Ridgewood for the schools. Ninety-five percent of the school budget is supported by the property tax.

The responsibilities of a School Board include appointing a superintendent, negotiating his/her contract and evaluating his/her performance. The Ridgewood Board of Education takes these responsibilities seriously.

We hold our superintendent accountable and expect him annually to achieve agreed upon goals. Daily he is responsible to oversee the education of our 5,800 students, manage 600 employees, and oversee our \$89 million budget. In addition, he must manage \$48 million worth of referendum projects at our nine school buildings and ensure that these projects are completed on time and within budget. On a daily basis he must make certain that district actions conform to laws, regulations, and Board policies; solve problems; and effectively communicate with staff, parents, students, and our community. He must represent the district at local, county, and state meetings and be prepared to meet with municipal and community leaders and legislators. Being the superintendent in Ridgewood is not for the meek. We are a demanding Board and community and only the most capable and experienced leader will suffice.

The proposed superintendent salary caps are cause for concern. The concerns are as

follows:

1. The proposed caps will lower the salary for current superintendents. Seventy percent of New Jersey's superintendent salaries currently exceed the proposed caps. In Bergen County, 62 superintendents earn more than the proposed caps. When their contracts expire they will face lower salaries. Ridgewood's superintendent's pension eligible annual salary will be reduced from \$216,500 to \$165,000. It should be noted that although our superintendent successfully achieved his goals for both the 2008-09 and 2009-10 school years, he did not accept a raise and froze his salary in both years even though his contract would have allowed for an increase.

2. Sustainable quality school leadership will be at risk. Some of New Jersey's most experienced superintendents will choose to resign or retire rather than continue to work at the same job with the same responsibilities for substantially less money.

3. The salary caps will cause capable and experienced superintendents to leave New Jersey. This unintended consequence of the proposed salary cap will cause an exodus of experienced superintendents from New Jersey to the surrounding states that have not imposed salary caps. There will be high superintendent turnover and leadership drain that will negatively impact New Jersey's public schools.

4. In some districts high school principals and district administrators will have higher salaries than the superintendent if the caps are instituted. If the salaries for experienced administrators are reduced labor unrest, low morale, resignation or early retirement will ensue. "Research has shown that school districts that experience high turnover in leadership, tend to have lower student achievement." (*Stability in Education*, NJSBA School Leader, September/October 2010, p.6)

5. The salary cap proposal singles out public school superintendents. These regulations do not apply to superintendents of charter schools nor to private special education school directors, both of whom are supported with taxpayer dollars.

6. The salary cap proposal sets an arbitrary salary based on enrollment with no regard for the administrative and supervisory tasks required of a superintendent to run an effective and efficient school district. With this proposal the work required of superintendents is undervalued by the state. Dwindling resources, reduced state aid, and restrictive tax and expenditure limits have made the job of the superintendent more challenging and complex. The ability to manage budgets, supervise staff, oversee the instructional program, ensure compliance with state and federal mandates, and focus efforts on improvement and high student achievement requires a skilled administrator. The superintendent's salary should be determined based on his/her education, experience, skills, and goal attainment; not on the number of students attending the district's schools.

7. Boards of Education negotiate superintendent salaries with awareness of the marketplace, consideration of his/her education and experience, and with knowledge of the community's expectations and student needs. It is the Board's duty and responsibility

to negotiate a fair and reasonable contract that sets the compensation for the superintendent. Noteworthy in looking at the contract we negotiated with our superintendent is the fact that although Ridgewood is the largest school district in Bergen County, our superintendent is not the highest paid superintendent in the county. The proposed state regulations that cap superintendent salaries significantly interfere with a Board's legal responsibility to negotiate a fair and reasonable contract with the superintendent.

The proposed salary caps for superintendents should not be added to the Fiscal Accountability, Efficiency and Budgeting Procedures. Boards of Education should be allowed to continue to negotiate fair and appropriate compensation packages with their superintendent of schools.