

Assembly Budget Committee

April 10, 2019

Dr. Lamont O. Repollet, Commissioner

State House Annex Committee Room 11

Good afternoon Chairwoman Pintor Marin, Vice Chairman Burzichelli and members of the Assembly Budget Committee.

Thank you for inviting me to discuss the Governor's Fiscal Year 2020 proposed budget for the Department of Education.

For the second year in a row, you're being asked to support historic levels of school funding that come with significant increases in overall state aid.

As a strong advocate of education, Governor Murphy has proposed an increase of \$206 million in formula aid for FY 2020. With your support, that will mark a two-year increase in K-12 funding of over half a billion dollars.

You're seeing two thirds – or 368 districts – that had been underfunded that are beginning to see improvements as their funding is now aligned with the existing formula.

That said, it is not lost on me that some districts still face tough budgetary decisions.

In the last few weeks, I've had the opportunity to discuss with many of you, your specific concerns regarding state aid.

The Department remains committed to working closely with school districts and other community leaders to offer guidance on the broad range of resources available to districts to better adapt to ever-evolving fiscal and demographic realities.

The proposed FY2020 budget reflects Governor Murphy's continued commitment to high-quality public education and aligns with his vision of a stronger and fairer New Jersey. This proposed budget allows the Department of Education to be progressive, responsive, and adaptive.

Governor Murphy increased funding for preschool programs by \$68 million: bringing the total funding for preschool education to a record \$806.5 million in the proposed budget. The additional funding will enhance or expand preschool education throughout the state: a big win for some of New Jersey's youngest residents.

This ensures that more children have access to a high-quality preschool program. We share the Governor's enthusiasm for the long-term investment in the future educational success of the next

generation. Research over the past several decades has consistently shown that children who attend preschool programs are also less likely to repeat a grade later.

At the other end of the P-12 spectrum is our administration's commitment to post-secondary education and career readiness.

The Department is dedicated to ensuring that our 1.4 million school children have on-ramps to post-secondary success: whether they're heading directly to a 4-year college, one of our 19 county colleges, trade schools, an apprenticeship or choosing another option after graduating high school.

Youth apprenticeship programs are one of those vehicles to success. Together with our sister agencies, the Office of the Secretary of Higher Education, and the Department of Labor and Workforce Development, we announced last fall that "apprenticeship" would be reinstated as a positive outcome for New Jersey high school students on the School Performance Report, an annual measure of post-secondary choices made by graduating seniors. We know apprenticeships represent a viable option for many students, as it allows some to earn college credits while in high school and paves the way for them to earn and learn, going on to make a family-sustaining wage.

This inter-government action not only helps highlight the importance of exposing students to multiple career paths following high school, it also creates incentives for secondary schools to place and count students who enter apprenticeship programs.

The FY2020 proposed budget also advances our commitment to career readiness by maintaining funding for STEM Dual Enrollment and Early College High Schools—which supports the P-TECH model.

P-TECH, or Pathway in Technology Early College High School, is a comprehensive high school model designed by IBM, in which program participants simultaneously earn a high-school diploma and an associate's degree in competitive STEM fields. In addition, they gain workplace experience through internships and mentorships. New Jersey will open its first three P-TECH schools this summer in Paterson, New Brunswick, and Burlington City.

Through the continued funding in the proposed budget, New Jersey will launch additional P-TECH programs for FY2020.

For many students, STEM and Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs are their first exposure to fulfilling and rewarding careers in New Jersey's key industries. These programs not only help students earn college credit while in high school, they deliver real-world skills and hands-on experiences; and a chance to explore meaningful career options.

To that end, the FY2020 proposed budget commits \$2 million to the Secondary School Computer Education Initiative, which supports the Department's mission to expand access to computer science education.

These are laudable achievements, but it is the educators, who devote their careers to instructing our children, who are the most crucial to their future success.

Governor Murphy's FY2020 proposed budget reflects the administration's long-standing commitment to increasing teacher diversity in New Jersey. The values of our State are reflected not only in the Governor's economic plan, but in the department's commitment to funding this initiative.

Currently, teachers of color represent only 16 percent of New Jersey's teachers, while students of color represent 56 percent of the state's nearly 1.4 million student enrollment.

This budget includes \$750,000 for the Department's High Poverty School District Minority Teacher Recruitment Program – a competitive grant program that will provide funding to eligible organizations that recruit, train, and place new teachers, with special emphasis on minority teachers, in one or more high-poverty school districts in the state. Diversifying our workforce is crucial to New Jersey's future success, and I'm proud to say we're making strides on this important topic. Just yesterday, I was in Washington D.C. participating on a national panel to

talk about this issue. I emphasized that a diverse workforce does not just benefit students of color: it benefits all.

To put this into perspective, this past weekend, we lost an education leader in the state of New Jersey, Dr. Derrick Nelson. Dr. Nelson was a father, a son, an educator, a 20-year Army reservist, a member of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity Inc.

It's evident that he lived a life of service, even in death. In all the articles written about this incredible person, they focused on Dr. Nelson's character not the color of his skin.

He is the embodiment of Dr. King's quote: "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character."

It's evident that Dr. Nelson helped break down stereotypes. It's evident that having a diverse educator like the late Dr. Nelson benefits everyone: not just children of color. As Gov. Murphy says, the strength in our state in our diverse workforce.

On behalf of the Department, I want to share my deepest condolences to the Nelson family and the Westfield community.

Now, I would like to turn back to the proposed budget, which also includes continued funding to support crucial safety and security measures for New Jersey for both public and nonpublic students, faculty, and staff.

Our Department has led training sessions to pave the way for educators to receive their School Safety Specialist certifications. We've also partnered with Sandy Hook Promise dedicated to training students and educators on ways to identify, assess, intervene, and get help for those exhibiting at-risk behaviors.

All these important initiatives have required the Department to make adjustments to fulfill this administration's agenda.

During the last year, I implemented my continuous improvement model ACE—Assess, Create, Execute. It is my goal that NJDOE will continue to be a mission-driven, values-focused organization providing collaborative and innovative supports through efficient and transparent systems.

My team and I have reorganized the Department to be more student-focused and customer service-oriented. For example, in the last year, the Office of Legislative Affairs and Policy Development fielded nearly 400 inquiries from legislators on a variety of topics that include constituent, legislative, and budgetary concerns encompassing all areas of education.

My team and I have met and engaged with more than 7,000 New Jerseyans– from children and parents to educators and community leaders – in all 21 counties.

As a former superintendent, I know how important it is to receive timely and transparent communication from the Department: whether you're a parent or a legislator.

As you can see, the positive actions we've taken this past year have led to real, tangible results for children and educators across our state.

What I hope I've conveyed here today is that a budget is more than line item appropriation: it is a statement of our Administration's education priorities and the conduit through which we create a stronger and fairer New Jersey for the state's 1.4 million students.

In closing, the Department of Education is proud to support a proposed budget that builds on last year's successes and focuses on investing in children from the earliest years of their education through high school graduation and beyond.

Thank you. I'm happy to take your questions.