

NJAPSA NEWS

Annual Winter Newsletter

2024-2025

A Publication of the New Jersey Association of Pupil Services Administrators

www.njapsa.org



From the desk of the President of NJAPSA, Tania Symmons



As we progress through another exciting school year, I am thrilled to extend a warm welcome to all of you—seasoned leaders and new faces alike—to our annual newsletter. NJAPSA, a thriving network of administrators spanning the state, stands as a testament to the power of collaboration and support in our challenging roles.

NJ School administration is no easy task; it demands resilience, adaptability, and a commitment to excellence. But what truly empowers us is the collective strength of this network—a network built on shared experiences, innovative solutions, and unwavering support. Whether you are navigating uncharted territory as part of our New Director's

Cohort or sharpening your expertise through our professional development workshops, know that you are part of something greater.

Our association is more than an organization; it is a community where connections are forged, challenges are met, and successes are celebrated. Together, we are a source of inspiration and practical wisdom for one another. I encourage you to reach out to us if you need support, have a question or want to connect with a member. We are currently exploring how we can offer our members more opportunities to connect and collaborate. We will be sharing more information as it becomes available. Enjoy this newsletter and I look forward to seeing you soon at one of our workshops or meetings.

Front Porch News

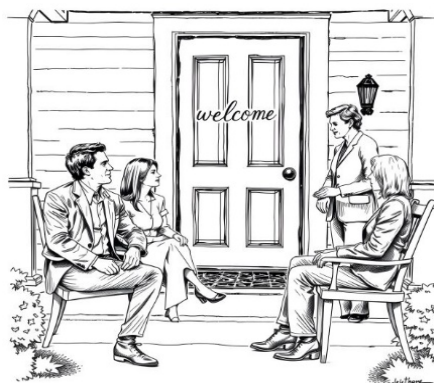
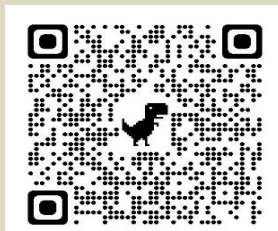
Immediate Past President, Dr. Danielle Hamblin



NJAPSA Front Porch Virtual Meetings Looking for a forum with colleagues across the state for the purpose of collaborating and offering thoughts, ideas, and support on topics relative to the world of special education leadership? If you would like to participate, sign up for the upcoming Front Porch meetings. Danielle Hamblin, Past President of the NJAPSA Board will be your facilitator throughout this school year and can be reached at danielle.hamblin@frsd.us. **Front Porch Meetings:** November 14, 2024, January 28, 2025 and March 28, 2025 (12-1 PM). We look forward to working together on behalf of *all* students. We have an amazing opportunity to nurture and support the unique talent that each child brings...let's continue to celebrate their individuality!

Dr. Danielle Hamblin

Drop in for NJAPSA's informal and free virtual "Front Porch" hour where you can ask questions, discuss ideas and connect with colleagues throughout NJ School Districts. Scan the QR code to let Dr. Hamblin you are interested or email her for the meeting link.





Executive Board Members 2024-25: Left to Right: Joseph Bond,-Trustee, Dr. Patricia Clark-Jeter-Trustee, Jamie Koransky-Trustee, Dr. Stephanie Logan, Trustee, Dr. Suzan Radwan-Treasurer, Dr. Frank Santora-Secretary, Tania Symmons-President, Patricia Hovey-Past President, Candie Hengemuhle- Communications Coordinator, Dr. Danielle Hamblin- Past President
Dr. Adrienne Castorina- Trustee, Marci Grabelle, Executive Director, Dr. Paul Barbato- Past President.

Missing in photo: Gary Molenaar, Past President Greg Margolis-Past President, Dr. Howard Lerner-Past President, Mitchell Badiner-Past President, , Dr. Gerry Crisonino- Trustee, LaCoyya Weashington-Trustee, Maribel Martinez-Trustee, Jessica Pignatello-Trustee.

NJAPSA is an affiliate of the National Association of Pupil Service Administrators (NAPSA). Our focus is on advocating for the needs of all students through specialized professional development for administrators with titles that include pupil services, student services, special education services and pupil personnel services.

ACHIEVING EXCELLENCE IN SPECIAL EDUCATION SINCE 1971

Executive Directors Message

Marci L. Grabelle



Welcome back to the 2024-25 academic year. As NJAPSA enters our 54th year serving Professional Development and training opportunities for Special Education Administrators. The NJAPSA board realizes the importance of comradery and support amongst our administrators within our specialized programs. Through our evolving Special Education professional development opportunities, administrators are apprise of all new mandates, laws, codes, innovative programming as well as extensive and comprehensive Directors' training for new Directors, Supervisors and administrators in charge of Special Education programs and services. Our timely professional development opportunities are beneficial for all Special Education Administrators; and our New Director and Cohort Programs provide Special Education Administrators pertinent information to enhance their skills as they navigate their first few years as Special Education Directors and Administrators.

Dr. Theodore Kozlik, the pioneer of our organization, knew that as a strong organization we could endure anything together in the best interest of our students. Dr. Kozlik supported the concept of collaboration and through continued educational and professional development opportunities we can create an educational environment for our most vulnerable population to grow, learn and be successful citizens in society. Sadly, Dr. Kozlik passed away in 2017. Our Board is passionate in continuing Ted's legacy. We celebrate him every year by awarding 6- \$1000 scholarships for graduating seniors who received special education services, have achieved successes over the 4 years in high school, and will be pursuing post-secondary opportunities. We continue Ted's legacy by joining our national chapter of APSA in Pennsylvania and our Executive Board member and trustees have presented at their national convention for the past 3 years. We hope he is looking down upon us with a huge smile.... knowing we continued his passion and love of NJAPSA!

The board also thanks all of you for your annual members and those that have participated in our cohort, advanced cohort, and professional development opportunities. We continue to expand our membership which represent counties statewide. We welcome, Dr. Stephanie Logan, our newest board members from the southern part of our state to join our team.

The NJAPSA Executive Board members met at our annual retreat in June to plan for the 2024-25 academic year. We worked diligently to listen to your concerns and provide professional development opportunities for our members and fellow colleagues to assist you with your administrative duties. We organized and continue to enhance our New Director's and Advanced Cohort programs to meet the ever-changing needs of our profession. We are excited to provide our professional members, cohort and guests to our annual mini-conferences, Director's Academy, and special professional development opportunities that we have collaboratively arranged with NJPSA/FEA and NJASA. We hope you will enjoy our conference offerings and your continued membership with NJAPSA.

As always, your continued support for Ted's vision and our mission is greatly appreciated. Wishing you all a happy, healthy and peaceful holiday season...and wonderful New Year 2025!

Marci L. Grabelle, MAT, MEd. Retired from public education in 2014. She served as the Vice Principal and Director of Special Services for Brielle Elementary School for 12 ½ years and her retired as the Director for Hazlet Public Schools. She has been a member of NJAPSA since 2007 and served on the board from 2008 until the present and as the Co-Executive and Executive Director for the past 5 years. Follow NJAPSA on X @njapsa.

NJAPSA Communications Corner

Candie Hengemuhle



NJAPSA is using Google Workspace for our email and other forms of communication. You will receive emails from njapsa.org. Specifically, the emails may come from:

president@njapsa.org (Taniasymmons@njapsa.org)
treasurer@njapsa.org (Suzanradwan@njapsa.org)
secretary@njapsa.org (Franksantora@njapsa.org)
executivedirector@njapsa.org (Marcigrabelle@njapsa.org)
communications@njapsa.org (Candiehengemuhle@njapsa.org)

It is important to make sure the njapsa.org email is not blocked by your school district's firewall in order to receive our notifications regarding membership, upcoming events and professional development and student scholarship opportunities. Check our website, www.njapsa.org for upcoming events, general membership updates, scholarship information as well as the New and Advanced Directors Cohorts.

We welcome recommendations for future topics and potential presenters that could benefit our NJAPSA membership. If you have any recommendations or questions please feel free to email me at communications@njapsa.org.

Schedule of 2024-25 Professional Development Registration is posted on our [website](http://www.njapsa.org).

Event	Date/Time	Location	Topics
Director's Toolkit (NJAPSA & NJPSA)	Friday, November 15 2024 9 AM – 3 PM	NJPSA/FEA-Educational Conference Center Monroe, NJ	Interventions to Adress the New Generation of Student Behavioral Needs
Directors Academy	Friday, February 28, 2025 9AM - 3PM	Forsgate Country Club, Monroe, NJ	George Scott, EdS, LMFT presents "An Inconvenient Truth." Mr. Kyle Trent, Esq presents & Legal Updates and Hot Topics in Special Education
Mini Conference Hot Legal Topics	Friday, February 7, 2025 12 PM - 3PM	Forsgate Country Club, Monroe, NJ	Current Hot Legal Topics in Special Ed
Annual I-SET Conference (NJAPSA & NJPSA/FEA)	Friday, March 14, 2025 9 AM – 3 PM	NJPSA/FEA-Educational Center-Monroe, NJ	Blending an AI Focus and Strategies in Educational Tech to Improve Instructional Outcomes
NJASA/NJAPSA Spring Leadership Conference	Wednesday-Friday May 14-16 2025	Caesars in Atlantic City NJAPSA Membership Luncheon 5/14/25 @ 11:30 AM	Uniting, Empowering, Celebrating: Education Matters

Candida V. Hengemuhle, Special Services Educational Consultant, LLC has over 40 years of noteworthy experience in the field of Special Education Administration and Leadership, Counseling Services and as a School Psychologist. Upon retiring as the Director of Special Services from the Warren Township School District, Ms. Hengemuhle has since held many Interim Director positions and consults with school districts throughout NJ reviewing the provisions of special education programs and services, IEP reviews and CST operations in addition to providing professional development, mentoring and coaching. She served as a board member of NJAPSA since 2011 and currently holds the position of Communication Coordinator.

Professional Development in a Glance

The NJAPSA Professional Development Committees design our conferences primarily for district and school level administrators who oversee special services and pupil personnel services. However, we also consider and welcome other school personnel who would benefit from the information. We often have CST, Special Education Instructional Coaches, Counselors, School and District Administrators, BCBA's, OT's, PT's, Technology professionals and Special Education Teachers who attend our conferences, depending on the topics. We encourage you to share our PD offerings with your staff.

- Our NJAPSA Committee members met with Peg MacDonald, NJPSA/FEA, to collaborate and plan for our annual *Special Education Director's Toolkit*, "***Interventions to Address the New Generation of Student Behavioral Needs***" which took place on November 15th to a sold-out audience.
- **February 9, 2025**, *Vic LaPira, Esq* (Fogarty & Hara, Esqs.) will be presenting to our members and guests on ***Hot Legal Topics in Special Education*** at the Forsgate Country Club, Monroe NJ from 12PM - 3PM. Registration form can be found at the end of the newsletter.
- Moving forward our **Directors' Academy** is on Friday, February 28, 2025, 9AM - 3PM and we are excited to welcome Our keynote **George C Scott, "An Inconvenient Truth"** and our legal keynote **Kyle Trent, Esq., "Legal Updates and Current Hot Topics in Special Education."** Registration Form is at the end of this newsletter.
- On **Wednesday, March 14, 2025**, in collaboration with NJPSA/FEA we look forward to another informative Conference, our **7th Annual Innovations in Special Education Technology Conference (I-SET)** to be held at the FEA Conference Center, 12 Centre Dr., Monroe NJ. The topic this year is "***Blending an AI Focus and Strategies in Educational Technology to Improve Instructional Outcomes.***" Registration will be through NJPSA.org.
- Our annual NJASA/NJAPSA Spring Conference "***Uniting, Empowering, Celebrating: Education Matters.***" will take place at Caesar's Atlantic City from **May 14-16, 2025**. Registration for this conference can be found on the NJASA website at www.njasa.net. The NJAPSA Annual Meeting for all members will be held on **May 14, 2025, 11:30 am-1 pm at our annual luncheon**. Members can register for the luncheon through this [link](#)
- **Call for Proposals** for SLC breakout sessions is now open and the deadline is **February 3, 2025**. Please use this link to submit your proposals prior to the due date <https://bit.ly/2025SPRINGLEADERSHIPPCFP>



2024 Spring Leadership Conference
Executive Officers and
Keynote Speaker, TJ Kostecky



2024-2025 New Directors' Cohort

Our **New Directors'** and **Advanced Cohort** programs have begun! Our New Directors met on October 6th for their first full day training. The **Advanced Cohort** meets on December 8th for their first session. If you are or know of a new or aspiring administrator of special education or are just starting out with a year or two in, consider exploring the New Director's Cohort Program for next year. Administrators must complete the New Directors' program before applying for the Advanced Cohort program. The applications can be found on our website at www.njpasa.org

We welcome our new Cohort who embrace the talents and skills of both aspiring and experienced professionals. We have six New Cohort members comprising a full range of urban and suburban districts who geographically represent Bergen, Burlington, Gloucester, Middlesex, Morris, and Somerset Counties. The program meets for five full day conferences, and they attend all of our PD opportunities for the year. Membership and a mentor are provided to all cohort members.



*New Directors' Cohort members 2024-25 School Year: Left to Right:
Lori Cohen, Mary Beth Warfield, Lisa Cinello, Kristen Massimo, Lisa Martinez*

2024-25 Cohort Calendar:

October 9, 2024: Orientation and Welcome: Getting Started as a Director; Budget Development and Grant Writing

December 6, 2024: Evaluation, Supervision, Recruitment & Retention; Using Technology Applications for Students and Administrators

January 10, 2025: Special Education Legal Issues and Hot Topics

February 7, 2025: Special Education Procedures, Best Practices, Extraordinary Aid, IDEA and the Monitoring Process

April 10, 2025: Parent School Board and Community Relations, and Using Data for Best Practice

Cohort Corner Testimonial by Molly Lange, Ed.S, Director of Special Services



As a recent participant in the New Directors Cohort offered by the New Jersey Association of Pupil Services Administrators (NJAPSA), I had the opportunity to embark on a professional journey that deepened my understanding of leadership within Special Services. This program, tailored to the unique needs of Special Services Administrators, provided me with invaluable skills and insights to navigate the complexities of our roles effectively.

Throughout the cohort experience, I engaged with fellow directors, learned from seasoned experts, and explored strategies to address the multifaceted challenges we face in providing equitable and meaningful services to students. The collaborative environment fostered a sense of community and mutual support, reminding me of the importance of building strong networks in this field.

The program also emphasized practical, real-world solutions to issues such as compliance, inclusion, and fostering student independence. These lessons not only enriched my professional toolkit but also reaffirmed my commitment to promoting inclusive and supportive environments for all students.

Participating in the New Directors Cohort has been an enriching experience that equipped me with tools to lead with confidence and clarity. I am grateful for the opportunity and look forward to applying what I've learned to better serve our students, families, and staff.

If you're stepping into a leadership role within Special Services, I highly recommend this program—it's an investment in both your professional growth and the future of your school community.

Molly Lange has served as the Director of Special Services for Warren Township Schools since July 1, 2023. She previously served as a Special Education Supervisor for Piscataway Township Public Schools from 2017-2023. Prior to Piscataway, Lange was a School Psychologist for People's Prep Charter School in Newark, NJ, and Coordinator of Special Education and an Intervention Coach for the Waukegan Public School District in Illinois. Mrs. Lange graduated from Montclair High School and attended Skidmore College in 2003, earning a degree in Psychology and Early Childhood education. In 2010 Lange graduated from The Chicago School of Professional Psychology with an Ed.S. in School Psychology as well as earning an Educational Leadership masters from the American College of Education in 2013.

2025-26 New Director's Cohort Opportunity: Our New Director's Cohort meets five times per year. The cohort provides valuable professional development opportunities in a small group setting throughout the year, encouraging our members to ask questions and share concerns that arise daily in the world of a director. This special opportunity provides a wonderful collegial network to assist directors throughout their professional career. New Director Cohort applications will soon be available for the 2025-26 school year on our website at www.njapsa.org.

2024-2025 Advanced Cohort Program



*Advanced Cohort 2024-25 School year: Left to Right:
Kathleen Lane, Natascha DeLaTorre, Gladasia Trotman,
Trish Schaffer
Missing: Allison LeGates, Erin Madara*

2024-2025 Cohort and Presenters



*Dr. Paul Barbato, Dr. Frank Santora and
Dr. Patricia Clark-Jeter, presenting to the New Directors
and Advanced Cohort Members*

The Advanced Cohort members are those Directors' who found the New Directors' Cohort helpful and beneficial as they enter the world of Special Education Administration. This year we have five participants in the Advanced Program: *Natascha DeLaTorre, Kathleen Lane, Gladasia Trotman, North Star Academy; Allison LeGates, Little Ferry; Erin Madara, Caldwell-West Caldwell and Trish Schaffer, Essex County Technical Schools.* All completed the New Directors' Cohort in the past. Our NJAPSA board members navigate the Director's with more complex issues Director's face including budget concerns, discipline, staffing and working with the board of education.

The Advanced Cohort's first meeting was held on December 6, 2024, at the Oyster Point in Red Bank. They are also scheduled to meet in January, February, and April. Topics include funding, staffing, legal precedents, and self-care. As Directors we are entrenched and involved in so many aspects of Education, not just Special Education that it is integral in our day-to-day functions to be sure to reach out to those with similar demands. The job can become isolating, wreaking havoc on our psyche and well-being. Directors are responsible for those most in need and reaching out to one another provides insight, support, and guidance. Within the Advanced Cohort we have explored trends, brainstormed innovative interventions, and sometimes just offered much needed reassurance. The Advanced Cohort has been shaped by the participants and their individual needs. This makes the Cohort impactful in an individualized manner. If you have completed the New Directors' cohort and would like to join the Advanced Cohort contact Marci Grabelle at executivedirector@najapsa.org.

NJPSA/FEA and NJASPA Special Education Directors' Toolkit Corner 2024: Key Insights and Highlights



Dr. Adrienne Castorina, Director of Special Services

The New Jersey Special Education Directors' Toolkit 2024, co-sponsored by the New Jersey Association of Pupil Services Administrators (NJAPSA) and the New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association/Foundation for Educational Administration (NJPSA FEA), took place on Friday, November 15, 2024. The event brought together leaders in special education to explore new tools, strategies, and resources aimed at enhancing educational services for students with disabilities across the state.

The morning session began with a warm welcome from Ms. Karen Bingert, Executive Director of NJPSA, and Ms. Tania Symmons, President of NJAPSA. Following the introductions, Dr. Damian Petino and Ms. Alexandra Pensiero of the New Jersey Department of Education provided a comprehensive keynote address. They highlighted important updates to the state's educational resources, including enhancements to the NJDOE website, new e-learning opportunities, and a valuable data series available to special education administrators. These resources, which are available at no cost, provide important tools to improve program delivery and outcomes for students with disabilities.

A key topic during the session was the Program Quality Indicators (PQI), a framework developed in collaboration with an advisory panel of experts to assess and improve the quality of special education services. The panel focused on identifying high-quality supports designed to enhance services for students with disabilities, particularly for students with autism and those in the 18-21 age range. This focus on continuous improvement highlights the commitment to providing equitable, high-quality education for all students.

The conference continued with a compelling session from Dr. Maurice Ingram, Program Development Specialist at the NJDOE, who addressed the growing need for schools to prioritize mental health as a critical component of student success. Dr. Ingram emphasized the importance of school-based teams and the implementation of evidence-based practices to support students' mental health needs. He underscored the importance of strategic partnerships with community organizations to provide holistic support for students both inside and outside the classroom.

Following Dr. Ingram's presentation, Ms. Pat Hovey, Executive Director of Thrive Alliance, led a session titled Linking Strategies/Services to Your Mental Health Needs. This interactive workshop engaged participants with practical strategies to help educators understand the purpose of behaviors and how to effectively respond to them. Ms. Hovey offered a variety of innovative approaches to help support students' emotional and behavioral needs in the school setting.

The day's programming also included a thought-provoking session on Building and Sustaining Community Partnerships to Meet Intensive Behavioral Needs. Dr. Paul Barbato, Director of Special Education for Dumont Public Schools, along with Ms. Johlennie May, District Behaviorist, and Ms. Daria Tabbacchino of Bergen's Promise Care Management Organization, discussed the importance of collaboration with community partners to address complex behavioral needs and ensure students receive the support they require.

The final session of the day, *Practitioner Perspectives: Coordinating Roles and Responsibilities in Leading and Implementing a Tiered System of Mental Health Supports*, was moderated by Ms. Tania Symmons. This panel brought together a diverse group of professionals, including Jessica Smedley, Director of Counseling at West Windsor-Plainsboro Regional School District; Ms. Johlennie May; Ms. Diane Travers, Senior Director of Programs at Family Connections; Ms. Dawn Lippi, District Social Worker, and Coordinator of Mental Health at Elizabeth Public Schools; and Dr. Frank Santora, Superintendent of Roxbury Public Schools. The panelists discussed the collaborative efforts required to implement and sustain a tiered system of mental health supports, emphasizing the need for coordinated leadership and shared responsibility across districts, schools, and communities.

The *2024 Special Education Directors' Toolkit* was a highly successful event, providing valuable insights, resources, and strategies to support the work of special education leaders across New Jersey. The shared commitment to improving educational services for students with disabilities was evident throughout the day, and the toolkit provided an important opportunity for continued learning, networking, and professional growth.

We look forward to building on the momentum from this event and continuing to support the work of special education professionals in the years to come.

Dr. Adrienne Castorina is the Director of Special Services in the Sparta Township Public Schools. Dr. Castorina holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology from Rutgers University, a Master of Social Work degree from New York University, and a doctorate degree

Toolkit 25 Gallery



Director of the Year
Dr. Suzan Radwan
Hillsborough Township Public Schools



Thank you so much to NJASA Special Ed. Awards Committee and Frontline for selecting me as this year's recipient. I am humbled by this recognition and undoubtedly feel that my accomplishments can be attributed to the phenomenal teachers, child study team members, staff members and administrators that I collaborate with on a daily basis. I truly cherish the professional relationships I have with so many in our education community and recognize that making a difference in the lives of students with disabilities is a team effort. I feel fortunate to have such smart and skilled colleagues working alongside me every day, so that together we can meet the needs of our most vulnerable students and families.

In a time where the number of referrals for students with disabilities are multiplying by the day, our students are coming to us with more complex needs than ever, the mental health needs of our students are exponentially growing, and we are struggling to provide special education services to our multilingual learners, I find calm in knowing that not only do I have the support of my staff but most importantly, I have the support of my District, Hillsborough Public Schools.

I want to personally thank Mr. Volpe, my superintendent who nominated me, and Dr. Kim Feltre, my assistant superintendent. I am so grateful for the fact that I always have a seat at the table. A seat when decisions for the District are being made so that I can advocate for the needs for our students with disabilities and ensure that all plans for our District take our students into consideration. You allow me to do right by children, and for that I can't thank you enough. Because at the end of the day, I feel like at its core, my job is to be an advocate for children, and you allow me to do that, so again, thank you.

Along my journey I have learned that you never know the impact you will have on a child when you give them your most authentic, unconditional support you can give them for the time you are with them. So I say, our jobs are like a relay race. We may never see our students to the finish line. But when we have them, we sprint. We give our students all we got, and then we pass the baton. Because the road ahead for our students with disabilities is long, and you just have to have faith in the process. Thank you again for this tremendous honor.

Dr. Suzan Radwan currently serves as the Director of Special Services for Hillsborough Township Public Schools in NJ. Dr. Radwan began her public school career in 2004 as a School Psychologist with Newark Public Schools, NJ where she worked with preschool through high school aged students. In 2010, she became Supervisor of the district's Office of Special Education. In 2013, Dr. Radwan was named Newark Public Schools' Executive Director of Operations for the Office of Special Education. Prior to joining the Hillsborough administration, Dr. Radwan worked as the Director of Special Services for Hoboken Public Schools, NJ. She currently serves as the Treasurer for the New Jersey Association of Pupil Services Administrators (NJAPSA), as well as on multiple committees for NJPSA. Dr. Radwan has a passion for increasing inclusive education, providing special education services to multilingual learners, has a strong focus on literacy development and is invested in increasing the mental health services available to students with disabilities in the school setting. Additionally, Dr. Radwan has expanded the transitional services available to high school students through the community-based instruction program during her tenure in Hillsborough. In 2023, she was the recipient of the Mary Ann Bonneau Administrator Award for her commitment to achieving literacy for all students and her successful implementation of the Wilson Reading Program in Hillsborough Public Schools. And in 2024, Dr. Radwan was the recipient of NJASA's 2024 NJ Special Education Administrator of the Year



Information regarding nominations for the 2025 Director of the Year will be available soon. When available, the nomination criteria and application will be posted on NJASA.net and NJAPSA.org websites.

NJASA/NJAPSA SPRING LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE:

Uniting, Empowering, Celebrating: Education Matters

May 14-16, 2025

Caesar's Atlantic City

Register for Conference at www.njasa.net

Wednesday, May 15, 2024, 11:30 am

NJAPSA Welcome Luncheon/Annual Meeting

Caesars, Atlantic City – Register at NJAPSA.org

Registration for luncheon/meeting only use QR Code below



It's All About Technology
"AI-Powered EdTech Tools: Transforming Special Education for All Students"

Louise Ortiz, AT Specialist
Farrah Rosenthal, AT Specialist
Bergen County Special Services, Educational Enterprises



In the world of special education, where individualized support is paramount, the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools has emerged as a game-changer. Teachers and principals working with students with disabilities are constantly seeking innovative solutions to cater to diverse needs. AI, with its adaptability and capacity for personalization, presents an array of tools that can revolutionize the special education setting. In this article, we will discuss our favorite AI tools that can reshape the way educators make special education more inclusive and effective.

Special education is a field committed to delivering individualized instruction and support to students with disabilities. The spectrum of disabilities are varied, ranging from learning disabilities and attention deficit disorders to autism spectrum disorders and complex physical impairments. The primary objective of special education is to ensure equal access to quality education for all students, enabling them to realize their full potential. Special education teachers and therapists face a unique set of challenges that set their classrooms apart from traditional settings. These challenges include:

- **Diverse Needs:** Students with disabilities often have widely varying needs, necessitating individualized instruction and support.
- **Limited Resources:** Special education programs frequently grapple with inadequate funding and understaffing, making personalized attention a challenge.
- **Data Overload:** Collecting and analyzing data on student progress can become overwhelming, leading to delays in identifying and addressing learning gaps. Let's explore how specific AI tools are addressing these challenges and transforming the special education landscape:
- **Read&Write** by Texthelp is an AI-driven literacy software designed to aid students with reading and writing challenges. It offers features like text-to-speech, word prediction, and highlighting tools to make content more accessible, bridging gaps in literacy skills. Additionally, Rewordify and AI Beta tools have been developed and added to the Read & write toolbar to level text and summarize content.

- **Diffit.me** is an AI teacher tool that will modify texts at different levels and in different languages. In addition, Diffit will create a summary, key vocabulary words, comprehension questions, and open-ended questions that work really well for class discussions. Diffit, unlike most AI tools, will source the content it provides; and teachers can choose a particular source to create a resource. Text and questions to meet the specific needs of individual students can be easily modified with this tool.
- **Whimsical: AI for Mind Maps** is a graphic organizing tool that allows for mind mapping and brainstorming as well as providing students the ability to expand on text and ideas. The built-in AI feature will give students suggestions to support their written structure, note-taking skills, and help expand vocabulary and concepts.
- **Google's AI Tools: The Power of AI Hidden in Plain Sight.** We have all been using AI tools within the Google Workspace for some time- maybe without knowing! Spelling suggestions, voice typing, Smart Compose (word prediction) and Google's search are all AI powered tools. Recently, Google launched the Duet AI assistant, bringing AI support to collaboration and productivity to their Google Workspace.
- **Google Arts & Culture:** Engage and elicit artistic creativity for students who would not otherwise have access to the tools to create art. Many students with special needs struggle to stay engaged and may have limited background knowledge and skills. Many Google Arts and Culture Experiments incorporate AI components that speak to a student's interests and can facilitate the process of creation, giving them multiple means of expression.
- Popular storytelling apps such as **Book Creator** are enhanced with creative AI tools such as the Magic Pen, which predicts images as the student draws. In addition, a Book Creator lesson using AI tools such as **ChatGPT** or **Google Bard** integrated in the process can allow for a differentiated and immersive approach to storytelling. For example, a student can upload an image of their dog and Google Bard can generate a rich poem about that picture. This can be the first draft to create a wondrous adventure story.

The integration of AI tools into special education will revolutionize how educators meet the diverse needs of their students. These AI tools offer personalized learning experiences, early intervention, accessibility enhancements, data-driven insights, and inclusive learning opportunities. By incorporating AI tools into the special education setting, teachers and principals can address challenges effectively and foster an inclusive learning environment. As educators in special education, it is essential to accept and embrace AI tools, ensuring they are implemented with care and consideration. By leveraging these supports, addressing potential challenges, and upholding ethical use, educators can harness AI's transformative power to provide an enriched educational experience that empowers students with disabilities to thrive.

Farrah Rosenthal is an AT Specialist, employed by Bergen County Special Services since 2005. She conducts student evaluations and trainings and specializes in finding access solutions for students with multiple disabilities. Additionally, she provides the latest educational technology solutions for all learners and presents professional development workshops. Ms. Rosenthal graduated from Tennessee Tech University and holds an Assistive Technology certificate from the University of Miami. Contact information: Email – farros@bergen.org Twitter - @FollowFarrahNJ

Louise Ortiz is an AT and Ed Tech Integration Specialist with 24 years of experience at Bergen County Special Services. With a background as a Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant, she has developed a passion for AT, focusing on innovative solutions to support students with significant disabilities. Louise provides ongoing support to educators and students, conducts evaluations, facilitates and delivers training and promotes inclusive education practices. Louise is dedicated to UDL and enjoys exploring and implementing emerging technologies that empower diverse learners in the educational setting.

Student Emotional Health and Wellness News by Patricia Hovey, Director, Thrive Alliance

ARE SCHOOLS REALLY TALKING TOO MUCH ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH?

It's well established that mental health is a basic need that must be addressed before students can learn and achieve academically. Yet a couple of researchers in the UK and Australia have been promoting their opinion that schools are "talking too much" about mental health. They say it's causing students to over-identify with mental health diagnoses and that *doing nothing is better than doing something*. This is a dangerous and short-sighted notion, given the latest statistics about student mental health:

- Nearly 20% of teens had a major depressive episode in the past year
- 42% experienced sadness or hopelessness in the past year

As experts in education and youth mental health, we're concerned that school boards will use this superficial and flawed "research" as an excuse to cut funds for mental health education and intervention. Cutting mental wellness support sends the wrong message, feeds mental health stigma in schools, and prevents students from getting the help they need.

If you're facing opposition like this in your district, use these talking points to push back and gain support for your mental health programs.

Certainly, there are students who learn about mental health issues and become convinced that their everyday worries and stress constitute an anxiety disorder. But is this a serious concern that warrants cutting mental health programs? Here's why it's not:

- Over-identification is easily solved. A trained counselor can identify a true mental health issue with a simple assessment.
- Every struggling student can benefit from help. Some students may have problems brought on by a temporary concern rather than an ongoing mental illness. Yet those students are still suffering and can benefit from short-term counseling and/or learning coping mechanisms that can help them do better in school.
- Lack of awareness leads to more serious outcomes. The bigger issue here, with much higher stakes, is the students with severe issues who lack access to information and help. If we refuse to address mental health in school, the outcomes will include higher rates of suicide, self-harm, violent behavior, substance abuse, poor academic achievement and delayed social-emotional development. Not to mention teacher burnout, which impacts the entire school community.

Even if schools don't talk about mental health, students are still exposed to content about mental illness on social media and elsewhere on the internet. And the problem is, they will see and hear information that's simplistic, misleading, or false. That certainly can fuel over-identification with common problems like anxiety and depression. And it leaves young people vulnerable to isolation and loneliness that increase their risk of developing more serious issues.

If we don't talk about these issues at school, how will students learn the facts? Ignoring the subject at school increases the power of misinformation. Let's give students evidence-based information and coping mechanisms they can use to feel better, and the confidence to speak up when they need help.

If schools ignore mental health, how will students get help? Very often, families are unaware of their children's emotional and behavioral issues. And if they are aware, they don't know how to help or can't afford counseling services. School staff are often in the best position to identify students struggling with mental health issues and can refer them for in-district services.

Mental health awareness, in isolation, won't necessarily fix problems. But it opens the door to higher level interventions for students with debilitating issues that impair their ability to function and learn. Without awareness, we can't identify those who need help.

Awareness is the starting point for schools:

- **For school staff (and parents)**, we need to build awareness about the signs of mental health issues, how to address them in the classroom, and the right way to get help for those students who may benefit.
- **For students**, we need to teach tools and coping strategies that can help them manage symptoms and prevent escalation.
- **Everyone** should know how to get help (for themselves or others) in a crisis.

In our experience, educators have the right intentions and want to help students succeed. But they are not mental health experts. That's why districts sometimes implement broad-stroke efforts that check boxes but fail to make an impact.

For example, taking 10 minutes a week to practice mindfulness is not enough to achieve measurable improvements in student mental health.

Schools need a continuum of mental health interventions to improve outcomes, including:

- Training programs for staff and parents
- SEL and ERI programs that teach students a range of coping skills for emotional and behavioral issues
- Policy and procedure changes that improve school climate and culture and make it easier for students to talk about mental health concerns
- Family outreach and regular communication
- Group and individual student counseling
- School refusal intervention

Abandoning school mental health programs will cause long-term harm. I realize that budgets are tight in many districts. We may not be able to do everything at once, but that doesn't mean we should do nothing to address youth mental health.

UNPACK THE EMOTIONAL BACKPACK TO IMPROVE MENTAL HEALTH AT SCHOOL

Our “emotional backpack” holds all sorts of feelings, beliefs, and experiences that impact our mental health at school and capacity to function effectively. Here’s how school staff can manage their own backpack, as well as support students who are so overloaded that they struggle to learn.

Students and Staff Carry Emotional Baggage That Hinders Learning

Students carry around a lot of emotional baggage that affects their behavior and their academic performance. And school staff members have their own baggage that can hinder their ability to teach and support students.

You may have heard the term *emotional backpack* used to describe the baggage that we all bring to school. The contents of the emotional backpack could be isolated stressors like an argument at home, a bad night’s sleep, or not eating breakfast. Or they could be ongoing issues like trauma, abuse, or even physical illness or injury.

Others can’t see what’s inside your backpack. And it can get heavy: imagine a bag loaded down with rocks, some tiny pebbles, and others big boulders.

As educators, our goal is to help students learn what they need to succeed in school and in life. The weight of an overfilled emotional backpack (both our own and our students’) greatly complicates that task. Here’s some advice to improve school mental health by recognizing and unloading our emotional backpacks.

Staff: Start by Managing Your Own Emotional Backpack

Chances are, you are familiar with the metaphor of putting the oxygen mask on yourself before assisting someone else on an airplane. The same concept applies to the emotional backpack: you can’t be emotionally available to help someone else if you’re weighed down yourself.

Be aware of your burdens. You can begin to lessen the weight of your backpack by becoming more conscious of it. Take some time to consider the “rocks” you are carrying around and how they may be impacting your reactions to students and your interactions with them. That awareness can sometimes be enough to shift your thinking and behavior in critical moments.

Talk about the contents. Pushing emotions and experiences down and not dealing with them makes them heavier. It can really help to talk with a supportive friend or a counselor when you are feeling overwhelmed.

Leave your backpack in the car. Another tactic is to actively resolve to put down your baggage before interacting with students. This takes practice but can be surprisingly effective. **TIP:** Try adopting a transition ritual every day before you enter the school building, such as a quick meditation or listening to your favorite song.

Signs That a Student's Backpack is Overloaded

The next step is recognizing when students are emotionally overwhelmed and need help lightening their load. Teachers, social workers, nurses, and other school staff can learn to notice the following signs:

Facial Expressions and Body Language

Does the student look uncharacteristically (or even chronically) angry, sad, fearful, or blank? Are they avoiding eye contact?

Changes in Behavior and Energy Level

Is a normally attentive student suddenly sleeping in class? Or a usually quiet child suddenly bouncing off the walls?

Irritability and Agitation

Does the student snap at the smallest frustration, or show physical agitation symptoms like fidgeting or rocking?

Work Refusal

Does the student refuse to participate in class or complete assignments? Is the student skipping class or frequently asking to go to the bathroom or the nurse?

Absences

Has the student had a string of absences without a medical or other reason?

How to Help a Student Unload Their Emotional Backpack

Teachers (and most school staff members) are not mental health experts. But that doesn't mean you can't help students lighten their emotional burdens so they can be more successful in school. Here's how to approach a student that you're concerned about.

1. **Be curious.** Pay attention to your students' emotional states. When something changes and seems troubling, try to engage the student to find out more. You want to do this in a non-obtrusive way that's not threatening to the student.
2. **Ask in the right way.** Don't ask "What's wrong?" That can make a student get defensive and shut down. Instead, try "Something's different with you today" or "I wonder what's happening."
3. **Monitor your tone.** Don't let your tone suggest that you're accusing or frustrated with the student. Try to keep it neutral. Avoid sarcasm, which is often misinterpreted and can make things worse.
4. **Check in regularly.** When you know a student is struggling, don't hover, but make it a point to monitor how they are doing.
5. **Teach emotional regulation strategies.** There are many techniques teachers can use to help kids overcome emotional issues in the classroom, including distraction and immersion in something they enjoy, like play.

Learn more: [Emotional Dysregulation: 5 Interventions for Students and Staff](#)

Little by little, you can help your students remove the small pebbles and even some of the bigger rocks from their emotional backpacks. As they become empowered to self-regulate their emotions, you'll find that their burdens seem lighter and their capacity to learn has grown.

Patricia (Pat) Hovey is a past president of NJAPSA and continues to serve on the NJAPSA Board. She was the Director of Special Services in Roxbury and retired from Jefferson Township as their Director of Special Services. Pat has been in public education for 28 years as: Special and General Ed teacher, district administrator, Professional Development creator and presenter, mentor, and specialized program developer. Pat 5 years of retirement as the Executive Director, Thrive Alliance Group Connecting the dots between mental health and student success.



What All School Personnel Should Know About the PSW Method of SLD Identification

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Identifying Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) remains a complex challenge in school psychology and special education. The Pattern of Strengths and Weaknesses (PSW) method has emerged as an increasingly popular and research-supported approach among various methods used to identify SLD. This article briefly explains the PSW method of SLD identification, clarifying its advantages over other methods, addressing frequently asked questions, and making a case for the Dual Discrepancy/Consistency (DD/C) method as the most effective PSW method.

Assumptions About Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD)

Before understanding the PSW method, it is crucial to consider the underlying assumptions about SLD that inform the method's structure. Several generally agreed-upon assumptions underlie SLDs. These assumptions are supported by decades of research and the applied practices in identifying and diagnosing SLD as defined by IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) and DSM-5 (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition). These assumptions are:

1. **Neurologically-based Weaknesses:** SLDs are caused by internal, neurologically-based weaknesses in cognitive processing.
2. **Specific Cognitive Deficits:** Cognitive weaknesses are often domain-specific and hinder academic development in areas such as reading fluency or math computation.
3. **Heterogeneity:** SLDs are not a one-size-fits-all condition; their severity, specific cognitive deficits, and impact on academic achievement vary widely among individuals.
4. **Co-Occurrence with Other Disabilities:** SLDs may coexist with other disabling conditions; however, these other conditions are not the primary cause of the learning difficulties.
5. **Exclusionary Factors:** Other factors (e.g., cultural differences and lack of proper instruction) may contribute to academic difficulties but are not the primary cause of SLD.
6. **Unexpected Underachievement:** One of the most significant markers of SLD is unexpected underachievement, defined (in the DD/C method) as specific cognitive and linguistic processing weaknesses that starkly contrast with an individual's ability to think and reason.
7. **Multiple Sources of Variability:** Academic outcomes in individuals with SLD are influenced by multiple factors, such as genetic factors, severity of cognitive and linguistic processing weaknesses, behavioral characteristics, and environmental influences.

These assumptions are central to how we define and diagnose SLD and shape the criteria used in the PSW method. However, no single method for identifying SLD is universally accepted as the definitive "gold standard." The PSW method, however, better reflects these assumptions than many other methods.

Overview of the PSW Method

The **PSW method** involves identifying discrepancies between cognitive strengths and academic weaknesses and between cognitive strengths and weaknesses. This pattern of cognitive and academic strengths and weaknesses is analyzed for consistency to determine whether the cognitive and academic weaknesses are related empirically. The goal is to understand how specific cognitive deficits contribute to academic difficulties, an approach distinct from other methods like **Ability-Achievement Discrepancy (AAD)** and **Response to Intervention (RtI)**.

The PSW method has three core criteria:

1. **Discrepancy between cognitive strengths and academic weaknesses:** This discrepancy means that a student's academic achievement does not align with their cognitive capabilities, often called unexpected underachievement.
2. **Discrepancy between cognitive strengths and weaknesses:** This discrepancy means that some cognitive processes are significantly weaker than others, distinguishing specific cognitive weakness from more pervasive cognitive deficits.
3. **Consistency between cognitive and academic weaknesses:** Because cognitive processing weaknesses are the presumed cause of SLDs, there must be an empirically established relationship between cognitive deficits and academic challenges rather than unrelated weaknesses. This consistency is sometimes referred to as expected underachievement.

Comparing SLD Identification Methods

There are three methods for identifying SLD in public schools: **Ability-Achievement Discrepancy (AAD)**, **Response to Intervention (RtI)**, and **Pattern of Strengths and Weaknesses (PSW)**. While all three methods are discrepancy-based, their approach, focus, and the data they emphasize differ.

- **AAD:** The AAD method compares academic achievement to a student's overall cognitive ability (e.g., Full Scale IQ). When exclusionary factors have been ruled out, a significant discrepancy suggests a learning disability. However, AAD does not clarify the underlying cause of the academic difficulty, making it less informative in understanding why a student is struggling.
- **RtI:** The RtI method focuses on the student's response to evidence-based interventions using discrepancies in rate and level of learning relative to peers. When the student's response is inadequate and exclusionary factors have been ruled out, the RtI method suggests a learning disability. RtI does not clarify the underlying cause, making it difficult to determine how to proceed with intervention beyond greater intensity and implementation frequency.
- **PSW:** The PSW method goes beyond identifying discrepancies. It delves into why a student is underperforming by identifying domain-specific cognitive weaknesses directly related to academic difficulties. By incorporating cognitive and academic assessments, PSW provides a more precise explanation for academic challenges, which can inform intervention planning.

Strengths and Limitations of the PSW Method

Each method of SLD identification has strengths and limitations. For example, while the AAD method is simpler, it does not explain why a student is struggling academically. RtI is limited to tracking responses to interventions and does not provide enough insight into cognitive processing weaknesses that, if known, could be addressed. PSW, with its focus on the relationships between academic performance and cognitive strengths and weaknesses, helps to clarify the reason for academic difficulty, leading to better-informed intervention.

A limitation of all SLD identification methods is the use of cut points to define discrepancies, as well as strengths and weaknesses. For example, a student might be considered to have a cognitive weakness if their score falls below a certain threshold (e.g., a standard score of less than 85). Cut points are inherently problematic due to the **measurement error** in standardized testing. For example, two students with scores near but on opposite sides of the cut point are very similar regarding the underlying ability. However, when cut points are used rigidly, one student's score would indicate a weakness, and the other student's score would not. The strict use of cut points in any SLD identification method leads to false positives (identifying a problem where there is none) and false negatives (failing to identify a real issue). To manage this, the PSW method, particularly DD/C, uses confidence intervals, which offer a range of possible scores, and other sources of converging data to improve the accuracy of decisions.

Research Supporting the PSW Method

There is substantial research supporting the PSW method. Studies have shown that cognitive abilities are multidimensional and can provide unique insights into academic performance.

Specific cognitive

processes, such as phonological processing for reading or working memory for math, are better predictors of academic outcomes than general cognitive ability alone. The incremental validity of specific cognitive abilities over general ability in predicting outcomes ranges from modest to substantial. Specific cognitive abilities and processes differentially predict academic achievement. Also, the cognitive ability profiles of individuals who respond to evidence-based interventions differ from those who do not respond as expected. These and other research findings support using the PSW method over other methods. Some researchers have critiqued the PSW method, questioning its diagnostic accuracy. However, further research, particularly by Schneider and colleagues (2024), has demonstrated that these concerns are overstated and that PSW can be effectively used with proper safeguards to minimize the impact of measurement error.

The Dual Discrepancy/Consistency (DD/C) Method

The DD/C method is grounded in the Cattell-Horn-Carroll (CHC) theory of intelligence and is considered the most psychometrically sophisticated and research-based method for identifying SLD. The DD/C method corrects for false negatives (failing to identify SLD when it is present) and provides safeguards against measurement error. It also evaluates the consistency among cognitive and academic weaknesses, offering more confidence in the accuracy of the decision. DD/C is the only PSW method that provides a probability estimate of decision accuracy, ensuring that the identification of SLD is as precise as possible. Additionally, the software required for DD/C analysis is affordable and widely accessible to school psychologists.

Implementing the DD/C Method

To use the DD/C method, school personnel need to:

1. **Conduct a comprehensive evaluation** that includes both cognitive and academic assessments.
2. **Use the software** (X-BASS) to analyze the data, with a new version (X-BASS 3.0) due for release in 2025.
3. **Undergo professional development** training, typically taking one day, to ensure proper use of the method

Conclusion

The PSW method, particularly DD/C, offers a comprehensive and research-based approach to identifying SLD. While all SLD identification methods have limitations, the DD/C method addresses many of the shortcomings of traditional approaches like AAD, providing a clearer understanding of a student's academic difficulties. PSW informs intervention planning more effectively by identifying specific cognitive deficits and their relationship to academic weaknesses. When used alongside other data sources, it can help reduce false positives and false negatives, ensuring that students with SLD receive the support they need.

DD/C is the most widely used PSW method. It is supported by research and aligns with common assumptions about what SLD is and is not. By integrating PSW into the identification process, especially when students do not respond as expected to high-quality instruction and intervention, school personnel can gain deeper insights into the causes of academic difficulties, leading to more effective interventions and better educational outcomes for students with SLD.

Conflict of interest disclaimer: I am a co-author of the DD/C method and co-developer of the software (X-BASS) used to analyze data according to the DD/C method. I receive a portion of the royalties for this software.

Due to space limitations, references were not included but are available upon request:flanagad@stjohns.edu

Dr. Flanagan is a Professor of Psychology, School Psychology Training Programs, St. John's University and Affiliate Clinical Professor, Yale Child Study Center, Yale University School of Medicine, New Haven, CT. She serves as an expert witness, learning disabilities consultant, and test/measurement consultant and trainer for organizations both nationally and internationally. She teaches psychoeducational assessment for intervention and understanding, diagnosing, and treating specific learning disabilities. Dr. Flanagan is a widely published author of books, journal articles, and software; best known for the co-development of the Cross-Battery Assessment approach and its corresponding software system, an operational definition of specific learning disabilities, and an intervention library of recommendations for students and teachers. She is the recent recipient of the President's Award from the Learning Disabilities Association of America (LDA) and the inaugural Contributions to Practice Award from APA's Division 16 (School Psychology) for exceptional contributions to the field through innovations in practice.



**A Message from the Chairperson of the NJ State Special Education Advisory Council
NAPSA Board Member
by Dr. Paul Barbato**

NJSSEAC Update:

As you may know, I serve as the Chairperson of our **New Jersey State Special Education Advisory Council (NJSSEAC)**. Our NJSSEAC has been actively meeting and would love to have you join us.

The NJSSEAC responsibilities include offering advice, consultation, and recommendations to the New Jersey State Board of Education and State Commissioner of Education on matters of unmet needs concerning special education and related services in New Jersey public schools. The NJSSEAC provides a broad base of stakeholder input on policies, practices, and issues related to the education of children and youth with disabilities who are IDEA eligible. In addition to the federal requirements for Advisory Council members, the NJ-SSEAC seeks out and identifies best practices and anticipate future needs for students with disabilities.

Committees and subcommittees are involved in much of the work of the Advisory Council. These subcommittees may be standing committees, with goals or ad hoc committees, which address a particular short-term issue during the course of a particular year.

Examples of Advisory Council Subcommittees include:

1. Executive Committee – the Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, and Secretary address the business of the Advisory Council. The Executive Committee will communicate and collaborate with the State Director regarding Advisory Council agendas and business.
 - a. Membership Committee – keep the Advisory Council memberships current and accurate.
 - b. By-Laws Committee – review the by-laws each year.
2. Advisory Council priorities are also addressed through subcommittee work. Each of the following Priority Subcommittees has developed an Action Plan outlining how they will approach their work this year:
 - Priority I: Education in the Least Restrictive Environment PreK-2
 - Priority II: Quality Instruction (Early Literacy)
 - Priority III: Transition (14+)
 - Priority IV: Discipline/Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

3. Engagement Councils - Internal Engagement and External Engagement

As an extension of our NJSSEAC work, the Vice Chairperson and I have been serving on the **Office of Special Education Programs, State Advisory Panel and State Interagency Coordinating Council (OSE SAP/SICC) national workgroup**. The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) at the federal level has always supported and involved the SAP and the ICC. The SAP and the ICC have continually played a critical role in providing advice around such initiatives as the State Performance Plan (SPP) and Annual Performance Report (APR), as well as providing input during onsite visits by OSEP at the SEA and LA. The SAP & ICC are now involved with OSEP Differentiated Monitoring System (DMS). In addition, OSEP has provided professional development opportunities for SAP and ICC members, and state education agency staff.

Check out the [forecasted NJSSEAC meeting dates](#) and feel free to reach out to me for more information.

National Association of Pupil Services Administrators (NAPSA) Update:

As a Board Trustee member of our **National Association of Pupil Services Administrators (NAPSA)** we continue to provide members with meaningful learning experiences that help us serve the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs of all students.

This school year NAPSA has rolled out a monthly webinar series for members focused on trending problems of practice. **The series, in collaboration with sponsor [Cartwheel](#), features NJAPSA colleagues, industry experts, and researchers offering evidence-based practices to help improve mental health systems and align them with research-backed approaches.** These hour-long webinars are free to access via Zoom during lunch time so do not miss out on them! Marci, Candie, or I will send out the date and Zoom registration link for the next webinar! **A recording will be available to all registrants following the webinar for attendee review or case of a scheduling conflict.**

If you are not a member of NAPSA and are interested in joining us, please click below for the half-price introductory membership offer.

[2024-25 NAPSA New Member Half-price General Membership Application](#)

NAPSA hopes to see you next year at our 59th Annual NAPSA Conference in Pittsburgh, PA on October 19-22, 2025!

Have a calm and productive remainder of the 2024-25 school year.

Dr. Paul Barbato is a NJAPSA Past President, Currently Director of Special Services (Dumont Public Schools), NJSSEAC Chairperson, NAPSA Board Member, NJPSA NJEXCEL / TLC Instructor / L2L Mentor, FDU/ Ramapo/ HCCC Adjunct Professor, NJSEAA Board Member

**“NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE. THE WORD ITSELF SAYS
‘I’M POSSIBLE!’
-AUDREY HEPBURN**

Legal Spotlight

Nathanya G. Simon, ESQ.



A RECENT SHIFT IN POSITIONS

By

Nathanya G. Simon Esq

Kevin Cuddihy, Esq.

Scarinci / Hollenbeck, LLC

As all of you well know, the minimal standard for the development of an IEP is to conduct evaluations to verify the disability, ensure that the classification category is accurate, and then address the student's needs based on the student's areas of strength and weakness by writing goals and objectives and providing special education instruction. The legal standard that is used to determine whether the district has provided and is offering to provide a free appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE) is fluid. These terms are general in nature and allow for each case to be decided on its own merits.

For the past many years, as an attorney representing school districts, when faced with a due process and/or mediation request, I have consistently advocated in support of the offered in-district program, services, and placement. The witnesses for the district, who are the staff working with the student, usually are able to provide supporting documentation that the goals and objectives in the IEP are appropriate, the instructional and related services being provided are appropriate, and that the student is making progress. However, more recently, there has been a shift in some of my cases. I have been asked to assist the district in obtaining relief from the court for the district to make an out of district placement over parental objection.

Recently, I handled two cases in which the District had made all reasonable efforts to provide the student with FAPE in LRE, but despite all of their efforts, the student was unsuccessful behaviorally, socially, emotionally, and academically. After numerous meetings, and requests for parental cooperation, the district could not obtain the consent of the parent to move forward with securing an appropriate out of district placement.

In the case of Roxbury Township Board of Education v. S.R. o/b/o J.M., decided on August 27, 2024, by Administrative Law Judge Kimberly Moss, the student had exhibited significant behavior concerns while attending the in-district program, resulting in over 100 code of conduct write-ups over two school years. The program in which the student was placed was specifically developed for students

with an emotional regulation impairment and had therapeutic supports and structured behavior management systems throughout the day. Eventually, the staff held a manifestation determination and IEP amendment meeting and placed the student on home instruction pending out of district placement. When the parent continued to disagree, the District filed a motion for emergent relief. After in-person oral argument, the Court granted the District's motion and concluded that the District could not provide the student with FAPE and ordered that the student remain on home instruction for 45 days during which time the District and parent were required to work together to secure an appropriate out of district placement.

In the case of K.F. o/b/o S.P. v. Morris Hills Regional Board of Education, decided on November 14, 2024, by Administrative Law Judge Perry Villani, the parent file the request for emergent relief seeking an order to have the student returned to the in-district placement rather than home instruction pending out of district placement. The student had a history of hospitalizations, self-harm, fleeing the school building, abusive language, and threatening and hitting staff. The District offered to provide a specialized program with therapeutic supports and one to one assistance, all of which were rejected by the parent. The student continued to struggle academically and behaviorally. After filing all of the documents, and oral argument, the Judge denied the parent's application and stated that since the District was offering home instruction, there would not be any irreparable harm to the student. Additionally, the District demonstrated that S.P. was at risk of harm in school since she had a history of refusing to heed the instructions from staff, walking out of the school, and remaining in the bathroom for long periods of time. The case is continuing through an expedited due process proceeding, which means that the case must be decided within 20 calendar days of the filing with the Court.

The takeaway from these cases is that there is a mechanism to address students who are uncontrollable, unsuccessful academically, and interfering with the safety and education of others. There are procedures that must be followed, and efforts that must be expended, in order to expect a favorable outcome, but if these are followed, the relief for the student, staff and other students is attainable.

Nathanya Guritzky Simon, Esq., is school board representation in all legal, labor and special education matters. She is best known for her handling of special education matters. Routinely she is offered the opportunity to counsel New Jersey school board clients throughout the state on day-to-day matters through to complex special education litigation, when necessary. Ms. Simon represents clients at identification meetings, evaluation determinations, Individualized Education Plan ("IEP") meetings, in mediation, in Complaint Investigations, at due process administrative hearings held at the Office of Administrative Law ("OAL"), and in litigation appealed into the Federal Court and State courts. Ms. Simon, Esq has presented numerous times for NJAPSA events and her firm co-sponsors with NJAPSA the School Leadership Conference luncheon annually at the NJASA/NJAPSA Spring Leadership Conference.

Kevin Cuddihy is an Associate Attorney within the Firm's Public and Education law practice groups. He handles a variety of special education matters, as well as labor and employment matters for school districts and municipalities. He is a graduate of Seton Hall Law School and was a public school teacher prior to becoming an attorney.



Dr. Theodore Kozlik Scholarship

The New Jersey Association of Pupil Services Administrators' Association is sponsoring the **Dr. Theodore Kozlik Scholarship Program** for June 2025 graduates.

Applicants must be classified as eligible for special education services, pursuing post-secondary education and **sponsored by a NJAPSA member**.

Dr. Theodore Kozlik dedicated his life to serving and supporting others, especially within the special education community on the local, state and national level. His educational training and career spanned over 50 years beginning as a music teacher and moving into special education and the administration of a growing body of law, research, specialization and scholarly pragmatism that were Ted's hallmarks. His mantra was that challenges were vanquished by hard work and that when things were at their worst you had to be at your best. Ted was blessed with gifts that few demonstrate, always respecting the person and their humanity regardless of their social situation, challenges or differences.

The **Dr. Theodore Kozlik Scholarship Program** honors Ted's lifetime work as a leader of leaders and ensure that the values he embraced will go forward with those who will live in a future that does not yet exist.

Six 2024 graduating students received the prestigious Theodore Kozlik Memorial Scholarship award which recognizes students who demonstrate perseverance and dedication in their academic and social endeavors as well as their pursuit of post- secondary opportunities. The program offered six \$1000.00 scholarships to students representing the North, Central and Southern parts of the state.

Dr. Theodore Kozlik Memorial Scholarship Recipients 2024

Camden Prep High School	Chapel Hill / Hawthorne	Ocean County Vo-Tech Schools
Union County Vo-Tech Schools	Verona Public Schools	Westfield Public School

If you are a member of NJAPSA, you are welcome to have your graduating students apply for the 2025 Dr. Theodore Kozlik Scholarship. Application forms are available on the website [www. NJAPSA.org](http://www.NJAPSA.org) and also included at the end of this publication.

All Candidates must graduate by **June 2025**. These scholarships may be used for any aspect of a post-secondary program, including 2 or 4 year colleges, technical/trade schools, business schools, fine art institutes or other recognized post-secondary institutions.

The applications are due by April 1, 2025. Please email all completed applications to: Marci Grabelle at executivedirector@njapsa.org- Please write in the Subject: "NJAPSA Scholarship and name of District/School.



NJAPSA Presents: Winter Academy Conference Directors, Supervisors, CST, and School Administrators

"An Inconvenient Truth"

George Scott EdS, LMFT

George Scott is a NJ Licensed Family Therapist practicing at the Center for Counseling Services in Mercer County, NJ where he specializes in helping individuals and families recover from the effects of life's traumatic and toxic stress events. He created Minding Our Children, a forum for adults to understand the protective and healing power of Showing Up in the lives of children. With a strong belief in the ability of children and families to heal from emotional hurt, George has focused his work on helping parents, professional educators and other adults understand their work in that healing. He was the former Director of Student Services in South Brunswick, NJ schools, and the former County Coordinator for the Traumatic Loss Coalition (TLC) in Middlesex and Monmouth Counties, NJ. George continues his work with the TLC as a State-wide Resource Coordinator through Rutgers UBHC, supporting the work of County Coalitions throughout NJ. He is an adjunct instructor at the College of New Jersey, offering graduate courses through the Counselor Education Department in Counseling Trauma. George is well known as a conference presenter and for his professional/personal development programs.

Legal Updates and Current Topics in Special Education

Mr. Kyle Trent, Esq.

Kyle J. Trent, Esq. is a Partner at the law firm of Apruzzese, McDermott, Mastro, & Murphy, P.C. He has focused his practice on the representation of school districts for more than a decade. Prior to entering private practice, Mr. Trent spent three years working in the Legal Research Unit at the New Jersey Office of Administrative Law, where he gained valuable behind the scenes insight while working with administrative law judges on numerous education and special education cases.

NJAPSA Annual Winter Academy

Forsgate Country Club, 375 Forsgate Drive, Monroe, NJ

Date: Friday, February 28, 2025

Cost: \$149 Member*

Time: 9:00 AM - 3:00 PM

\$199 Non-member

Light breakfast and lunch provided

**Membership rate applies if at least 1 person in a district belongs to NJAPSA. NJAPSA registered districts sending 3 or more staff members will be offered the MEMBER RATE for ALL participants.*

For further information or groups of 5 or more email marcigrabelle@njapsa.org

Registration is via email only: Scan this completed form and PO to:

marcigrabelle@njapsa.org

If your district requires a Purchase Order be processed via regular mail, send to:
NJAPSA, PO Box 2012, Westfield, NJ 07091

Please register by February 10, 2025

Name: _____ Title: _____

District: _____ Email: _____

Important: EMAIL all registration forms to marcigrabelle@njapsa.org with scanned purchase order. If paying by check or your district requires a purchase order to be mailed, email this registration form and indicate a P.O. or check is being mailed. Include a copy of your emailed registration with the mailed check or PO.

___ \$149 for members - Purchase order or check is ___ attached or ___ will be mailed (check one)

___ \$199 for non-member - Purchase order or check ___ attached or ___ will be mailed (check one)

Registration will be confirmed by email



AN INFORMATIVE PRESENTATION ON SPECIAL EDUCATION

**Current and Hot Legal Topic sin Special Education
Vic LaPira, Esq
Fogarty & Hara Esqs.**

**FRIDAY, February 7, 2025
12:00-3:00 pm
Forsgate Country Club, Monroe, NJ
\$25 Members
\$35 Non-Members**

**Please register by Thursday, February 1, 2025
For further information contact marcigrabelle@njapsa.org**

Registration: Email this form to: marcigrabelle@njapsa.org
(with scanned PO preferred) or detach and return to:

NJAPSA PO Box 2012, Westfield, NJ 07091

Name: _____ Title: _____

District: _____ Email: _____

Cell # _____

_____ \$25 members - PO or check ___ attached or ___ will be mailed (check one)

_____ \$35 non-member - PO or check ___ attached or ___ will be mailed (check one)

(Confirmation will be by email only)



NJAPSA and NJPSA/FEA PRESENT
**7th Annual Innovations in Special Education
Technology (I-SET) Conference:**

Blending AI and Strategies in Educational Technology to
Improve Instructional Outcomes



March 14, 2025; 9 am - 3 pm at FEA, 12 Centre Drive, Monroe, NJ (In-Person Only)
Fee: \$149 NJAPSA and NJPSA Members and Non-Members

Presenters: Dr. Brian Friedlander, AssistiveTek LLC; Mike Marotta, ATP; Richard West ATCenter; Farah Rosenthal, Technology Specialist, Bergen Special Services School District; Joel Handler, Director of Technology, Hillsborough Schools, Janet Tuohy, Assistant Director of Technology, NJPSA; Elizabeth Beck, Special Education Coach, North Brunswick Township Public Schools

Audience: Directors and Supervisors of Special Education, Child Study Team Members, Principals and Vice Principals, School Counselors, I&RS Team Members, and Special Educators

What's new in artificial intelligence to promote access and learning for students with disabilities? This year's I-SET conference will explore AI possibilities for administrators, educators, and students providing attendees with specific tools for planning, adapting, and delivering instruction as well as administrative tasks and oversight. New and improved technology for schools and families to facilitate communication and promote independence will be discussed as well. Do not forget to bring a laptop or other device so that you can fully participate in activities planned for each session.

For further information, contact Marci Grabelle at marcigrabelle@njapsa.org or Peggy McDonald at pmcdonald@njpsa.org.

Register at www.njpsa.org.

Membership



PLEASE INDICATE IF YOU ARE:

- Renewing your NJAPSA membership 2024-25
- New member to NJAPSA 2024-25
- Retired Membership 2024-25

NJAPSA Membership

Complete the following information for renewing your membership or becoming a new member. You can mail at the address below or email scanned copy and PO to marcigrabelle@njapsa.org.

NAME: _____

SCHOOL DISTRICT/CO _____

POSITION: _____

WORK ADDRESS: _____

HOME ADDRESS: _____
(if applicable) _____

WORK /HOME PHONE: _____ Cell: _____

EMAIL ADDRESS: _____

Please print this form and mail with a purchase order or check in the amount of \$195.00 (\$50.00 for retirees) to:

NJAPSA
P.O. Box 2012
Westfield, New Jersey 07091-201

Allow 4 weeks for acknowledgement of your membership. An invoice for your payment will be sent to your email address. Please be aware that membership runs from July through June of each school year.



2025-2026

New Directors' Cohort Application

Name: _____

Primary Position/Title: _____

Present Employer: _____

Work Address: _____

City _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Work Phone: _____ Cell Phone _____

E-mail: _____

How long at present position: _____

Home Address: _____

City _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Cell Phone: _____ DOB (optional): _____

Preferred Mailing Address: Business: _____ Home: _____

Please *mail the completed application and resume, to be received by October 6, 2025, to:

NJAPSA New Administrators' Cohort
PO Box 2012
Westfield, NJ 07091

Note: Please answer each question fully or reference your resume and section if the information is included there.

* NJAPSA will accept an electronic application and resume as temporary submission in order to expedite your application. An original signed document is still required in order to complete process.

1. Higher Education – Begin with the most recently attended institution.

<u>Institution</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Major</u>	<u>Degree</u>	

2. List all honors, awards, and fellowships received, as well as special travel or study programs undertaken, beginning with the most recent.

Name of award, honor, travel or study program Date(s) received

3. Reference: Please list an individual who are familiar with your professional work and qualifications.

Name	Position	Address	Home & Office Phone #

Applicant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

NJAPSA

New Jersey Association of Pupil Services Administrators
www.njapsa.org

2024-2025



NJAPSA Dr. Theodore Kozlik Scholarship 2025 Application Applicant Information – Due April 1, 2025

NJAPSA Executive Board 2024-25

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Dr. Suzan Radwan, Treasurer

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Dr. Stephanie Logan

The New Jersey Association of Pupil Services Administrators' Association is sponsoring the **Dr. Theodore Kozlik Scholarship Program** for June 2024 graduates. Applicants must be classified as eligible for special education services, pursuing post-secondary education, and sponsored by a NJAPSA member. The District must have an active NJAPSA membership. Dr. Theodore Kozlik dedicated his life to serving and supporting others, especially within the special education community on the local, state and national level. His educational training and career spanned over 50 years beginning as a music teacher and moving into special education and the administration of a growing body of law, research, specialization, and scholarly pragmatism that were Ted's hallmarks.

His mantra was that challenges were vanquished by hard work and that when things were at their worst you had to be at your best. Ted was blessed with gifts that few demonstrate, always respecting the person and their humanity regardless of their social situation, challenges, or differences.

Ted seemed to always find a way to support those who worked hard by making sure professionals and students had the tools they needed to stay on the path of continuous improvement. He was dedicated to meaningful professional development, appropriate researched based materials, and equipment for programs he oversaw.

Ted also embraced the notion of educating the "Whole Child." He understood that curriculum needed to integrate academic learning, emotional and physical health and the ability to be as independent and responsible as possible upon graduation.

In addition to high academic standards, Ted also valued working with your hands; building, gardening and cooking for example and along with this, personalities that marched to a different drummer and did not "run with the herd."

The **Dr. Theodore Kozlik Scholarship Program** honors Ted's lifetime work as a leader of leaders and ensure that the values he embraced will go forward with those who will live in a future that does not yet exist.

ONLY NJAPSA MEMBERS MAY SPONSOR APPLICANTS.

Six (6) - \$1,000.00 Scholarships; Two (2) per each, Northern, Central and Southern Regions will be awarded by the NJAPSA Scholarship Committee. (Limit one scholarship recipient per high school).

Students should demonstrate some or all of the following:

- Motivation to succeed academically
- Participation in school and extracurricular activities
- Community Service including volunteerism
- Employment experiences
- Self-Directed
- Leadership skills

All Candidates must graduate by **June 2025**. These scholarships may be used for any aspect of a post-secondary program, including 2 or 4 year colleges, technical/trade schools, business schools, fine art institutes or other recognized post-secondary institutions.

NJAPSA
P.O. Box 2012
Westfield, NJ 07091-2012
marcigrabelle@njapsa.org

The applications are due by April 1, 2025. Please send all completed applications to: Marci L. Grabelle at marcigrabelle@njapsa.org. Please include in email subject: "NJAPSA Scholarship and Name of District."

NJAPSA Dr. Theodore Kozlik Scholarship 2025 Application

Personal Statement

(Due April 1, 2025)

Please write in 250 words or less a description of your disability and how your experience in receiving special education services has benefited you. Please tell us why you believe you should receive this scholarship. You can ask for assistance in writing this narrative.

Member's Name:
District or School:
County:
Date:
Student Applicant:

NJAPSA Dr. Theodore Kozlik Scholarship 2025 Application
References

Please obtain 2 letters of recommendations and attach to this application. These recommendations must be from two people knowledgeable about you as a student, i.e., case manager, guidance counselor, teachers, etc.

Reference 1: _____

Reference 2: _____

I verify that I am a member in good standing of NJAPSA for the 2024-25 school year and recommend this Dr. Theodore Kozlik Application on behalf of the above named student.

The completed applications are due by **April 1, 2025**, please include **most recent transcripts** and **completed application** and email to:

Marci L. Grabelle
marcigrabelle@njapsa.org

Include "NJAPSA Scholarship and the district/school of applicant"
in the email subject box.

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Contact Us

NJAPSA
P.O. Box 2012
Westfield, NJ 07091-2012
Marci L. Grabelle
Executive Director
marcigrabelle@njapsa.org



*Celebrating over 50 years of Excellence
1971-2025*