



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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SUPERINTENDENT SHAFER TESTIFIES BEFORE STATE ASSEMBLY BUDGET COMMITTEE

Schools chief advocates for statewide starting teacher's salary, faster track to key certifications, greater equity with QSAC waiver

TRENTON – Superintendent of Schools Eileen F. Shafer testified before the N.J. State Assembly's Budget Committee today and advocated for a statewide starting teacher's salary, a faster track for educators to obtain bilingual and special education certifications, and greater equity in the administering a waiver for urban school districts as they are evaluated by the state, through the N.J. Quality Single Accountability Continuum, or QSAC.

“The shortage of teachers affecting schools throughout the nation has presented one of the most significant challenges to our district,” said Shafer, in a 4th floor committee room in the State House. “As new teachers come in, teachers who have been with us get lured away by other school districts that offer higher salaries. It is this district-versus-district scenario that I find most troubling.”

The establishment of a statewide minimum starting salary would help quell that scenario, Shafer.

“This was done before in the State of New Jersey,” Shafer said.

Another way to help districts hire the teachers they need is to expedite the processes through which paraprofessionals obtain bilingual certifications and special education certifications, and make them less costly, she said.

Shafer called for greater equity in the administration of a waiver given to school districts for QSAC, the state's process for evaluating school districts in five areas, including Instruction and Program.

A district's scores on the Instruction and Program section of QSAC are largely based on students' performance on state assessments. Test scores have been low in districts throughout the state due to the pandemic shutdown's impact on student learning.

In order to help districts achieve the minimum score of 80 on the QSAC's Instruction and Program section, the state issued a waiver that took into account the pandemic shutdown's impact on students' assessment scores. However, in urban districts, the waiver does not have the intended impact of achieving the Instruction and Program score of 80. Therefore, urban districts have not received the full benefit of the waiver.

“The urban districts have been left behind, such as Newark, Orange, Passaic, and Paterson to name a few,” Shafer said. “Where is the equity? A waiver should be there to help everyone, not a select few. COVID did not discriminate, but the waiver for QSAC Instruction and Program does discriminate. It separates the urban districts from all of the others.”

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Assemblyman Benjie Wimberly, vice chair of the Assembly Budget Committee, asked what the impact is on urban school districts that do not have the full benefit of the waiver.

“For that particular area, Instruction and Program, if a district doesn’t receive 80 percent, then the district would be put on a Corrective Action Plan,” said Shafer, who noted that Paterson Public Schools as well as Newark Public Schools has just earned back local control ending decades of a state takeover.

“For us not to benefit from the waiver as others do is just discriminatory,” Shafer said.

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