

NJASA Leadership & Diversity Committee Meeting Agenda
Monday, November 24, 2025

Present at the meeting: *Sandra Diodonet, Nelyda Perez, Colleen Butler, Van Cathcart, Tami Crader, Rosa Diaz, Dan Dooley, Matt Eagleburger, Nathan Fisher, Chuck Ford, Vanessa Jones, Carol Kelly, Peter Koza, Ted Loeffler, Robert Mungo, Lee Nittel, Robert Mungo, Kristin O'Neil, Andrea Romano, Carleena Supp, Michelle Velez-Jonte, and Judy Rattner.*

- **Welcome** – Dr. Sandra Diodonet - Chairperson
Sandra asked that those in attendance share personal and professional gratitude reflections on what they are thankful for, with several members expressing gratitude for their families, professional networks, mentors, and supportive colleagues and boards of education. The discussion highlighted the importance of community support and the challenges faced in educational settings, particularly in high-need districts. Those in attendance highlighted the quality of their students. Emphasis was placed on the appreciation for opportunities and the chance to give back, emphasizing the importance of community support.
- **Welcome on Behalf of the Officers** – Nelyda Perez, NJASA Immediate Past President
Nelyda welcomed everyone to the meeting on behalf of the officers and wished them all a Happy Thanksgiving.
- **NJASA Update** – Judy Rattner, NJASA Associate Executive Director
Judy announced updates, including Dr. Ray Gonzalez of Westfield being named New Jersey Superintendent of the Year and the inclusion of legal publications in membership benefits starting January. She announced that registration for Techspo was open and that the deadline for the RFP for the Women's conference in March is Monday, December 1.
- **Legislative Update** – Judy Rattner, NJASA Associate Executive Director
Judy shared legislative efforts to streamline certifications, address transition student impacts on graduation rates, and a pension bill affecting those returning to work and their pension tier, as well as the governor's veto of a bill that would have increased district costs due to the inclusion of coaching and advisor stipends in pensions.
Dan provided an update on a bill regarding therapy animals in schools, which passed the Senate unanimously and is now moving to the Health Committee for a vote on December 8th. He explained that the program aims to set up regional funds for grants to implement therapy animal programs in schools over the next two years, with plans to evaluate its effectiveness for potential statewide implementation. Dan also shared success stories from Absecon, including the use of therapy dogs and a new therapy farm program involving goats, sheep, and cows, funded by external partners like Merck. He emphasized the program's benefits for students with special needs and its positive impact on literacy scores and school culture.

- **ALAS Report** – Michelle Velez-Jonte
Michelle reported on the New Jersey Alliance of Black School Administrators' conference, which raised \$2,260 for student scholarships, and mentioned plans for a mixer and increased scholarship funding.
- **Black Superintendents Report** – Dr. Frederick Williams
Frederick provided updates on the Alliance of Black Superintendents, noting their focus on supporting Black children and administrators, and mentioned plans for a future conference, though details were pending.
- **Topics/Books Currently of Interest**

What You Leave Behind
5 to 21
The Running Ground
The Berry Pickers
Equity Visits

The 6 Thinking Hats
The Book of Awakening
The Fifth Season
The Anxious Generation

- **Activity**– Dr. Sandra Diodonet
Sandra then led a discussion on the challenges facing public schools in New Jersey, dividing the group into breakout sections to address specific issues and answer three key questions: identifying urgent challenges, ensuring problem-solving doesn't become siloed, and determining where to invest efforts for maximum student impact.
School District Challenges and Solutions
The group discussed various challenges facing school districts, including poverty, funding shortages, and the impact of AI in education. They shared experiences from different districts, highlighting how socioeconomic factors and demographic changes are affecting student achievement and school resources. The discussion also touched on board dynamics, curriculum development, and mental health issues in schools.
- **Upcoming Meetings**
 - **Tuesday – 2/24 – Committee Meeting – 9 :30 - 11:00**
 - **Monday – 5/4 – Committee Meeting – 9:30 – 11:00**
- **Final Thoughts/Concerns**
The meeting concluded with everyone wishing each other a wonderful Thanksgiving holiday.

“One Vision – Our Voice”

The mission of the New Jersey Association of School Administrators, the unifying professional association of school leaders, is to ensure a superior statewide system of education by influencing and effecting educational policy, regulations and legislation; and by maximizing the capacity and effectiveness of school leaders through professional development programs and support services.