



2011 POLITICAL ACTION PROJECT

During the NEW Leadership™ New Jersey Summer Institute, you will be divided into small groups of about five people to work on the political action project. The action project is a role playing exercise that will require you to research the topic and work with your group to prepare a presentation for the last day of the program. Each person in the group must participate in the presentation on Tuesday.

The topic for this year is **Education Reform**, with a focus on the issues of performance based pay and tenure reform for teachers. For this exercise, each group will be assigned a particular position on the issue. You may be assigned to a group that takes a position or approach that you would not take in “real life.” *This is a learning exercise!* It is important, especially in politics, to try to understand the perspectives and strategies of your opposition.

This is a role-playing exercise. Each of you will select the identity of an individual who has a stake in this issue. Think about the following questions: ***Who are you? Who do you represent? What is your stake? Why will decision makers care about your opinion?***

The action project will involve several skill-building aspects:

1. Working in a group across differences
2. Researching the issue
3. Identifying constituencies, coalition partners, opponents and allies
4. Crafting a message to articulate your position
5. Preparing an issue brief or press release
6. Making a presentation to encourage support for your position

Action project schedule:

- Saturday morning, June 11: Receive your group assignment.
- Sunday morning June 12: Meet with your group to build consensus on your position, the message you want to convey, and begin developing your strategy. Choose a spokesperson to ask questions of the panel.
- Sunday afternoon, June 12: You will hear from leaders in education policy and have time to research the issue. Work in groups to identify your goals; organizational considerations, constituents, allies and opponents; targets and tactics.
- Monday evening, June 13: Create materials for your presentation.
- Tuesday morning, June 14: Make a presentation in the form of a mock legislative hearing or a press conference, where your group argues on behalf of your position.

As you proceed with this exercise, please keep the following in mind:

People are likely to be articulating arguments and using research that they don't necessarily support or believe. *Although you may disagree with the opinion expressed, please try to show respect for the individual.*

In "real life," advocacy groups are working toward achieving their goals, but also developing the skills of their members. How will your group build the skills and experience of the participants? Everyone has different skills and talents, and all are valuable contributions to the organizing process. It is good to play to people's strengths, but equally good to support people in trying something new or taking risks.

Does the group's public presentation reflect the values promoted by your action plan? Do the roles played, the language and presentation all give a message that fits the group's goals (whether issue group, legislators or other)? *Public presentations should match agreed-upon group values. However, beware of relying on stereotypes.*

Work hard to produce an excellent action plan. However, remember that in this short time, no one expects you to achieve perfection.

Be creative! Use your imagination! Have fun!
Remain as realistic as possible, but be creative, daring, and risk-taking!

2011 Action Project Topic: Education Reform

President Barack Obama has made education a national priority. Many people believe the education system in the United States is broken. Education reform is currently being discussed at every level of government. With the election of Governor Chris Christie, education reform has become a high profile issue in New Jersey. Governor Christie has made tenure reform and merit pay for teachers a high priority for his administration. Governor Christie is a proponent of two important aspects of education reform: merit pay and tenure reform. Both tenure reform and merit pay will be based on improved teacher evaluation.

Merit pay has been proposed as a way to improve teacher performance. Currently, teachers' salaries are generally based on their level of education (whether or not they have a Master's Degree or the number of credits towards a Master's) and the length of time they have worked in the school district. A merit pay system would create a performance-based incentive plan that would reward excellent teachers by increasing the amount they are paid. There are many different suggestions for implementing a merit pay system, addressing eligibility requirements, levels of compensation, and assessing teacher merit.

Governor Christie supports a merit pay system that is based on new teacher evaluations and that focuses on children's test scores as one primary teacher achievement metric. The New Jersey School Boards Association and the Newark Teacher's Union have both come out with public statements in support of the Governor's proposals.

Because school systems are locally run, merit-based pay has not been implemented on a national scale. It has received a boost from President Obama's proposed education reforms, which embrace the idea of merit pay as a useful tool, and it has been tried in many different forms at the state and local levels. Whether these programs have been a success is a source of significant controversy in the literature, with studies to support both sides of the argument, frequently based on evaluation of the same programs. There are individuals and organizations pushing for a performance-based system to be incorporated into the structure of teacher salaries, and many pushing against it.

The New Jersey Education Association (NJEA), the union representing over 200,000 educators in the state, adamantly opposes adopting any form of performance-based pay in New Jersey. The NJEA and others argue that teacher "merit" is too difficult to determine, and compensating teachers on that basis is counterproductive. The NJEA also warns against evaluating teachers based on test scores, which it believes may encourage 'teaching to the test'.

Changes in the tenure system are another potential element of education reform. Currently, teachers enter into a contract with their school district that provides the details of the salary and tenure policy. In New Jersey, most teachers are eligible for tenure after three years in the district. Some argue that more effective teachers are the ones with experience, so teachers who have many years of experience should have the confidence to eliminate the 'safety net' of tenure. Others are concerned that since more experienced teachers have higher salaries, if tenure is restructured or eliminated, economic constraints could result in more experienced teachers being let go.

Parents are involved on both sides of the issue. Both sides want an effective and efficient education system, but the way to accomplish that is highly contested. The NJEA is staunchly against the Governor's plan for tenure reform, but has published its own suggestions. The NJEA and some parents want to reform the tenure system that exists whereas other stakeholders, including those allied with Governor Christie, are seeking a complete overhaul of New Jersey's tenure process.

In 2010 Governor Christie established a nine-person Education Effectiveness Task Force (EETF) to examine the potential for education reform in New Jersey and propose a way to move forward. On March 1, 2011, the EETF released a 44 page interim report on the need to reform New Jersey's teacher evaluation system. The report mostly conformed to Governor Christie's arguments, and stated that at least 50% of teacher evaluations should be based on test scores with the other 50% being allotted to classroom evaluations and subjective measures. Anticipating the controversy over merit pay and tenure and their connection to student test scores, the report suggests that school districts choose their own weighting system for evaluations. (However, it recommends that test scores comprise 70-90% of the evaluation metric.) The report also noted the need to increase teacher training and estimated that reforms would cost about \$10 million.

Governor Christie argues that teachers should want to have their performance assessed and rewarded. His system would showcase effective teaching methods and bonuses would be tied to performance. In addition, increased potential monetary rewards would provide an incentive to attract individuals who would otherwise not go into teaching and encourage current teachers to stay.

Critics of merit pay and tenure reform question whether these improvement proposals are sufficient to address the broader problems with New Jersey's education system. As important as teachers can be, it is clear that parental involvement, student aptitude, socioeconomic environment, and other factors are also major determinants of student progress. Without addressing these issues as well as more equitable school funding policies, merit pay could be only a drop in the bucket.

Action project final presentations – Tuesday June 14, 9:30 am

Each student will each be assigned to one of the following groups. Presentations on Tuesday morning will take two forms.

Groups 1, 2 & 3 will participate in a hearing before the New Jersey Legislature’s Joint Committee on the Public Schools.

Group 1 students will serve as members of the New Jersey Legislature’s Joint Committee on Public Schools. The committee chair will open the hearing. Groups 2 and 3 are coalitions of organizations on each side of the education reform issue. They will have 10 minutes each to present their testimony. The legislators will have 10 minutes to ask a set of prepared questions of both groups.

Groups 4 and 5 will hold press conferences advocating their positions on this issue.

Each group will issue a press release and will have 10 minutes to present their statement at the press conference. Two students from each group (except group 1) will serve as press and ask questions during the press conference. The students who are serving as members of the press are not expected to present testimony or speak on behalf of their group at the press conference. However, they should help their group research and prepare for the presentation.

All members of the group are expected to participate in the presentation Tuesday morning.

NEW LEADERSHIP, No. 929
STATE of NEW JERSEY
20th SESSION

Sponsor: Senator Theresa Ruiz (D-29)

Co-sponsor: pending

BE IT ENACTED by the Senate and general Assembly of the State of New Jersey:

A multi-measure statewide evaluation system shall be implemented by the Department of Education by the 2012-2013 school year that shall require observation and evaluation of all educators at least twice per year with summative evaluation at the end of the school year using the rating categories of highly effective, effective, partially effective, or ineffective. These ratings are new and are not currently in use in New Jersey schools. These ratings are intended to be the basis for two proposed reforms: teacher tenure and merit pay.

- 1. Tenure attainment** with recommendations for tenure eligibility only after four years of service and after ratings of “effective” or “highly effective” have been received for the preceding three years with guidelines for lesser ratings to be determined during implementation.
 - a.** Tenure status is lost after an evaluation of “ineffective” is conferred for a full year or after an evaluation of “partially ineffective” is conferred for two consecutive years.
 - b.** Laws governing reductions in the workforce will be reformed and “Last In, First Out” policy will be changed so that any layoffs are based on effectiveness – not seniority – and determined by an evaluation system established by the Commissioner of Education.

- 2. Teacher compensation will be reformed and merit pay will be instituted State-wide.** Teacher compensation will focus on an educator’s demonstrated effectiveness in advancing student learning. Evaluations will be adjusted based on whether the educator is teaching in a failing school or in a subject area that has been identified as a difficult-to-staff subject area.
 - a.** Teachers should be evaluated as follows:
 - i. 50% (or more) student performance on standardized tests¹
 - ii. 50% teacher practice²
 - b.** Teachers will be paid according to their evaluations with bonuses given to high performing teachers.

¹ According to the March 1 interim report released by the Governor’s Education Effective Task Force, at least 50% of teacher evaluations for merit pay should be based on student test scores. Schools can choose to base a larger percentage of student achievement evaluations on test scores. 50% is the minimum suggested.

² The meaning of “teacher practice” should be determined by the school district. Teacher practice may include classroom techniques, use of technology and implementation of the learning program required by the school district.

Group 1 Assignment

You are members of the New Jersey Legislature's Joint Committee on Public Schools and are holding a hearing on Bill 929. Your responsibility as a committee member is to arrive prepared with thoughtful questions for each group. At the end of the hearing you will cast a vote that you believe best serves the public interest. You should be able to articulate the reasons for your vote.

Members of the Committee:

Assemblywoman Joan M. Voss (co-chair) (D-38)

Senator Diane B. Allen (R-7)

Assemblyman Scott T. Rumana (R-40)

Assemblywoman Mila M. Jasey (D-27)

Senator Donald Norcross (D-5)

Senator Theresa Ruiz (D-29)

Assemblyman Brian Rumpf (R-9)

To prepare for this hearing, each legislator should familiarize herself with the issues and begin to identify a position. In real life, this person would have staff to research these issues. However, for this exercise you will conduct your own research. You should craft pointed questions to elicit useful information about the issue. **These should be written out prior to the hearing so that you can use them during the testimony.**

Hint: Remember that each group member will be role-playing a specific real-life committee member. Think about how you would (as that person) position yourself on these issues and what kinds of arguments you would use to support or oppose the arguments presented. Try to find out where your real life committee member stands on the issues. Think about how the district they represent might impact their opinion of Bill 929.

These groups will be testifying before the committee:

Group 2 represents organizations that are in favor of Bill 929. The New Jersey School Boards Association and the Newark Teachers Union both support the tenants of Bill 929.

This group may argue: Merit pay rewards teacher performance and helps retain quality staff.

Group 3 is a coalition of organizations that are opponents of merit pay and tenure reform. The NJEA is the biggest opponent and will be prepared to fight hard for Bill 929 not to be passed.

This group may argue: Merit pay might make sense in the business world, but students are human beings not profit margins.

As you prepare for this meeting, consider the following:

- What are the major goals of the Governor's education reform proposal? Does including a change in performance pay or tenure help to meet those goals?
- What are the costs and benefits of proposed changes to performance pay and tenure?
- Are the conditions of the proposed education reform in line with your views as a legislator?

- Who do you represent, and how many of these people are stakeholders in the debate over public schools?
- How would you characterize the schools in your district? Are they performing poorly or doing well?
- Do you believe that Bill 929 is in line with the views of a majority of your district? What is best for your constituents as a whole?
- What role do you think the state government ought to play in setting education policy and addressing change within the education system?

Group 2 Assignment

You are members of a coalition of organizations that support adopting merit pay and reorganizing tenure in New Jersey. You will testify at a public hearing in support of Bill 929. Your group includes the New Jersey School Boards Association (NJSBA) and Newark Teachers Union. **You should put together a policy brief to give to the members of the New Jersey Legislature's Joint Committee on Public Schools immediately prior to the public hearing.**

Select two students from your group to serve as members of the press. They will ask questions of group 4 during their press conference. These students are not expected to speak during the policy brief. However, they should help their group research and prepare for the hearing.

You believe that by implementing the reforms proposed by the Education Effectiveness Task Force, Governor Christie and Bill 929, New Jersey's troubled education system will begin to experience broad-based improvements.

In countering opponents, your group points to several arguments:

- The current system is outdated and does not allow for flexibility. Performance pay and tenure reform are important tenants of the education system that have gone unmodified for too long.
- Monetary incentives are continually recognized as effective ways of encouraging productivity and compliance. Implementing performance pay in New Jersey will allow good and teachers to be additionally compensated when certain standards are exceeded.
- The ability for a teacher to stay in their job after their productivity has waned must be removed. We have a duty to make sure that all students are provided with the best available teacher, not simply the one that has been around the longest.

The New Jersey School Boards Association (NJSBA) and Newark Teachers Union have been some of the most vocal supporters of the tenants of Bill 929. However, national teachers associations and other education reform groups also have a stake in this debate. Consider groups that are potential allies and try to use their statements to support your position.

Opposing Viewpoint:

Group 3 is composed of a coalition of organizations including the New Jersey Education Association (NJEA). Group 3 warns against 'teaching to the test' and does not support Bill 929.

Questions to consider:

- What individuals and interests do you represent?
What kind of power and influence do you have? Who are your allies?
- What are the issues that unify members of your coalition; where might you be divided?
- How will you get your message across, and what role will each group member play?
- Who is your audience? What arguments will be most persuasive to your target audience?
- What are your opponents' strongest arguments, and how do you counter them?
- What resources, research materials, and information do you need to make your case?
- How have similar reforms worked in other states?

Group 3 Assignment

You are members of organizations that are opponents of merit pay and tenure reform. You will testify at a public hearing in opposition to Bill 929. Your main power base lies with the New Jersey Education Association (NJEA). The NJEA is one of the most powerful lobbying groups in New Jersey, with membership of over 200,000 people. **You should put together a policy brief to give to the members of the New Jersey Legislature's Joint Committee on Public Schools immediately prior to the public hearing at which you are testifying.**

Select two students from your group to serve as members of the press. They will ask questions of group 5 during their press conference. These students are not expected to speak during the policy brief. However, they should help their group research and prepare for the hearing.

The NJEA is in opposition to three key components of the Governor's plan: merit pay, tenure reform and teacher evaluations based primarily on test scores.

In countering opponents, your group points to several arguments:

- Merit pay is the wrong solution for teachers. Students are subjective human beings and their individual progress cannot be judged by objective metrics. No merit pay scale will be fair to teachers. Merit pay has been unsuccessfully implemented in other states.
- A complete overhaul of the tenure system isn't necessary. Governor Christie rejected the NJEA's proposed tenure reform plan which is the better solution. A complete overhaul of tenure would leave teachers with no job security and increased stress.
- The Education Effectiveness Task Force recommends that 70% - 90% of teacher evaluations be based on test scores. This encourages 'teaching to the test' rather than learning and may penalize some schools more than others.

NJEA opposes all aspects of Bill 929. Other coalitional partners may oppose on some aspects of the bill. Consider additional groups that have a stake in education reform and that agree - at least partially - with the NJEA. Try to use the statements of your allies to support your position.

Opposing Viewpoint:

Group 2 is composed of a coalition of organizations concerned about the fate of New Jersey education system. Their group is led by the Governor. They believe that the proposed legislation is for the betterment of the children.

Questions to consider:

- What individuals and interests do you represent?
- What kind of power and influence do you have? Who are your allies?
- What are the issues that unify members of your coalition; where might you be divided?
- How will you get your message across, and what role will each group member play?
- Who is your audience? What arguments will be most persuasive to your target audience?
- What are your opponents' strongest arguments, and how do you counter them?
- What resources, research materials, and information do you need to make your case?
- How have similar reforms worked in other states?

Group 4 Assignment

Your group is a coalition of citizens who support Bill 929. You are an ally of Group 2. Members of your group may include parents, teachers, school board members and other elected officials who support of merit pay, tenure reform and evaluations based on test scores. **Your task is to prepare a press release and hold a press conference to encourage public support for your position.**

Select two students from your group to serve as members of the press. They will ask questions of group 5 during their press conference. These students are not expected to speak during the policy brief. However, they should help their group research and prepare for the hearing.

You may use these arguments to help persuade the public that the policies supported by your group are the best policy options to improve New Jersey's educational system:

- The proposed legislation provides an updated framework from which education policy can evolve. Tenure has gone unmodified for too long. Better guidelines for teacher evaluation, including evaluations based on test scores, are needed.
- Incentives, especially monetary rewards, are continually recognized as effective ways of encouraging productivity and compliance. Implementing performance pay in New Jersey will allow quality teachers to be recognized and additionally compensated when certain standards are exceeded. Merit pay has worked in other states.
- The ability of teachers to stay in their job after their productivity has waned must be removed. The current tenure system gives teachers a job for life. The State of New Jersey has a duty to make sure that all students are provided with the best available teacher, not simply the one that has been around the longest.

Opposing Viewpoint:

Group 5 is comprised of citizens such as parents and teachers who are concerned about the fate of New Jersey education system. Group 5 does not support merit pay or the tenure reforms proposed by Governor Christie and the Education Effectiveness Task Force. Group 5 is allied with the NJEA and the rest of Group 3.

Questions to consider:

- What individuals and interests do you represent?
- Who are your allies, and who or what groups might be effective spokespersons for your message?
- How can you come together as citizens to increase your collective power to advocate for your issue position?
- How will you get your message across, and what role will each group member play?
- Why will the media want to show up to your press conference?
- Who is your audience? What arguments will be most persuasive to your target audience?
- What are your opponent's strongest arguments, and how do you counter them?
- How might you alter your media statement for different types of media? (For example: social media).

Group 5 Assignment

Your group is a coalition of citizens who oppose Bill 929. You are an ally of Group 3. Members of your group may include parents, teachers, school board members and other elected officials who are against reforms including merit pay and tenure reform. **Your task is to prepare a press release and present a press conference to encourage public support for your position.**

Select two students from your group to serve as members of the press. They will ask questions of group 4 during their press conference. These students are not expected to speak during the policy brief. However, they should help their group research and prepare for the hearing.

You may use these arguments to help persuade the public that the policies supported by your group are the best policy options to improve New Jersey's education system:

- Merit pay is the wrong solution for teachers. Teachers face different challenges depending on their specific class and it is too difficult to fairly determine what types of efforts qualify as deserving of a bonus. Other states, such as Florida, have had difficulty implementing merit pay.
- A complete overhaul of the tenure system isn't necessary. NJEA's proposed tenure reform plan is a better solution. The current tenure system works and just needs some tweaks to function more effectively. It does not provide a job for life.
- Evaluations based on test scores encourage 'teaching to the test' rather than actual learning. Standards based almost solely on testing also unduly penalize certain teachers. Socio-economic status, including parental education, at-home support and neighborhood factors are known to impact school performance. Basing evaluations on test scores unfairly faults brave teachers who work in challenging neighborhoods or with disadvantaged populations.

Opposing Viewpoint:

Group 4 is comprised of citizens such as parents and school board members concerned about the fate of New Jersey education system. Group 4 supports Bill 929, merit pay and tenure reform. Group 4 is allied with Group 2.

Questions to consider:

- What individuals and interests do you represent?
- Who are your allies, and who or what groups might be effective spokespersons for your message?
- How can you come together as citizens to increase your collective power to advocate for your issue position?
- How will you get your message across, and what role will each group member play?
- Why will the media want to show up to your press conference?
- Who is your audience? What arguments will be most persuasive to your target audience?
- What are your opponent's strongest arguments, and how do you counter them? How might you alter your media statement for different types of media? (For example: social media).