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Submitted by:

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Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding the Superintendent Salary Cap Regulation since I am not able to attend the February 9th hearing to address you in person. I also wish to specifically recognize the leadership of Senator Ruiz and Sarlo, as well as Asm. Jasey and Diegnan for sponsoring legislation that recognizes the authority to compensate the Superintendent rest with the local Boards of Education.

We have had time to evaluate the impact of the regulation adopted by the Commissioner of Education in 2011 capping a superintendent’s salary. In my opinion, it has been the single most damaging decision made by the State of New Jersey which impacts public education. The instability in school district leadership create statewide by the salary caps threatens the strength of public education in this State. As my testimony will illustrate the educational leadership necessary to sustain long-term educational success of a school district rests with the relationship created between the Board of Education and the Superintendent. For reference, attached to this testimony is a copy of the Iowa Association of School Boards Lighthouse Study, which provides supporting documentation. My hope is that by establishing testimony, which clearly articulates this relationship, committee members will understand why they need to support this legislation.

The Ridgewood Public School System has earned a long-standing reputation of educational success. The mission statement speaks to our commitment to a “tradition of excellence and innovation” as we seek to maximize a student’s potential to become a life long learner. Our mission was recently reaffirmed during a strategic planning process with community stakeholders. But having a mission may as well be like having a dream if you cannot put it into practice. To close the gap between mission and reality takes leadership. Ridgewood works to achieve our mission every day and by every measure of accountability has demonstrated long-term success. I believe this is because we have also been fortunate enough to benefit from years of strong, consistent and experienced educational leadership which values instructional decision-making. Instructional decision-making happens at every level of a school district. Its evidence is seen daily in our classrooms, by our building Principals and supervisors, and by our superintendent. However, good instructional decision-making takes work.

The structure created, for example, by the State Academic Standards is interpreted locally through written curriculum and then again by the classroom teacher’s lesson plan. It is the innovation and creativity at the local level, which brings a rich and rewarding classroom experience to our students. Ridgewood has 6 Elementary Schools, 2 Middle Schools and a High School. We have 826 staff members (550 Teachers, 26 Administrators, 200 Special Education Aides, 50 secretaries)

How do we make sure all students have access to the same educational opportunity?

I quote from, Leading for Instructional Improvement, by Steven Fink and Anneke Markholt, “It take expertise to make expertise”. It is the role of school district leaders to develop and cultivate the expertise necessary for high-quality teaching. This deeper level of understanding brings a greater level of problem solving. Leadership at the classroom level requires a certain level of expertise but leadership at the district level requires expertise in multiple disciplines.

The superintendent, as the educational leader of the school district, with the shared vision of the Board of Education is an equation for student success. The Board of Education provides accountability for local constituents. A primary responsibility of the Board is to hire and annually evaluate the Superintendent. The give and take of this relationship is critical to local success as goals are established for the district, and budgets developed. The salary caps severely limits a board’s ability to attract and retain quality leadership. The current regulation sets an upper benchmark for a salary without considering cost of living adjustments, rising healthcare costs, and experience levels of candidates? Boards of Education are sensitive to balancing a quality educational with the local tax rate. We know the value our community places on education and the quality they have come to expect. Our Superintendent will tell you we expect him to perform miracles these days with dwindling state aid, tax levy caps and ever increasing state mandates. The residents of Ridgewood have not changed their expectations and neither has the Board of Education. Through the budgeting process Board’s prioritize and allocate resources accordingly to meet the educational goals of the school district. There are sufficient State budgetary parameters already in place to control spending. We need the flexibility to make decisions locally within existing parameters in the best interest of our communities.

A few key points which highlight why capping a superintendents salary is unnecessary:

·         A Redundant Cap: The cap on superintendent salaries is unnecessary due to the existence of the 2 percent property tax levy cap on the operating budget and the administrative spending growth cap. If boards are able to create budgets within these existing caps while providing a thorough and efficient education, what they pay the superintendent should be a local decision.

·         Executive County Superintendent Oversight: Through regulation and statute the Executive County Superintendent reviews all superintendent employment contracts, providing sufficient controls and safe guards on superintendent compensation.

·         Stability of Leadership: The cap has had a negative impact on the quality, stability and continuity of educational leadership: The superintendent salary cap has caused high turnover rates as superintendents leave to pursue opportunities in neighboring Pennsylvania , Connecticut, and New York; states that do not cap superintendent salaries. It has also increased the use of interim superintendents, and caused a decline in the experience level of candidates for superintendent positions. Administrative personnel do not seek advancement to the superintendent seat as in the past.

·         Costly: Interims superintendents cost the State more money: The use of interim superintendents, as a result of the cap, has been a net negative for State finances as they not only earn a salary from the district but also draw on the already overburdened State pension system.

·         Flexibility of Local Control: The vast majority of school boards in New Jersey are democratically-elected. They are entrusted by the taxpayers to spend tax dollars judiciously. If they fail to do so, the voters are empowered to replace them through the electoral process. This decision is best left at the local level.

IASB Lighthouse Research Report: <http://www.ia-sb.org/WorkArea/showcontent.aspx?id=570>