



# Public Schools of Plainfield New Jersey

## Office of Community Engagement

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## **PLAINFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS SUPERINTENDENT DR. DIANA MITCHELL TESTIFIED BEFORE THE NJ JOINT COMMITTEE ON THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Plainfield, NJ. – Dr. Diana Mitchell, Superintendent of Plainfield Public Schools, addressed the New Jersey Joint Committee on the Public Schools, co-chaired by Senator Ronald L. Rice and Assemblywoman Mila M. Jasey at the monthly meeting held virtually on Tuesday, October 19, 2021.

The committee heard testimony from educational and community leaders on how New Jersey may successfully reopen schools, address learning loss and mitigate the social emotional impact of the pandemic on students and teachers in New Jersey.

Several concerns were shared by Superintendent Mitchell, including the increased number of new student registrations, teacher vacancies, transportation staffing challenges, and other concerns.

Dr. Mitchell said in her thirty years in education, “This is perhaps one of the most challenging years, due to the pandemic.”

“Over the past three months, we have registered 818 new students. This is unprecedented, as opposed to previous years. We used to have 300, 400, 500 maybe up to 700 students register throughout the year, but we have never registered 818 students in three months - from July 1<sup>st</sup> to October 15<sup>th</sup> - of those registered, 532 qualify for bilingual education and 286 are English speakers.

“This has affected our facilities; we are bursting at the seams. Some of our classrooms have 28 plus students. We have a teacher shortage, bilingual teachers are nonexistent, and we cannot find any. Employee morale is sinking, due to COVID protocols and the added stress of additional students. And social distancing is almost impossible.”

“There’s an added stress on our food services program and also, we’ve had to purchase additional curriculum and instruction materials in order to accommodate the additional students.”

Dr. Mitchell said transportation is also a concern, “On a good year I have 37 buses operating. Today, I have 16 buses. Some students are getting home at five and 6 o’clock in the evening, due to this transportation concern, and we are talking about students in kindergarten and first grade. And some students are just not being transported.”

Sarah Bilotti, Superintendent of North Warren Hills Regional High School District located in Warren County, and Tony Trongone, Chief Education Officer for the Millville Public Schools in Cumberland County, and an officer of the New Jersey Association of School Administrators (NJASA) as president-elect, joined Dr. Mitchell in her testimony. Both superintendents spoke about the added budgetary stress the pandemic has caused their districts and the need to provide added services for their students.

Following Dr. Mitchell’s testimony, Assemblywoman Jasey said, “Clearly, we are going to have to figure out some way to support districts like Plainfield. Together we must, come up with a way support these districts; it is an unattainable situation.”

Jasey added, “This is a monumental issue and it’s not going to go away tomorrow or next month. I think we are going to be feeling the effects of the pandemic long after the health issues are resolved. There are things we can do, perhaps we can use this as an opportunity to build more into our schools to create resources because our students are our future and if we don’t invest in our kids, then there will not be a future for them. I am overwhelmed with all the information but grateful for it.”

Senator Rice said the committee would review all the recommendations expressed by the Districts for further discussions.

To accommodate some of the additional new students to Plainfield, the District has redistributed adult offices at 209 Berkman Street, the Old Lincoln School, to allow for the opening of a “Port of Entry Program” for students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE). Some SLIFE English language learners have experienced interrupted education due to war, civil unrest, migration, or other factors, some have never had the opportunity to participate in any type of schooling before entering school in the United States. The District is also exploring the possibility of trailers to house students on campuses where class sizes continue to increase.

A view a recording of the proceeding, please [click here](#):

Background: (Source NJ Legislature website)

The Joint Committee on the Public Schools provides an ongoing study of the system of free public schools; it's financing, administration and operations, as well as to make recommendations for legislative action. For more information visit: <https://www.njleg.state.nj.us/joint/jps.asp>

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