



## State of New Jersey

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
PO Box 500  
TRENTON, NJ 08625-0500

CHRIS CHRISTIE  
Governor

KIM GUADAGNO  
Lt. Governor

DAVID C. HESPE  
Commissioner

March 12, 2015

Ms. Nancy Evans Bennett, Executive Co-Chair  
Ms. Lola Szobota, Executive Co-Chair  
New Jersey Science Convention  
5 Cypress Circle  
Morristown, New Jersey 07960

Dear Ms. Bennett and Ms. Szobota:

The New Jersey Department of Education is in receipt of your letter submitted on behalf of the New Jersey Science Education Leadership Association (NJSELA) and the New Jersey Science Teachers Association (NJSTA) joint sponsors of the New Jersey Science Convention, requesting a waiver of the prohibition on overnight travel in order to facilitate the hosting of the Thirty-ninth Annual New Jersey Science Convention planned for October 13 and 14, 2015 in Princeton, New Jersey.

As you are aware, *N.J.S.A.* 18A:11-12 requires that boards of education must ensure that all school district travel expenditures are "in compliance with state travel payment guidelines as established by the Department of the Treasury..." State Department of the Treasury *OMB Circular 12-14* Section X.B specifically prohibits reimbursement of in-State overnight travel. However, the circular authorizes the Commissioner of Education "to grant waivers for overnight travel for school board members and school district employees to attend in-State conferences pursuant to guidelines issued by the Department of Education," *OMB Circular 12-14 Section I.B.8.*

The Department's regulations at *N.J.A.C.* 6A:23A-7.11(c) authorize the Commissioner to grant overnight in-State travel waivers only in extremely limited circumstances, where the sponsoring organization can demonstrate that the conference is broad and multidisciplinary in scope, comprised of content-rich educational programming with important professional development opportunities and/or required training. In addition, the sponsoring organization must demonstrate that the conference's content, structure, scheduling and anticipated attendance necessitate that it be held on multiple consecutive days with overnight lodging. The travel regulations are posted on the Department's web site at: <http://www.state.nj.us/education/code/current/title6a/chap23a.pdf>.

Pursuant to the regulations, waivers will not be granted for reimbursement of lodging prior to the first day of the event or after check-out time of the last day of the event. Moreover, waivers will be considered only where the sponsoring organization can demonstrate that the conference is broad and comprised of content-rich educational programming with important

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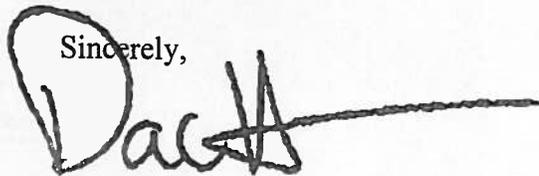
professional development opportunities and/or required training. In addition, the sponsoring organization must demonstrate that the conference's content, structure, scheduling and anticipated attendance necessitate that it be held on multiple consecutive days with overnight lodging.

After carefully reviewing your submission, the Department finds that the Thirty-ninth Annual New Jersey Science Convention planned for October 13 and 14, 2015 in Princeton, New Jersey meets the criteria of the regulations. Specifically, I note that based upon the content of your submission, the conference promises to provide two days of content-rich professional development programming to Science educators. I also note that the program schedule for each of the two days offers multiple concurrent workshops from eight A.M. through early evening. For these reasons, the waiver request is granted. As a result of this waiver, school districts and charter schools will be able to reimburse attendees for overnight lodging on October 13, 2015 provided that the remaining conditions delineated in this letter are met. Reimbursement for registration fees, mileage and meals, subject to the limitations and conditions set forth in *OMB Circular 12-14* and *OMB Circular 11-09* may also be permissible. School districts and charter schools should ensure that they approve attendance only of board members, trustees, and employees whose duties are related to the purposes of the conference or who are required to attend to meet continuing education requirements as a condition of continued employment.

Moreover, please be advised that the waiver of the prohibition for reimbursement for overnight lodging covers only those attendees whose home to event commute exceeds 50 miles. In other words, only those individuals whose one-way commute to the Thirty-ninth Annual New Jersey Science Convention planned for October 13 and 14, 2015 exceeds 50 miles may obtain reimbursement from their school district or charter school for overnight lodging for October 13, 2015.

Finally, I want to express my appreciation of the NJSELA and the NJSTA effort to provide professional development opportunities to those who strive to provide quality public education in New Jersey. My best wishes for a successful conference.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D. Hespe", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

David C. Hespe  
Commissioner

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c: Senior Staff

Executive County Superintendents

DOE evaluation under N.J.A.C. 6A:23A-7.11 (c)

Waivers will be granted in only extremely limited circumstances, where the sponsoring organization can demonstrate that the conference is broad and multidisciplinary in scope, incorporates content offerings from numerous specialty areas, and includes important professional development opportunities and/or required training.

- 1) What evidence is presented by the sponsor to support that the conference is broad and multidisciplinary in scope?

FROM THE ORGANIZATION'S WEB SITE:

The New Jersey Science Convention is the self-described "best professional development opportunity in the Mid-Atlantic area for science educators, including teachers, administrators, and student interns." This two-day convention allows more teachers to attend at least one day of activities and is located in a central location to facilitate attendance. Each day has up to seventy-five sessions of interest to all levels and disciplines in science, as well as over fifty-five vendors of science books, supplies, and equipment.

- 2) What specialty areas has the sponsor incorporated into the conference?

The group is still assembling the program for 2015. The sponsor provided the 2014 convention program booklet for our review. The cover-letter suggests that the 2014 book is a representation of the planned scope of offerings for the 2015 convention. The 2015 keynote speaker according to the website (as of Feb. 20, 2015) Dr. David Robinson, New Jersey State Climatologist.

- 3) Has the sponsor demonstrated that the conference offers professional development opportunities and/or required training?

Yes. The program chairpersons letter mentioned that the organization is a NJ DOE PD provider (#651) and attendees can obtain their 100 hour requirements by participating in the workshops offered.

- 4) Has the sponsor demonstrated that the conference's content, structure, scheduling and anticipated attendance necessitate that it be held on multiple consecutive days with overnight lodging?

Yes. The 2014 conference offered 150 workshops over two days providing multiple opportunities for PD in various Science based topics. Although located in central NJ, there are many traveling more than 50 miles to attend the conference. The attendance for 2014 was 950 attendees and the same audience total is expected for 2015.

5) Has the sponsor provided complete information as specified in code including:

The name and dates of the event?	Yes
Justification for the length of the conference and the necessity to hold events for each day beyond the first day of the conference?	Yes
Identification of all other conferences sponsored or co-sponsored by the organization (whether single or multi-day) in the previous year?	Yes
A description of the target audience by position title and/or educational certificate and endorsement?	Yes
The cost of registration?	Yes, The 2015 registration fees will be: \$175.00, two days \$295.00.
A detailed list and description of any activities to be charged to the participants by the sponsor separate from the registration fee?	Yes optional Banquet Tuesday evening, 10/13/15 is \$45.
A copy of agenda or program for the event?	Yes – 2014 as a template for 2015
A statement of purpose of the event?	Yes
A description of the training offered? (i.e. needed for certification for continued employment, required continuing education, or legal requirement).	Yes
Is the event an annual event? If so, has the sponsor provided the prior year's total attendance and the prior year's registration fee?	Yes. Yes, 2014 attendance was 950 professionals.

**Reviewer's Summary Statement:**

<http://www.njscienceconvention.org/>

The NJ Science convention promoted by the New Jersey Science Education Leadership Association (NJSELA) and the NJ Science Teachers Association (NJSTA) is a two day science convention that has gained national recognition as the best state-level science convention. The convention offers over 150 workshops and provides opportunities for PD to its attendees. The conference draws in about 1000 attendees from the Mid-Atlantic area, reaching out to NY, PA and DE, not just focused on NJ. A favorable waiver was granted for the 2012, 2013 & 2014 conferences.