



STATE OF NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

For Immediate Release

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Contact: [Michael Yaple](#)

(609) 376-3537

Two New Board Members Sworn into State Board of Education

Trenton, NJ – Two new members were sworn into the New Jersey State Board of Education at yesterday’s board meeting.

“I am pleased that Mary and Jeanette have been officially sworn into the State Board of Education, and I look forward to seeing them further our mission of uplifting our best-in-the-nation public schools and ensuring every child in New Jersey has the opportunity to thrive academically,” **said Governor Phil Murphy**. “Mary and Jeanette bring with them a wealth of experience in working to improve educational outcomes of young learners in our state. I am confident they will be invaluable to the Board.”

Brief bio information of the two members is below; additional information is available on the State Board’s [webpage](#).

Mary G. Bennett – Irvington, Essex County

Mary Bennett has worked as Educational Consultant/Adjunct Faculty for the Seton Hall University Academy for Urban Transformation, South Orange, since 2007. She has also worked as an Instructor and Education Mentor at Montclair State University since 2007.

She served as Executive Director of Project GRAD, Newark from 2001-2013; as Senior Fellow/Lead Facilitator at the National Center for Educational Alliances, Bronx Community College, from 1999-2002; and as principal, vice-principal, program director, and English language arts teacher in Newark Public Schools from 1973 to 1999.

She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from Douglass College, New Brunswick, and received her master’s in Curriculum Development from Rutgers University, New Brunswick. She is certified by the New Jersey Department of Education as school business administrator, assistant executive superintendent, principal, supervisor, and teacher. She also attended Seton Hall University for Administrative Credentialing.

Currently a resident of Irvington, she chaired the Newark Educational Services Board in 2016 to help implement the district’s return to local control; served as former board member of Our Children, Our Schools New Jersey in 2015; as co-coordinator with Alliance for Newark Public Schools since 2013; and as Children’s Advocate appointed by Superior Court of New Jersey, from 2003-2006.

Jeanette Peña – Union City, Hudson County

Jeanette Peña has worked since 2022 as Educational Director of Special Education and Organizational Accountability for the Union City Public Schools. Between 1998 and 2000, she served as a School Psychologist in the Jersey City School District, Paterson Public Schools, and Newark Public Schools.

She also has served as Adjunct Professor at Hudson County Community College from 1994-2000, and she previously worked as a youth counselor for the Safe Haven Program in Union City from 1993-1998, and as a social worker for St. Joseph’s Hospital in Paterson from 1992-1993.

She received a master’s in education-psychological studies at Seton Hall University, South Orange in 1994; a bachelor’s in psychology from Rutgers University, Newark, in 1992; and her Professional Diploma in School Psychology from New

Jersey City University in 1997. She has earned NJExcel Certificates of Eligibility for School Administrator and Principal through the Foundation for Educational Administration.

She is a member of the American Psychological Association and the National Association of School Psychologists. She has served as a trustee for Hudson County Community College since 2012 and for Union City Board of Education from 2003-2011, and as commissioner of the Union City Redevelopment Agency from 2001-2003.

Mary Bennett replaces Mary Elizabeth Gazi, and Jeanette Peña will fill the seat of Ernie Lepore, who resigned from the Board.

The New Jersey [State Board of Education](#) is a 13-member panel appointed by the Governor with the advice and consent of the State Senate. The State Board adopts the [administrative code](#), which are the regulations that detail how education law will be implemented. Regulations cover the supervision and governance of the state's local educational agencies, which include all public school districts, charter schools, and renaissance school projects that collectively serve nearly 1.4 million students. In addition, the State Board advises on educational policies proposed by the Commissioner and confirms Department of Education staff appointments made by the Commissioner.



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