

Executive View

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Spring Leadership Conference Showcases the Strength, Resilience, and Shared Purpose of New Jersey's Education Leaders

The 44th Annual NJASA/NJAPSA Spring Leadership Conference proved once again why this gathering remains one of the most important professional learning opportunities for New Jersey's school leaders.

Held May 13–15, 2026, at Caesars Atlantic City, the conference brought members together around the timely theme, “Leading, Thriving and Elevating Education in Changing Times.” Over the three days, attendees engaged in meaningful professional development, celebrated outstanding colleagues, connected with Allied Members, and renewed the professional relationships that help sustain effective leadership throughout the year.

The conference opened with a powerful general session featuring Jared Campbell, an award-winning singer-songwriter whose message blended music, humor, storytelling, and reflection. Jared's presentation reminded attendees of the human side of leadership—the importance of kindness, purpose, positive decision-making, and the lasting influence educators have on students and communities. His ability to connect through music and personal experience gave the conference an uplifting and memorable start.

Thursday's general session featured Jeff Harmon, executive leadership coach, speaker, and founder of the nonprofit My Impossible. Jeff's extraordinary story of setting out to climb Mount Kilimanjaro after becoming a wheelchair user offered a compelling leadership lesson: seemingly impossible goals become possible when individuals commit to a shared mission, build the right team, and refuse to allow adversity to define the outcome. His message of resilience, teamwork, and leading through uncertainty resonated strongly with school leaders facing complex challenges in their own districts.

The conference concluded on Friday with a keynote address by Dr. Lily Laux, New Jersey Commissioner of Education. Her presence underscored the importance of continued partnership between the New Jersey Department of Education and local district leadership.

Commissioner Laux's message to New Jersey's educational leaders emphasized the critical role superintendents, central office administrators, and pupil services leaders play in guiding school communities through a period of complexity and change. She reinforced the importance of steady leadership, open communication, student-centered decision-making, and the shared responsibility to strengthen teaching, learning, and support systems across the state.

The conference also provided important moments of recognition and celebration. NJASA and NJAPSA honored exemplary leadership through award presentations, including recognition of distinguished service, central office leadership, regional superintendents, the Superintendent of the Year, and retiring colleagues whose service has strengthened public education across New Jersey. These recognitions reminded all in attendance that leadership is measured not only by decisions made in difficult moments, but also by sustained commitment, professional integrity, and service to students, staff, families, and communities.

A major strength of this year's conference was the depth and relevance of the professional learning program. Sessions addressed the issues most urgent to district leaders, including school funding pressures, special education, student mental health, school safety, artificial intelligence, curriculum design, attendance, communications, staffing, school climate, regional collaboration, leadership resilience, and inclusive practices. The conference offered practical strategies that members could bring directly back to their districts, while also providing the broader perspective needed to lead in a rapidly changing educational environment.

Equally valuable was the opportunity for members to reconnect with colleagues. The Welcome Reception, Exhibit Hall, NJASA President's Reception, breakfasts, refreshment breaks, and informal conversations throughout the conference created time for professional exchange, collegial support, and renewed friendships. The strength of NJASA has always rested in the willingness of members to learn from one another, and this conference demonstrated that spirit in every session, hallway conversation, and gathering.

NJASA extends its appreciation to NJAPSA, our presenters, keynote speakers, Allied Members, sponsors, exhibitors, award recipients, retirees, and all attendees who contributed to the success of the conference. The event reflected the very best of New Jersey educational leadership: thoughtful, resilient, student-centered, and committed to continuous improvement.

Members are encouraged to mark their calendars now for next year's Spring Leadership Conference, scheduled for May 19–21, 2027. We look forward to building on this year's success and once again bringing New Jersey's education leaders together for professional learning, recognition, and shared purpose.