

Grantee: JerseyCAN

Program Area: Education

Headquarters: Cranford, NJ

Total funding: \$150,000 since 2014

Most recent grant: \$35,000 in 2018

Late in the evening this past July 1, Governor Murphy and New Jersey legislature reached a deal on the FY19 state budget, the first budget by the new governor that many of our grantees have been anxiously awaiting to provide some clarity to the stances of the administration. This is a \$37.4B budget that includes a \$348M increase in school aid compared to the FY18 budget; this has been considered an overall success by JerseyCAN, the subject of our spotlight this month, as Janellen Duffy and her team have been actively monitoring the intense budget negotiations and dueling budget proposals in Trenton for several months. As many of you may recall, Janellen, the founding Executive Director of JerseyCAN, presented to the Board at the December 7, 2016 meeting during which she spoke about NJ-centric education reform efforts within our public school system. As I know you've already heard from Janellen and received an overview of the organization's mission, I will try not to reiterate the basic goals of JerseyCAN, but, rather, provide an update on its recent efforts, successes, and future challenges regarding this newly finalized budget which will carry significant implications on the state of public education over the next several years.

To begin, I'll provide a brief refresher on JerseyCAN as a whole. Launched in March 2013 as a branch of 50CAN (the national Campaign for Achievement Now), it advocates for a high-quality education for all New Jersey students and helps to create learning environments that best meet every child's needs by promoting earlier education, such as Pre-K access, and expanded high-quality educational opportunities, regardless of home address. With an operating budget of \$950K, JerseyCAN's staff of three employees achieves this through the advocacy of legal changes that benefit pre-K-12 students, elevating the voices of parents, teachers, and other community members to lawmakers, and ensuring these policy wins are successfully implemented (a key point!). Throughout this process, JerseyCAN also prepares and distributes issue briefs and original research which provide in-depth analyses of New Jersey's public education systems and serve as the foundations for its policy recommendations. In March of this year, Janellen Duffy became JerseyCAN's Senior Advisor to the new Executive Director, Patricia Morgan. Patricia is a graduate of Drew University and a lawyer by training with a very strong education policy background, most recently having served in the Christie Administration in senior roles in the Governor's Counsel's Office and the New Jersey Department of Education. This team and its Board, led and co-chaired by Ann Borowiec, former CEO of J.P. Morgan Private Wealth Management, features several powerhouse leaders who don't just lend their name to any board or movement; it's not surprising that JerseyCAN, in its short history, has had such an impact on the educational policy of the state.

Over the past year, JerseyCAN has maintained a significant presence in Trenton as Governor Murphy prepared his administration's first state budget and has advocated for inclusion of funding for a number of educational reforms, specifically, charter school aid, school funding reform, pre-K funding, and STEM/STEAM education. Given the Governor's line-item veto power, the team maintained a presence in the State House and stayed connected to key staff in the legislature and administration, efforts that have evidently reaped the following successes:

- 1) **Charter school aid:** Since last winter, JerseyCAN worked diligently to educate the Governor's staff and the Department of Education on the nuances of charter school funding and did extensive legislative outreach to ensure its inclusion in the legislature's proposed budget. (This aid is extremely important as it helps charter schools account for projected enrollment increases.) As a result, funding was included to continue to keep charter schools steady on a cost-per-pupil basis.

- 2) **School funding reform:** With this budget deal, the Governor also agreed to implement equitable school funding reform championed by Senate President Sweeney for the last several years. Many view this as a historic update to a school funding policy that has been relatively unchanged since 2008. Essentially, a portion of the \$348M increase in school aid will be redistributed aid from districts receiving more state dollars than they are supposed to receive according to the school funding formula, a process that will occur over seven years. Newark, Paterson, and Elizabeth will see large dollar increases at \$37.5M, \$20.3M, and \$17.2M, respectively. (I'll point out that this achievement is a bit "double-edged" as one of the hardest hit districts facing a decrease of \$1.3M is Freehold Township which JerseyCAN has researched extensively and hailed as the leader of STEM education and personalized learning in the state, though it has yet to comment on this.)
- 3) **Pre-K funding:** Through partnerships with Advocates for Children of New Jersey and Pre-K Our Way (an FMKF grantee), JerseyCAN had provided communications support and wove pre-K issues into its legislative testimony, drawing attention to the need to move the state closer to fully funding the 2008 law that called for expansion of pre-K programs. Notably, this budget invests a landmark \$57 million in new pre-K funding, the largest increase in over a decade, bringing the total to \$83 million; this implies that over 3,500 four-year-olds are expected to gain access to pre-K this year.
- 4) **STEM/STEAM education expansion:** This past year, JerseyCAN, in partnership with J.P. Morgan, released an in-depth report exploring New Jersey's STEM landscape and evidence-based innovations, including highlights on Students 2 Science, Inc. and the Liberty Science Center, both of which are FMKF grantees. It is my understanding that JerseyCAN has been capitalizing on its interest in the expansion of STEM education in order to find early common ground with Governor Murphy, an approach that has been clearly successful given the inclusion of a \$2M grant program in this budget to help high schools offer college-level computer science courses and to support teachers' professional development. New Jersey also plans to launch a loan forgiveness program this year for STEM graduates who remain in the State.

While aspects of JerseyCAN's recommendations did not make it into the final budget, such as Host District Support Aid to alleviate financial pressures placed on school districts with a high concentration of charter schools, the FY19 education budget overall reflects many of JerseyCAN's key priorities and the culmination of Patricia and her team's work over the past several months. As mentioned above, the immediate goals moving forward include working to ensure the effective implementation of these programs and continued inclusion of the line items in future budgets, in addition to responding to the significant implications the Supreme Court's decision in *Janus v. AFSCME* will have in New Jersey and its related pending lawsuits. (I would expand upon this now, but I'd need a whole other spotlight to cover it all! In the meantime, here is a link to an overview and supplemental details of the case collected by our grantee, National Right to Work Legal Defense Fund: <http://www.nrtw.org/janus>) While it's evident that advocacy efforts take time, especially in New Jersey which seems to have some of the most intricate challenges with respect to education in general (let alone reform efforts!), JerseyCAN strategically works with those in the state who yield the most efficient impact while empowering the voices of those most directly affected; and to evident success, at that.

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Prepared by Erin Clifford