

With the legislature now on its summer recess one might expect things to slow down in Trenton. That hasn't been the case this year.

After wrapping up the budget at the end of June the legislature was promptly called back in for a special session by the Governor. At his special session the Governor called upon the legislature to implement an agreed upon tax cut immediately. The legislature has taken a "wait and see" position having set aside the money in the budget but not authorizing a tax cut. We can expect this debate to continue throughout the rest of the year with the administration and legislature paying close attention to monthly tax collections.

The legislature has also been holding select committee meetings during July and August and a somewhat unexpected voting session on July 30th. This voting session was held with the express purpose of passing a resolution to place before the voters a constitutional amendment concerning the legislature's authority to pass laws taking contributions from justices' and certain judges' salaries for employee benefits. This was in direct response to the recent NJ Supreme Court ruling holding that such action goes against the NJ Constitution's provision that judges cannot have their salaries cut.

In addition, the Governor signed into law on August 6th the Teacher Effectiveness and Accountability for the Children of New Jersey (TEACHNJ) Act. This major tenure reform initiative, which passed the legislature on a bipartisan basis, will now tie teacher effectiveness to tenure.

In the past, teachers were granted tenure automatically after three years of employment. Now, teachers will need to participate in a district mentorship program and receive a rating of "highly effective" or "effective" in two annual summative evaluations within the first three years of employment following the initial year of employment.

Each school district will be required to establish a mentoring program and a "school improvement panel". The panel will oversee the mentoring of teachers, conduct evaluations of teachers and identify professional development opportunities for all instructional staff members.

This new law also reduces the time and cost in removing a consistently ineffective teacher. Now the time would be limited to 105 days from the time the written tenure charges are received by the Commissioner and is capped at \$7,500 per case in arbitration costs – which will be paid by the state. In the past such cases would take years and could cost upwards of \$100,000.