

# LMC = RESULTS

## Cherry Hill Public School District Labor Management Collaborative works together to obtain \$1.5 million in salary guide

By Kimberly Crane

Like many schools post-pandemic, Cherry Hill Public Schools has struggled to hire and retain qualified staff. The crux of the struggle in Cherry Hill was the district's ranking for starting salaries. Cherry Hill ranked 478 out of 498 statewide for new hires with a bachelor's degree, and 456 out of 497 statewide for those with a master's degree. In a year with record school staff shortages, low starting salaries equals low staff recruitment and retention.

"At the high school and middle school levels, we had a lot of members covering additional periods," explains Cherry Hill Education Association (CHEA) President Steve Redfearn, who has been a member of the New Jersey Labor Management Collaborative (LMC) since August 2022. "When we sought candidates for open positions, our starting salary was so low that we couldn't get qualified candidates in the door."

### Searching for solutions

The Cherry Hill Board of Education began addressing the salary guide issue at its meetings in 2023, publicly addressing the need to improve teacher recruitment and retention. With guidance from the board's professional association and the New Jersey LMC, the board included CHEA and district stakeholders in the discussions.

Despite the departure of LMC-supportive board members, Joel Mayer and Gina Winters, discussions continued with Cherry Hill Superintendent Dr. Kwame Morton, Board President Miriam Stern, other board members and administrators in the human resources and business offices.

"It is helpful to bring all of the partners together," Redfearn elaborates. "We needed the perspective of our HR folks on why we couldn't get qualified candidates. We needed the superintendent's perspective as well as our board, knowing about all these open positions and our members taking on additional periods."

Morton played a pivotal role in ensuring the success

---

*Kimberly Crane is an NJEA Communications Consultant and the vice president of the Highland Park Education Association. She can be reached at [kcrane@njea.org](mailto:kcrane@njea.org).*



Participants in the Cherry Hill School District Labor Management Collaborative discuss priorities.

**It's exciting to think about what other accomplishments we can attain in the future within the Labor Management Collaborative structure."**

**– Cherry Hill EA President  
Steve Redfearn**

of the collaborative, as well as creating a welcoming environment and fiscally appropriate salary guide that made the district a contender for new hires.

"As a district, Cherry Hill is dedicated to fostering effective collaboration, believing it to be the cornerstone of all key decisions and improvement initiatives," Morton says. "In line with this commitment, the LMC played a crucial role by providing valuable input and engaging in meaningful collaboration to finalize the enhanced CHEA salary guide."

Redfearn said the board and administration really stepped up and realized that they had to do something before the staffing shortages began affecting student outcomes.



Cherry Hill School District Labor Management Collaborative includes the various local associations along with administrators and the school board. At the table on the lower right are Superintendent Kwame Martin (at end of table) and Educational Assistants of Cherry Hill President Rosemarie Casey (at table corner facing Martin).

"This is all about building and sustaining partnerships for our students," Redfearn says. "Our students need consistency to reach their full potential, and this is achieved when the board, our district and the association leadership work collaboratively rather than in opposition to each other. It's exciting to think about what other accomplishments we can attain in the future within the Labor Management Collaborative structure".

### State funding cuts threaten progress

As CHEA and the district awaited New Jersey state education aid numbers, they planned for what the salary adjustments would look like and how enhancements could be done within the district budget, its banked cap and 2% tax levy.

**"As a district, CHPS is dedicated to fostering effective collaboration, believing it to be the cornerstone of all key decisions and improvement initiatives." - Superintendent of Cherry Hill Public Schools Dr. Kwame Morton**

When the state aid figures were announced, Cherry Hill experienced a nearly \$7 million reduction. The focus on tackling issues related to teacher recruitment and retention now expanded to include preserving programs and preventing staffing cuts.

CHEA, the school board, the Cherry Hill Fair Funding group, the Cherry Hill Zone PTA and district leadership, took their fight to Trenton and eventually received word that \$3.1 million would be restored from the \$7 million lost.

### Collaboration Corner LMC New Jersey Labor Management Collaborative

Welcome to our new series – Collaboration Corner LMC. Each month the NJEA Review will spotlight the success stories and progress of local associations participating in the New Jersey Labor Management Collaborative (LMC).

For more information on the New Jersey Labor Management Collaborative email Mike Ritzius, NJEA liaison to the New Jersey LMC at [mrizius@njea.org](mailto:mrizius@njea.org).

### Enhancing the salary guide

Undeterred by the loss in state aid, the local association, the school board, superintendent and most district stakeholders remained committed to fixing the issue of staff recruitment and retention. The solution was clear: The salary guide needed an infusion of funds to enable the district to become a competitive option for qualified candidates.

"We revised our approach in the hopes that at least some aid would be restored, which did happen, so we were able to use part of the restoration aid toward the salary guide enhancement."

**“This is truly essential work that allows the board to gain greater understanding, engage more collaboratively and ultimately serve our primary stakeholders: the students.”**  
- Cherry Hill School Board President Miriam Stern

For its part, CHEA requested that the NJEA Research and Economic Services Division develop a salary guide proposal for Cherry Hill that would:

Increase the entry level salaries to become more competitive within the region while also improving the overall standing in the entire state for recruitment purposes.

Provide additional enhancements to staff receiving higher increment increases at the top of the guide for their dedication to the district.

Maintain an incremental trajectory for upcoming negotiations that is sustainable and allows for a path to increase all salaries and in turn promote teacher recruitment and retention.

The salary guide produced by NJEA provided a framework for discussions in the Cherry Hill Labor Management Collaborative. This helped the group move closer to meeting the goal of attracting a retaining staff while protecting current positions and programs.

### **A \$1.5 million solution**

In May the school board began to discuss how to use the state aid restoration toward salary enhancements. At its June 2024 meeting, the board voted to use \$1.5 million to enhance the certificated staff salary guides.

Redfearn said CHEA members were pleasantly surprised by the news.

“They are kind of in shock because this hasn’t happened before here and is really unheard of anywhere,” Redfearn said. “We are entering into negotiations next year, and this puts us on a path to continue to enhance the starting salary at negotiations.”

Michael Ritzius, the NJEA liaison to the New Jersey LMC, says that local association members at all levels should be part of labor and management initiatives.

“During the collaboration process it is important for locals to invite association members into the conversation to maximize communication and understanding about goals and possible outcomes,” Ritzius says. “Just as with negotiations, everyone does not always get what they want. Collaboration, however, keeps the door open to continued improvements and solutions to many district issues and builds a culture of positive relationships.”

### **LMC = results!**

A collaborative labor management structure works when you have district stakeholders, like those in Cherry Hill, who are committed to the LMC process with the goal of creating positive outcomes for students.

“In the New Jersey Labor Management Collaborative, and working with Mike Ritzius from NJEA, we sit with our school board quite often,” Redfearn says. “These meetings provide an opportunity to work together on many issues. “This is a textbook case of why the New Jersey Labor Management Collaborative works. We achieved something that’s a win-win. It’s an excellent example of how you can work together to collaborate.”

Cherry Hill School Board President Miriam Stern views the LMC as a game changer.

“This is truly essential work that allows the board to gain greater understanding, engage more collaboratively and ultimately serve our primary stakeholders: our students,” Stern says. 🙌



*Great Public Schools for Every Student*

## **NEA's Role in the NJ Labor Management Collaborative**

The New Jersey Labor Management Collaborative, an initiative dedicated to fostering productive relationships between labor and management in New Jersey’s educational system, thrives through the robust support of the National Education Association (NEA). This partnership exemplifies NEA’s commitment to enhancing educational environments not only in New Jersey but across the nation.

The NEA, as part of the National Labor Management Partnership (NLMP), a coalition of the national organizations of the nation’s educators, is cultivating a dynamic ecosystem of support that empowers districts to implement collaborative strategies effectively. Through providing crucial resources, expertise and ongoing consultation, the NLMP nurtures a sense of collective efficacy between labor and management, driving improvements in teaching conditions and student outcomes.

This collaborative approach has shown tangible benefits, leading to more cohesive school communities and a better educational experience for all stakeholders. By backing initiatives like the New Jersey Labor Management Collaborative, NEA demonstrates its dedication to fostering a culture of cooperation and mutual respect within the education sector, paving the way for sustained success and innovation.

For more information about NEA’s role in labor management collaboration, visit [nea.org/collaboration](https://nea.org/collaboration).