



**SUNLIGHT**  
POLICY CENTER  
— OF NEW JERSEY —

## ISSUE UPDATE

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SPENDING DECLINES SIGNIFICANTLY;  
99% TO DEMOCRATS**

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SPENDING**

March 15, 2024

# **2023 NJ ELECTIONS: NJEA SPENDING DECLINES SIGNIFICANTLY; 99% TO DEMOCRATS**

## **The Decline Implies Teachers Want Less Political Spending**

### **Executive Summary**

New Jersey's largest government union, the New Jersey Education Association (NJEA), is also its largest special interest political spender. As always, the NJEA was active in the 2023 elections, which generated two observations: 1) NJEA political spending declined significantly from previous elections; and 2) more than 99% of the NJEA spending went to Democrats.

Does the decline in spending reflect teachers wanting less political spending?

All told, the NJEA spent \$3.45 million, which was down -57% from its 2017 peak, and -28% less than the 2021 election. The decline occurred at both the NJEA's Super PAC, Garden State Forward, and its traditional PAC, NJEA PAC. It's revealing for both.

NJEA PAC provides a barometer of teachers' political activism because it is funded by a separate dues stream that teachers must opt into. Because fewer teachers are choosing to contribute, NJEA PAC's sending has steadily declined. In 2023, NJEA PAC contributed \$1.12 million, the lowest amount in over a decade and down -30% from its 2013 peak. When given a choice, teachers do not want to spend their money on politics.

They don't have a choice when it comes to Garden State Forward. The Super PAC can spend unlimited amounts of money, is funded by the \$136 million pool of teachers' regular dues, and is controlled by NJEA leadership. That's why it's become the NJEA's main vehicle for political spending: from 2013-22, Garden State Forward spent \$64.6 million to NJEA PAC's \$8.9 million.

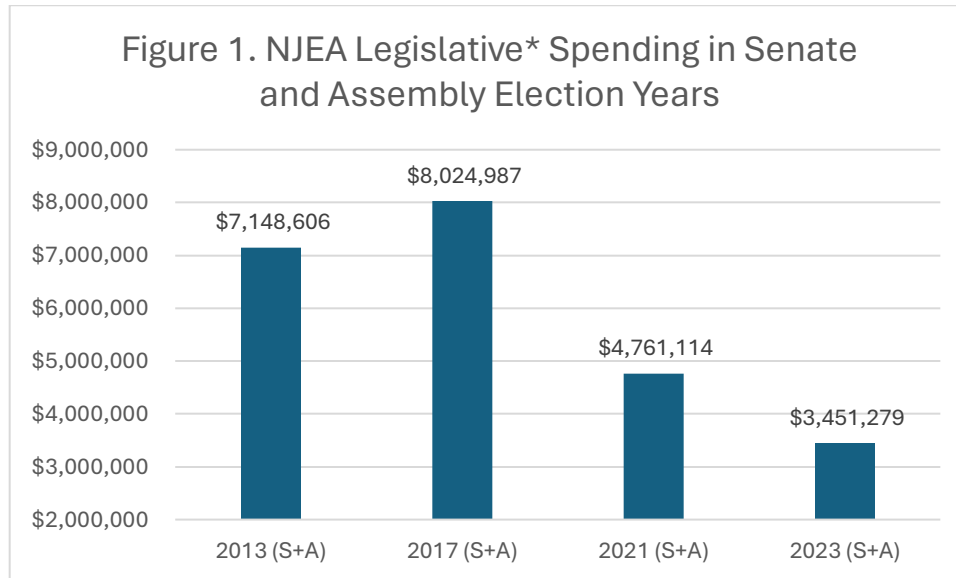
Given these characteristics, Garden State Forward spending provides a barometer of the NJEA's discretionary political spending, and leadership clearly decided to spend a lot less in 2023. Compared with prior legislative election years, 2023 spending of \$2.32 million was down -65% from the 2017 peak and -35% from 2021.

But what the NJEA did spend, it spent almost entirely on Democrats. Overall, 99% of the NJEA's partisan spending went to Democrats. This was true at every level of electoral politics: legislative 99%; state-level 100%; county 99.8%; and municipal 100%. The NJEA was almost 100% for Democrats in 2023.

One election does not make or set a trend, but we now have over a decade of elections against which to compare, and the data shows that NJEA political spending declined significantly in 2023. NJEA PAC indicates that fewer teachers want to spend their own money on politics. Garden State Forward suggests a scenario: teachers are leaving the NJEA, dues revenues are declining, and the NJEA has to be more concerned with member retention than playing politics with teachers' regular dues. Both would imply that teachers want less NJEA political spending.

## **I. Diminished NJEA Spending in 2023 Election**

The numbers show that NJEA political spending declined in 2023, which was an election for the state senate and assembly, as well as for county, municipal, and school board elections. To get a better sense of the decline, we looked at elections that were comparable to 2023: the senate and assembly elections of 2013, 2017, and 2021 (after stripping out the gubernatorial spending). As Figure 1 shows, when compared with those three previous elections, 2023's \$3.45 million is less than half of both 2013's \$7.15 million and 2017's \$8.02 million, and -27.5% less than 2021's \$4.76 million. The bottom line is that there was a significant drop in 2023.



Source: Election Law Enforcement Commission (ELEC). \* Gubernatorial spending for 2013, 2017, and 2021 excluded.

There are two sources for NJEA political spending: its Super PAC, Garden State Forward, and its traditional PAC, NJEA PAC.

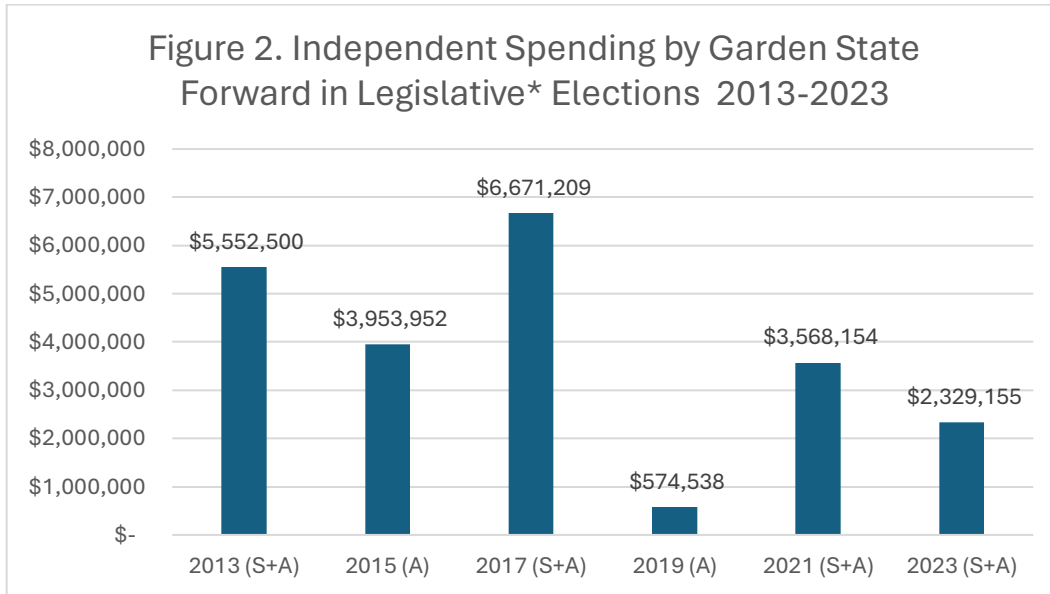
### **Garden State Forward**

Since the Supreme Court's *Citizens United* decision, which led to the creation of Super PACs, the NJEA's Super PAC, Garden State Forward, has become the NJEA's main vehicle for political spending. From its founding in 2013 to 2022, Garden State Forward spent \$64.6 million compared to \$8.9 million for NJEA PAC.<sup>1</sup>

Garden State Forward's ascendancy comes from three factors: 1) it can spend unlimited amounts of money in support of the NJEA's preferred candidates and causes; 2) it is funded by New Jersey teachers' highest-in-the-nation regular dues, which means that NJEA leadership can draw from a pool of \$136 million in annual dues revenues; and 3) it is controlled and directed by NJEA leadership.

<sup>1</sup> Data drawn from NJEA IRS Forms 990 for tax years 2012-21, which correspond to calendar years 2013-22.

Because of these characteristics, Garden State Forward provides NJEA leadership with tremendous firepower and flexibility, and serves as a barometer of the NJEA's discretionary political spending from year to year. This can be seen in Figure 2, which compares the ELEC data<sup>2</sup> for spending on legislative elections from 2013-23. Garden State Forward spending declined to \$2.33 million in 2023, far lower than in previous years (except 2019, which was Assembly only), -65% less than its 2017 peak, and -35% less than 2021.

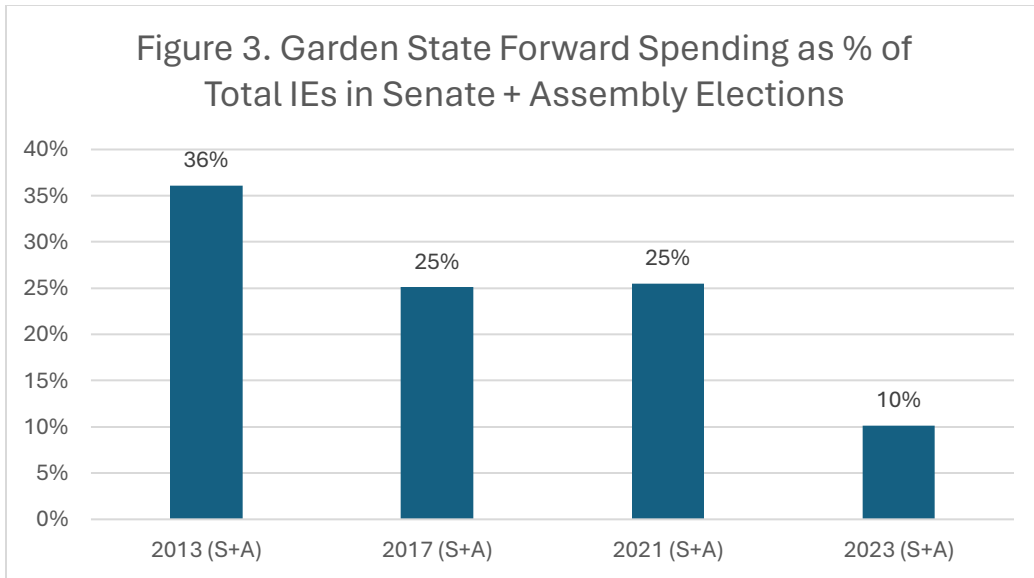


Source: ELEC. \* Spending on the gubernatorial elections excluded.

To get a better sense of the relative decline in Garden State Forward spending, we looked at 2023 spending as a percentage of overall independent expenditures (IEs).<sup>3</sup> As shown in Figure 3, Garden State Forward's IEs have fallen from 36% of the overall amount in 2013 to 10% in 2023.

<sup>2</sup> ELEC provides a compilation of total spending on legislative elections, which includes data for Garden State Forward and is used in Figures 1 and 2. However, Sunlight's own compilation of ELEC filings for the 2023 elections, which includes both direct spending in support of candidates as well as contributions to other Super PACs, comes to \$2.53 million, as seen in Table 2. We used ELEC's numbers to allow for comparison with previous years in Figures 1 and 2.

<sup>3</sup> Super PACs must make independent expenditures, which cannot be coordinated with candidates or political parties.



Source: ELEC. Spending on the gubernatorial elections excluded.

Garden State Forward allows NJEA leadership to spend as much or as little as it wants, and in 2023 leadership chose to spend less.

### **NJEA PAC**

As a traditional PAC, NJEA PAC is very different from Garden State Forward. NJEA PAC can contribute directly to candidates and parties but is limited in what it can spend by both contribution limits and a separate, dedicated dues stream that teachers must opt into. It is controlled and directed by a Delegate Assembly committee via set procedures. Given these characteristics, NJEA PAC provides a good barometer of teachers' political activism, and the numbers make clear that teachers' political activism continued its long-term decline in 2023.

Per Table 1, NJEA PAC spent \$1.12 million in 2023, which is the least amount in over a decade. It was even less than the \$1.2 million spent in 2019, which was an assembly-only election. 2023's spending declined -30% from its 2013 peak.

Table 1. NJEA PAC Contributions

Year	Amount
2011	\$ 1,439,011
2013	\$ 1,596,106
2015	\$ 1,211,262
2017	\$ 1,353,778
2019	\$ 1,200,094
2021	\$ 1,192,960
2023	\$ 1,122,124

Source: ELEC

As Sunlight has [documented](#), fewer and fewer teachers are choosing to contribute to NJEA PAC, which leaves it with less money to spend. In 2023, that again showed.

## **II. 2023 NJEA Partisan Political Spending: 99.2% to Democrats**

While the NJEA's overall spending may have been less than previous elections, it was heavily skewed towards Democrats. Per Table 2, combining NJEA PAC and Garden State Forward, the NJEA spent \$3,526,172 million, of which \$3,496,372 went to Democrats, or 99.2%.<sup>4</sup>

Table 2. NJEA 2023 Partisan Spending: 99% to Democrats

2023 NJEA Spending	Democrat	Republican
Legislative	\$ 2,982,172	\$ 29,300
State-Level	\$ 315,000	\$ -
County	\$ 205,100	\$ 500
Municipal	\$ 23,900	\$ -
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 3,526,172</b>	<b>\$ 29,800</b>

Source: ELEC

### **State Legislative Elections: 99% to Democrats**

Most of the NJEA's spending went to state legislative elections. Garden State Forward contributed \$1 million to Prosperity Rising, a Democratic Super PAC reportedly controlled by State Senate President Nicholas Scutari, and \$950,000 to Middle Ground, a Democratic Super PAC focused on legislative districts (LDs) 11, 16 and 38. It also spent \$583,722 supporting Democratic candidates in LDs 2, 3, 4, and 14.<sup>5</sup> NJEA PAC contributed \$401,950 to Democrat candidates and \$29,300 to Republicans, and \$46,500 to the Democratic Assembly and Senate Campaign Committees. As shown in Table 3, 99% of the NJEA's spending went to Democrats.

Table 3. NJEA 2023 Legislature Spending: 99.0% to Democrats

2023 State Legislative	Democrat	Republican
Prosperity Rising (GSF)	\$ 1,000,000	\$ -
Middle Ground (GSF)	\$ 950,000	\$ -
Candidates (GSF)	\$ 583,722	\$ -
Candidates (NJEA PAC)	\$ 401,950	\$ 29,300
Campaign Committees (NJEA PAC)	\$ 46,500	\$ -
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 2,982,172</b>	<b>\$ 29,300</b>

Source: ELEC

<sup>4</sup> Includes only partisan elections. Board of Education elections are non-partisan and are not included in the totals. Excludes contributions to non-partisan organizations as well as those that could not be identified. Excludes NJEA PAC contributions to federal candidates via the NJEA's parent, the National Education Association, which amounted to \$230,776.

<sup>5</sup> As noted in Footnote 3, this 2023 data is derived from Sunlight's own compilation drawn from Garden State Forward's ELEC filings. This totals \$2.53 million, which is higher the \$2.33 million presented by ELEC, which is used in Figure 1 to allow for comparison with past elections.

Table 4 provides the top ten legislative candidates supported by NJEA spending. All are Democrats. Anthony Angelozzi (LD8) and Alphonso Harrell (LD2) lost their elections. Both are NJEA members.

Table 4. Top Ten Candidates for NJEA Spending: All Democrats

Candidate	Party	District	GSF	NJEA PAC	Total
Sen. Moriarty	D	LD4	\$ 100,777	\$ 5,000	\$ 105,777
Anthony Angelozzi	D	LD8	\$ 89,000	\$ 5,000	\$ 94,000
Sen. Burzichelli	D	LD3	\$ 85,934	\$ 5,000	\$ 90,934
ASM Miller	D	LD4	\$ 72,653	\$ 5,000	\$ 77,653
ASM Hutchinson	D	LD4	\$ 72,653	\$ 4,000	\$ 76,653
ASW Simmons	D	LD3	\$ 51,053	\$ 4,000	\$ 55,053
ASM Bailey	D	LD3	\$ 51,053	\$ 4,000	\$ 55,053
Alphonso Harrell	D	LD2	\$ 50,600	\$ 3,000	\$ 53,600
ASM Coughlin	D	LD19	\$ -	\$ 16,000	\$ 16,000

Source: ELEC

### **State-Level Spending: 100% to Democrats**

State-level spending includes contributions to state party committees and those in support of gubernatorial candidates/governors. As shown in Table 5, NJEA PAC contributed \$65,000 to the New Jersey Democratic State Committee, and Garden State Forward contributed \$250,000 to Stronger Fairer Forward, a Super PAC supporting Governor Murphy. There were no contributions to Republican state-level organizations.

Table 5. 2023 NJEA State-Level Contributions: 100% to Democrats

State -Level Spending	Democrat	Republican
Stronger Fairer Forward (GSF)	\$ 250,000	\$ -
State Party Committee (NJEA PAC)	\$ 65,000	\$ -
Total	\$ 315,000	\$ -

Source: ELEC

### **County Spending: 99.8% to Democrats**

County spending includes contributions to county party organizations and individual candidates for countywide offices, such as county executive, commissioner (formerly known as a "freeholder") and sheriff. In 2023, the NJEA made \$205,600 in contributions to county Democratic organizations (DOs) or individual candidates: \$192,100 to DOs, \$13,000 to Democratic candidates, and \$500 to a Republican candidate in Atlantic County. All of these contributions were made by NJEA PAC and 99.8% went to Democrats. Table 5 shows the top counties for NJEA spending.

Table 5. Top Counties for NJEA Spending in 2023: All to Democrats

County	County DO	Individuals	Total
Passaic County	\$ 45,000	\$ 4,750	\$ 49,750
Essex County	\$ 30,000	\$ 4,000	\$ 34,000
Middlesex County	\$ 26,500	\$ -	\$ 26,500
Somerset County	\$ 20,000	\$ 1,000	\$ 21,000
Union County	\$ 20,000	\$ -	\$ 20,000
Bergen County	\$ 15,000	\$ -	\$ 15,000

Source: ELEC

### **Municipal Spending: 100% to Democrats**

New Jersey municipal elections are both partisan and non-partisan. In 2023, the NJEA contributed \$23,900 to municipal candidates, all of whom were Democrats.<sup>6</sup> Of that, NJEA PAC contributed \$13,900 and Garden State Forward contributed \$10,000 to Progressive Values Committee, a Super PAC supporting Paterson Mayor Sayegh. Table 7 shows the top five municipalities for NJEA contributions.

Table 7. Top Municipalities for NJEA Spending in 2023: All to Democrats

Municipality	Party	NJEA PAC	GSF	Total
Paterson (Sayegh)	D	\$ 1,500	\$ 10,000	\$ 11,500
Fairview	D	\$ 4,000	\$ -	\$ 4,000
North Bergen (Sacco)	D	\$ 3,000	\$ -	\$ 3,000
East Orange	D	\$ 2,000	\$ -	\$ 2,000
Hamilton	D	\$ 1,250	\$ -	\$ 1,250

Source: ELEC

### **Board of Education Elections: Non-Partisan but Lots of NJEA Money**

Board of Education (BOE) elections are non-partisan and the NJEA's contributions are not included in Table 1 above. The NJEA was heavily involved in BOE elections in 2023, spending a total of \$352,045, with \$316,045 spent by Garden State Forward<sup>7</sup> and \$36,000 spent by NJEA PAC. Table 8 shows the top ten school districts where the NJEA spent money, with \$205,650 spent in Jersey City, the NJEA's largest school district.

In many school districts, NJEA contributions can give NJEA-backed candidates a decisive financial advantage over their opponents, who are often self-funded, so \$352,045 is a lot of money.

<sup>6</sup> Paterson and North Bergen hold non-partisan elections, but Mayors Sayegh and Sacco are prominent Democrats.

<sup>7</sup> This includes \$297,045 spent directly by Garden State Forward, as well as \$14,000 contributed to Districts for Democracy (former Democratic congressman Malinowski's Super PAC) and \$5,000 to Education Truth Project (a progressive Super PAC), both of which are active in 2023 New Jersey BOE elections.



Table 8. Top Ten School Districts for NJEA Spending in 2023

School District (County)	NJEA PAC	Garden State Forward	Total
Jersey City (Hudson)	\$ -	\$ 205,650	\$ 205,650
Manchester (Ocean)	\$ 1,500	\$ 37,278	\$ 38,778
Montgomery (Somerset)	\$ -	\$ 35,319	\$ 35,319
Frankford (Sussex)	\$ 1,500	\$ 18,798	\$ 20,298
Paterson (Passaic)	\$ 15,000	\$ -	\$ 15,000
Wayne (Passaic)	\$ 8,000	\$ -	\$ 8,000
Asbury Park (Monmouth)	\$ 2,000	\$ -	\$ 2,000
Colts Neck (Monmouth)	\$ 2,000	\$ -	\$ 2,000
Readington (Hunterdon)	\$ 1,500	\$ -	\$ 1,500
Bergenfield (Bergen)	\$ 1,000	\$ -	\$ 1,000
West Orange (Essex)	\$ 1,000	\$ -	\$ 1,000

Source: ELEC

### **III. Conclusion: Do Teachers Want Less Political Spending?**

One election does not make or set a trend, but we now have over a decade of elections against which to compare, and the data shows that NJEA political spending declined significantly in 2023. NJEA PAC's declining numbers indicate that fewer teachers want to spend their own money on politics. Garden State Forward's declining spending suggests a scenario: teachers are leaving the NJEA, dues revenues are declining, and the NJEA has to be more concerned with member retention than playing politics with teachers' regular dues.

Both would imply that teachers want less political spending. We'll be watching what happens over the next few elections to see if the NJEA is listening.