



Educator Express

Week of Jan. 15, 2024



Murphy signs A5684/S4055, expanding access to free school meals for N.J. students

Gov. Phil Murphy on Jan. 16 signed [A5684/S4055](#), which will make New Jersey students from more than 60,000 families newly eligible for free school meals under 2022's [Working Class Families' Anti-Hunger Act](#).

A5684/S4055 calls for schools participating in the National School Lunch Program and/or the federal School Breakfast Program [to provide a free school lunch and/or breakfast](#) to those students whose families have an annual household income of up to 224 percent of the federal poverty level. (Two years ago, when the Working Class Families' Anti-Hunger Act became law in New Jersey, [its income eligibility level](#) was up to about 200 percent of the federal poverty level.)

"Back in the fall of 2022, I believe, we signed legislation into law that expanded access to free, nutritious school breakfasts and lunches for literally thousands of New Jersey schoolchildren," Murphy said Jan. 16 from the South Amboy Elementary School gym. "Today we're building on that progress with legislation that will help prevent even more children from going through the school day on an empty stomach. ... In addition to ensuring our children are fed and nourished, this legislation will also ... give our kids the support they need to fully focus on their studies and ultimately excel in their lives."

AFTNJ President Donna M. Chiera, who attended the bill signing Jan. 16, afterward recalled that during her teaching career in Perth Amboy, the breakfast and lunch served at her school were the only consistent meals most of her students could count on. With that in mind, she would stock a complementary "goodie drawer," and on half days, she'd incorporate a cooking lesson into her curriculum "so my students wouldn't go home without having lunch."

"These are things teachers throughout our state do on a daily basis," Chiera added. "We understand that having food in your belly helps your body stay healthy so you can attend school. And knowing that free, nutritious food is available at school frees your mind so you can socially, emotionally and academically function in the classroom."

With [food insecurity increasing across America](#), Chiera appreciates that Murphy and Assembly Speaker Craig Coughlin, among other elected leaders in New Jersey, have passed legislation through the years expanding student access to free school meals.

"Actions such as these will bolster New Jersey's reputation for having a world-

class education system," she said.

ABOVE: Gov. Phil Murphy prepares to sign A5684/S4055 on Jan. 16 at South Amboy Elementary School. *(Photo by Chris M. Junior)*

Ending use of race, ethnicity in higher ed admission decisions is 'mostly a good thing,' say 68 percent of U.S. adults in survey

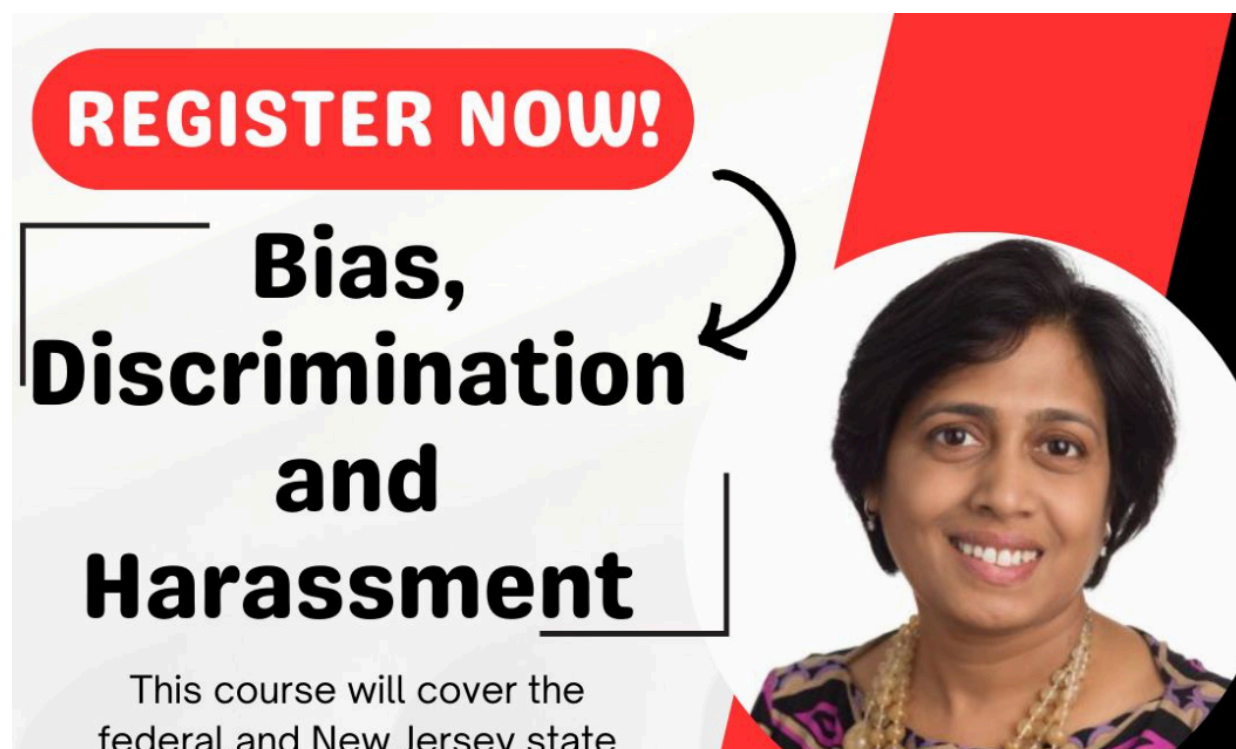
The Supreme Court's ruling last June to end the use of race and ethnicity in college and university admission decisions is "mostly a good thing," according to 68 percent of U.S. adults in a Gallup Center on Black Voices survey conducted last fall. [Read more](#)

**New Rutgers-assisted report finds
\$360B shortfall in K-12 public schools
in 39 states from 2016-21**

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**Vice President Harris announces
additional \$285M for schools to hire, train mental health counselors**


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Adjunct faculty: Have you filled out the health insurance survey?

AFTNJ is working with the Council of New Jersey State College Locals, the United Adjunct Faculty Federation of New Jersey, the Rutgers Adjunct Faculty Union and Rutgers AAUP-AFT to get access to affordable state health care for adjunct faculty.

If you haven't taken the survey, you can do so by clicking [here](#).

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