

Governor signs bill to screen teacher history

Nicholas Pugliese

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School employees accused of sexual misconduct or child abuse would have a much tougher time moving from job to job under a measure signed into law Wednesday by Gov. Phil Murphy.

The so-called "passing the trash" teacher bill, S-414/A-3381, was first introduced by Republican lawmakers and advanced unanimously through the Legislature in February following a report by NJ Advance Media that showed how several educators were able to get hired in new schools after allegations of misconduct or abuse. One such teacher was later convicted of sexually assaulting six students in three school districts.

"Ensuring our children are safe when they go to school every day is our number one priority," Murphy said in a statement announcing his action. "Parents should have the peace of mind that their children attend school in an environment in which they can safely learn, grow, thrive and succeed."

The new law requires public, charter, nonpublic schools and contracted service providers to investigate the employment histories of applicants for positions that involve regular contact with students.

Specifically, districts must ask job candidates and their former employers specific questions about sexual misconduct, and school officials must share information about misconduct allegations and child abuse probes unless the claims were proven to be false or unsubstantiated.

The law also bars separation agreements that force districts to suppress or destroy information about misconduct or abuse investigations, and it protects districts from liability for disclosing such information.

Leading the push for the legislation were Joseph Pennacchio and Anthony Bucco in the Senate and Jay Webber in the Assembly. All are Morris County Republicans.

"This is a huge victory for our children, their parents and our state," Webber said in a statement. "No longer will these predators be able to continue their horrific behavior simply by changing jobs. Children will now have the protection they deserve."

Email: pugliese@northjersey.com