



NEW JERSEY GENERAL ASSEMBLY
16TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT

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Governor Chris Christie
Senate President Steve Sweeney
Assembly Speaker Vincent Prieto
Senator Tom Kean, Minority Leader
Assemblyman Jon Bramnick, Assembly Minority Leader
State of New Jersey
PO Box 001
Trenton, NJ 08625

Dear Governor and Legislative Leadership,

In the recent State Budget Address, it was proposed that within 100 days the Executive and Legislative branches work together to reach consensus on a new school funding formula.

The current school funding formula is blatantly unfair and terribly flawed. It is also unnecessarily complex. It disadvantages children, taxpayers and educators in far too many middle class, blue collar school districts throughout the state, leaving some communities to, for example, sacrifice libraries for classroom space.

As we all know, the 'thorough and efficient' clause in our state constitution has served as the basis for state public school funding for 40+ years. I wholeheartedly support that every child has a right to a high quality education. There is another clause in our state constitution, however, that is being inadvertently violated by the current distribution of state school aid – the 'equal benefit' clause, which is meant to protect against any community benefiting at the expense of another.

When a \$300,000 home in Delran, Egg Harbor Township, Lakewood, Manville, Freehold Borough, Red Bank and Woodbridge pays more in property taxes than an \$800,000 home in Jersey City . . . When affluent New Jerseyans living in Hoboken get to send their three- and four-year old children to state-funded Pre-K for free, when a great many blue collar towns throughout the state receive not a penny for Pre-K . . . The current distribution of state school aid is unfair to a great many children, taxpayers and educators throughout the state.

Far too often, we hear that the answer to the school funding crisis is simply "fully fund the current formula." This is, if I may, a flawed solution designed to protect the status quo and shirk responsibility. Moreover, even if we were to fully fund the 400 school districts currently

underfunded, there would remain a great many grossly *overfunded* school districts. Thus, the inequities that polarize New Jerseyans would continue under the “fully funded” solution.

We need a comprehensive and bold plan that reforms the current school funding formula and, in turn, addresses our property tax crisis. A plan that is fair to all New Jerseyans. A plan worthy of bi-partisan support.

With all that in mind, and as part of your deliberations, negotiations and, hopefully fair compromise and solution, I offer the following plan and specific reforms:

- Reduce excess aid in the most extremely overfunded school districts by 20% per year over 5 years, with the savings re-directed to the most severely underfunded school districts in places like Delran, Egg Harbor Township, Lakewood, Manville, Freehold Borough, Red Bank and Woodbridge and other middle-/working-class towns across the state.
- Redefine ‘Local Fair Share’ so no community funds less than 25% of their school operating budget or construction costs through the local property tax levy, phased in over 5 years or 20% per year.
- Recognizing that simply spending more money per student does not guarantee better educational outcomes . . . Change the state aid formula by reweighting cost-per-student spending targets (i.e., ‘adequacy’). This will better serve ‘Non-Abbott’ middle-/working-class towns and shore communities across the state by reallocating state aid so the distribution aligns with need of TODAY, not the 1980s.
- Prevent communities from abating school taxes on new development with 75% of negotiated payments-in-lieu-of-taxes (i.e. PILOTS) dedicated to the local school district.
- In order to ensure that state-funded Pre-K is not unfairly limited to a small handful of districts, reform the system to redirect state pre-K funds to make means-tested pre-K available to all families at no additional cost to taxpayers.

Respectfully, I request that this plan and specific reforms be given the most serious consideration. We have, after all, reached the tipping point.

Of course, I am available to discuss this plan and reforms at your convenience.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Michael". The signature is stylized and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "M".