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## **60 ORGANIZATIONS PRESENT LETTER BLASTING GOV. CHRISTIE'S PROPOSED CHANGES TO SCHOOL FUNDING FORMULA**

*Diverse coalition ask legislators to reject Gov. Christie's attempts to rewrite school funding formula*

Trenton – As legislators enter the final three weeks of budget deliberations, a diverse coalition of sixty organizations delivered a letter to the Democratic majority offices of the New Jersey Legislature urging them to reject the Governor's proposed changes to the school funding formula.

The letter highlights how the proposed FY 2013 budget would underfund schools by \$750.4 million, amounting to a total of \$3.6 billion in state aid lost since Governor Christie first took office in January 2010. The letter was also highly critical of changes to the formula itself included in the budget language that would directly cut funding for at-risk students and English language learners. The Governor's budget proposes reducing the aid levels, or "weights," for poor students, English language learners (ELL), and students who fall in both categories, as well as how student enrollment is calculated.

"Governor Christie is trying to use budget language to effectively dismantle the framework for school aid established by the legislature in 2008 and approved by the New Jersey Supreme Court," said Sharon Kregel, Policy and Outreach Coordinator for the Education Law Center. "And while his budget would deliver the deepest aid cut to the state's poorest school districts, over 200 urban and suburban districts wouldn't even receive the minimum aid they are entitled to under the law next year."

The letter was signed by a broad array of groups including parent organizations, PTA boards, labor unions, social service providers, communities of faith, environmental groups and housing advocacy organizations. Representatives delivering the letter repeatedly asked their legislators to continue their fight for full and fair funding for students.

"New Jersey has some of the best schools in the country, and it has been a leader in the fight to make sure all students receive the support they need to thrive," said Daniel Santo Pietro, Chair of Public Policy for the Latino Action Network. "Governor Christie's budget would cut funding for poor students and English language learners while giving tax breaks to millionaires. Our legislators need to stand strong and reject it."

Below is the text of the letter:

## **OPEN LETTER TO NEW JERSEY STATE LEGISLATURE**

**May 23, 2012**

Dear Members of the New Jersey Legislature:

We the undersigned urge you to provide all school districts with the aid to which they are entitled under the School Funding Reform Act of 2008 (SFRA). We believe that the proposed FY 2013 Budget would continue a troubling trend of underfunding New Jersey's public schools and risk dismantling the very framework for funding education passed with bipartisan support by the Legislature just four years ago.

The statewide school funding formula was carefully devised to ensure every school district has the funding necessary to support the core curriculum for each student regardless of need. In 2009, the state Supreme Court found that SFRA met the constitutional requirements for providing all students in the state with a thorough and efficient education, as long as the formula was fully funded.

Unfortunately, the state has failed to meet its obligations to students over the last three years. A series of budget cuts beginning in February 2010 cost New Jersey's students \$2.9 billion in funding they were entitled to under state law. While we are glad this year's budget includes a marginal increase in education funding from previous fiscal years, the proposed FY 2013 Budget once again shortchanges our schools. While some school districts are receiving increased aid over FY 2012, almost all will receive less aid than they are entitled to under SFRA. Statewide, schools districts would lose \$750.4 million, bringing the total level of underfunding since 2010 to \$3.6 billion. Over 200 districts – urban and suburban – would fall short of even the minimum amount of funding required for adequacy.

Even more troubling is the attempt to use the FY 2013 budget proposal to permanently alter the formula outside of the process set down by the Legislature. If passed, the budget would reduce "weights" for at-risk students, English language learners, and students who fall in both categories. The proposed budget also changes how student enrollment is calculated to reduce funding in districts with higher levels of at-risk and transient students. This change would endanger the very educational programs that encourage students to come to school.

The proposed formula changes circumvent your own legislative role in establishing a framework for fair and adequate school funding. SFRA clearly outlines how elements of the formula are to be evaluated and changed, and the Legislature has the obligation to review and endorse or reject changes proposed by the Department of Education. This should happen, by law, outside the budget process.

We urge you to reject any budget that adjusts weights or enrollment calculations for students outside of the process established by SFRA. Further, we urge you to increase school funding within the current budget year. There are a number of measures – including taxes on high income

earners and closing corporate loopholes – that could net the state additional revenue to meet its constitutional responsibility to its students.

Providing a thorough and efficient education to all students regardless of their special needs is one of the state government's most important functions.

You have it in your power to ensure that all students in New Jersey have equal educational opportunity this year and in years to come, and we hope that you will continue your strong advocacy on behalf of New Jersey's students.

Sincerely,

*Abbott Leadership Institute*  
*American Federation of Teachers-NJ*  
*Association of Mathematics Teachers of New Jersey*  
*Blue Wave NJ*  
*Camden Education Association*  
*Communities in Schools of New Jersey*  
*CWA 1037*  
*CWA Local 1081*  
*CWA Local 1084*  
*Edison Central Six Parent-Teacher Association*  
*Education Law Center*  
*El Centro Hispanoamericano*  
*Fair Funding Action Committee*  
*Fair Share Housing Center*  
*Grassroots Institute of New Jersey*  
*Hispanic Information Center of Passaic*  
*Hispanic Family Center of South Jersey*  
*Hispanic Multipurpose Center*  
*Hispanic Services of Burlington County (SASCA)*  
*Jewish Labor Committee*  
*La Casa de Don Pedro*  
*La Unidad Latina*  
*Latino Action Network*  
*Latino Institute*  
*League of Women Voters of NJ*  
*MoveOn Hudson*  
*New Labor*  
*Newark Secondary Parents Council*  
*NAACP - Irvington*  
*NAACP - Maplewood and the Oranges*  
*NAACP - New Brunswick*

*NAACP - Newark*  
*NAACP - Plainfield*  
*NAACP -- State Council*  
*NAACP - Trenton*  
*New Jersey Association of School Administrators*  
*New Jersey Black Issues Convention*  
*New Jersey Citizen Action*  
*NJ Communities United*  
*New Jersey Education Association*  
*New Jersey Food and Water Watch*  
*New Jersey Regional Coalition/Building ONE New Jersey*  
*New Jersey Tenants Organization*  
*New Jersey United Students*  
*New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association*  
*New Jersey Work Environment Council*  
*Our Children/Our Schools*  
*Paterson Education Fund*  
*People's Organization for Progress*  
*Rutgers Student Union*  
*Save Our Schools NJ*  
*Save Our Schools March -- New Jersey Chapter*  
*Statewide Education Organizing Committee*  
*Statewide Parent Advocacy Network*  
*ThisAbled*  
*Trenton Area Soup Kitchen*  
*Trenton Board of Education*  
*Trenton CHANGE*  
*Trenton Education Association*  
*Urban League of Essex County*