



**TESTIMONY OF EDUCATION LAW CENTER ON
THE EMERGENT HEALTH AND SAFETY CONDITIONS AT
TRENTON CENTRAL HIGH SCHOOL**

SEPTEMBER 11, 2013

Thank you for the opportunity to join with Trenton students and parents; Assemblyman Reed Gusciora; and other legislators, advocates and organizations to bring to your attention the abysmal and rapidly deteriorating condition of Trenton Central High School (TCHS).

ELC is here today to remind you that the constitutional right of Trenton students to a thorough and efficient education includes school facilities that are safe, healthy, and adequate to deliver the State's rigorous learning standards. Under the Abbott rulings and the state facilities law, the NJ Department of Education is obligated to fund school facilities construction and renovation needed in Trenton and other SDA districts, including health and safety repairs.

The conditions at TCHS are an egregious example of the Department's failure to ensure students attend school in buildings that are safe, healthy and educationally adequate.

We came before you last spring to protest the Department's recommendation to eliminate the existing regulation requiring expedited action to remediate "emergent" conditions in TCHS and other SDA district buildings. We also brought to your attention the extensive delays in repairing and constructing schools caused by the Department's refusal to take prompt action.

Today you are hearing first hand the unconscionable results of the Department's disregard for the conditions at TCHS, less than a mile from here. The first day of school was bleak for TCHS students. They must endure a building where rotting roofs regularly leak during rainstorms. Water has infiltrated the school and damaged classrooms, hallways, stairwells, and other parts of the building. This infiltration worsens each and every time it rains. Because of water damage, TCHS's auditorium and several classrooms are unusable. Portions of the ceilings in classrooms, the library and other spaces have collapsed because of leakage. Walls have buckled from the leaks, and plaster has fallen and will continue to fall, in areas used by staff and students. Students and staff are exposed to the mildew and mold that is now widespread at various locations in the school. Service tunnels are laden with asbestos. Exterior masonry is in danger of falling and injuring students, and the exterior gutters and cornices are so grossly deficient, they are in danger of collapsing at any moment. The delay in addressing exterior deficiencies will not only lead to higher costs for eventual interior repairs, but could very well result in serious injury to students and staff.

In short, the conditions at TCHS are disgrace to the entire state, not to mention a profound breach of this Board's solemn duty to ensure our children are not put in harm's way.

Because of the Department's abject failure to correct these conditions, the Trenton district has been forced to divert scarce funds for educational programs, services, and staff from their budget towards temporary patches, fixes, and other stabilizing measures. Some of these temporary measures were required because TCHS has been cited for over one hundred local building code violations.

This Board has a responsibility to act to protect the health, safety and well being of the 1800 students now attending TCHS. You cannot expect these young people to receive the education they deserve – one that will prepare them for college and career – in such a degraded and potentially dangerous environment. We urge this Board to immediately issue a clear and firm directive to Commissioner Cerf to expedite all necessary repairs to TCHS and report back to you on the progress made. Thank you very much for your anticipated attention to this matter.