

June 2024

Governor Phil Murphy
225 West State Street
Trenton, NJ 08625

Dear Governor Murphy:

I am very fortunate to be a resident of Jefferson Township, NJ. It is a community that shows how valued its members are with Senior Centers, Recreational Activities, Family Carnivals, Scouting, and School Activities forging our families and our children together, molding them into the future of NJ. I am grateful to live in this community and have children attending the Jefferson Township School District.

I am asking for your support and action to ensure that a new funding formula is developed that fairly supports ALL 1.4 million of New Jersey's students. Since the adoption of S-2, Jefferson Township Public Schools has faced increasing annual losses which now exceed \$11 million per year. The cumulative loss since the inception of S-2 is just under \$45 million and will continue to grow each year. The impact of this has been profound. Our district has cut administrative, instructional, and support staff; closed a school building; added participation fees; and made multiple moves into health insurance plans to take advantage of any possible savings. We have also almost entirely depleted reserve accounts severely limiting the ability to make required improvements to aging facilities. Our school district is falling off a fiscal cliff at an alarming rate despite these actions.

In addition to the cuts in state aid, Jefferson has been deprived of the ability to positively impact enrollment trends through housing development due to the Highlands Act. It is surely a worthwhile endeavor to protect the natural resources of our great state, but this endeavor comes at a cost, and districts, like Jefferson, bearing that cost are not being made whole. We know that enrollment is a significant driver of state aid. We know that the Highlands Act limits development, thus stunting enrollment. It is incumbent upon you and the legislature to stop ignoring these realities at the expense of the students and taxpayers of Jefferson Township.

Our district is facing rising costs of health care benefits for our staff, uncapped transportation to the Morris County School of Technology satellite programs, and special education funding that does not account for our full population of classified students. Although new legislation was passed that permits Boards of Education to exceed the 2% cap on the tax levy, this places an undue burden on the Jefferson Township taxpayers and schools and unjustly shifts responsibility from the state to the local municipality.

Governor, I implore you to review the school funding formula and take the following actions:

- Cut aid proportionally to mirror the decline in student enrollment. Jefferson's enrollment decreased by 29%, yet our state aid has been reduced by 60%.
- Fund special education aid based on actual enrollment. The categorical and equalization aid assumes a district's special education population aligns with the State average of 15.9%; our actual special education population is closer to 20%.

- Increase the base per-pupil cost. The figure is grossly underestimated given inflation and additional costs incurred by school districts today compared to 15 years ago when the formula was first developed. This in no way can provide for a thorough and efficient education.
- Increase the amount provided for special education extraordinary aid.
- ***Provide impact aid to districts affected by the Highlands and Pinelands Acts. With 88% of Jefferson's 42 square miles protected against development, enrollment and ratables are suppressed.***

As a community, we have worked hard to build a beautiful, strong place in which to raise our children and we are asking that their education not be devalued by the State. Our schools are filled with excellent educators who have worked hard, built relationships with our children, and are irreplaceable. The faculty has never given up on our children and programs, and we are asking you not to either.

As the head of our NJ government, you have the power to do the right thing. You inherited a formula that your comptroller said was flawed from the beginning. By taking immediate action you will support all children in the state and prevent a legacy of irreparably harming real lives and communities. Please allow a robust review of the funding formula and provide much-needed fiscal support during the review process so our taxpayers are not shouldering the additional, and disproportionate burden.

Sincerely,

Jefferson Township Resident

Cc: Senator Bucco
 Assemblywoman Dunn
 Assemblyman Barranco
 Senator Gopal
 Senator Turner
 Senator Corrado
 Senator Henry
 Senator McKnight
 Assemblywoman Lampitt
 Assemblywoman Stanley
 Assemblywoman Bagolie
 Assemblywoman Fantasia
 Assemblywoman Matsikoudis
 Assemblywoman Morales
 Assemblyman Schnall
 Assemblyman Simonsen
 Assemblywoman Swain
 Commissioner Dehmer