



Jefferson Township Public Schools

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Mrs. Jeanne Howe, Superintendent of Schools

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Dear Governor Murphy, Senate President Sweeney, and Assembly Speaker Coughlin:

We write on behalf of the 1.4 million students who attend more than 100 school districts that comprise the Support Our Students (SOS) coalition. Every single district in SOS, the children we educate, and the families and communities we serve, have been and will continue to be negatively impacted by the S2 funding formula.

We appreciate the incredible economic strife facing the state and wish to offer a perspective from the SOS districts that were already facing financial crisis before the pandemic hit.

On Saturday, May 9, many SOS member districts joined Senator Sweeney's address to NJSBA and were pleased with the direction you are looking to take all of New Jersey's public schools. Specifically, the Senate President's work in healthcare and finance is critical to preserve our state's stellar education system. As you clearly identified, these two matters remain linked and must be considered in looking at school funding today and in the future. You also mentioned hard-hit S2 districts and shared an understanding of the impact they could face if further cuts are applied to already reduced budgets.

Senate President Sweeney pointed out the challenges schools face with their fiscal year budgeting due to the state's three-month extension of the fiscal year. Specifically, districts were mandated to adopt a budget in May using state aid figures that will most likely change after pandemic revenue projections become clear. The financial impact of the pandemic on education is a new wrinkle in what is already a messy situation. In our hard-hit S2 districts that have already seen reductions for the 20-21 school year, stress runs high over fears of further cuts. At one point during your address, you mentioned the concept of a "flat" approach to State Aid funding. The question in regard to "flat" is in the definition. Would "flat" refer to existing 19-20 funding or the projected funding from February?

It seems highly probable that state aid will be decreased across the board, but how will that work? It's critical that the reductions applied through the S2 funding formula are factored into the process. If not, districts that already have had funding scaled back through S2 will be crushed by additional cuts. Sweeping further reductions would inflict deep and long-term damage to many districts, eventually impeding these districts in their ability to provide the fundamentals of a complete and efficient education. And additional funding cuts would immediately affect some of our most fragile children and families who already might have suffered education losses during remote learning, causing achievement gaps to grow exponentially.



The answer to that question is key and will have a major impact on the financial future for New Jersey's schools. If State Aid is decreased across the board (something that seems very probable), how will it work? No one formula fits all and we are requesting that the reductions applied to many districts through the S2 funding formula are considered in whatever new formula is applied. If not, districts that already have had funding cuts through S2, will be crushed by additional cuts. Sweeping further reductions would cause extreme, long-term damage to many districts, eventually impacting districts' ability to provide the basics for a thorough and efficient education that every child in New Jersey deserves. For example, additional funding cuts would immediately affect some of our most fragile children and families who already may have suffered education losses during remote learning, causing achievement gaps to grow exponentially.

New Jersey's public schools are integral to the fabric of every community, whether rural, urban, shore or suburban. Every district is approaching the crisis with great care and caution, continuing to make those hard decisions due to the unknown financial conditions we are all facing. We implore the Senate to take into account the realities for those districts that were already struggling pre-pandemic and provide hope for a future post-pandemic. Your support and guidance will be much appreciated by the children, families and communities that *together* New Jersey's educators and legislators are committed to serve.

Yours truly,

Jeanne Howe

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