

PISCATAWAY BOARD OF EDUCATION

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To Piscataway School Families:

In recent weeks, you have probably heard about several news articles related to school funding and their impact on the residents of Piscataway. I am writing to let you know what is happening and to clarify the issues behind the headlines. There are three topics that must be addressed.

1. The first is that for many years and for reasons no one in New Jersey can explain, Piscataway has not received its fair share of state aid compared to other similar school districts. Based on New Jersey's funding formula, we should be receiving \$35 million in state aid; instead, we receive \$17 million. This works out to about \$2,357 per student. In order to make up the difference between what the state provides and what it costs to educate a student, Piscataway taxpayers have been paying a disproportionate share of their property taxes for public schools, again compared to surrounding towns. Here is a chart that describes what various towns receive in school aid relative to Piscataway.

District *	2009-10 aid per pupil in dollars from State of NJ
Piscataway	\$ 2,357
Middlesex Boro	\$ 4,374
Old Bridge	\$ 4,963
Plainfield	\$ 13,933
New Brunswick	\$ 14,362

*Data from the NJ Department of Education



Towns that you see missing from this chart include Edison, Woodbridge, and North Brunswick. Like Piscataway, they have also received less than their fair share of state aid over the years. That is why we joined with these districts to lobby our state representatives and the new Governor's administration. And we are asking you to get involved. Visit our website (www.piscatawayschools.org) for additional information, a video, a *Home News Tribune* editorial, and sample letters. We must all work together to ensure that Piscataway taxpayers no longer have an unfair burden while preserving quality education for our children.

2. The second issue is the Governor's directive that state aid we were expecting for the remainder of the school year is frozen. We were told to use Piscataway cash reserves, or what he calls "surplus." Like your household, reserves are what we build up by scrimping and saving and when we have enough, we use it for roof repairs, boiler replacement, and other improvements. We hold a little savings in case of emergency and we also roll over some reserve into next year's school budget in order to provide tax relief.

The recent state directive mandates that we use \$725,000 of reserves to fund the current school year operation. As a result, we have to cut back on projects and will be tightening spending even further in the next few months.

3. The third issue is how to fund next year's school budget. As I said in my first bullet, Piscataway already receives less than 50% of what the state says we are entitled to in state aid. On top of this, school districts have now been told to prepare for a 15% **cut** in state aid for the 2010-11 school year. This would mean a \$2.5 million cut in our educational program. To put this in perspective, here is a sample of what that cut *could* mean:

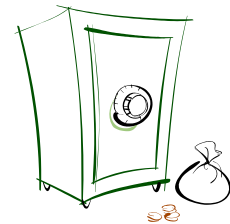
Eliminate Full Day Kindergarten	\$ 1 million
Raise K-8 Class Size to 26 and Cut 12 Teachers	\$900,000
Eliminate entire extracurricular athletic program	\$980,000
Eliminate co-curricular activities	\$345,000
Cutback Instructional and Student Supervision	\$400,000
Curtail Technology	\$250,000



When we originally prepared the 2010-11 school budget that voters will decide this April 20, we eliminated three teaching positions, one supervisor, and athletic, technology and equipment budgets. Unfortunately because of the state not funding Piscataway adequately, this budget contains a proposed tax increase. Make no mistake about it...if the state fully funded Piscataway schools according to its own formula, we could fully fund our educational program, put forth a budget with no tax increase, and provide a REBATE to every homeowner.

Our school district has worked diligently over the past several years to implement cost savings and change the way we do business. Here is a sampling of efficiencies that have resulted.

Special education savings over five years	\$ 4.2 million
Energy savings over three years	\$325,000
Health insurance savings over three years	\$ 1.4 million
Transportation savings over three years	\$1.2 million
Increase in cafeteria revenue	\$250,000



As you can see, we have tried to spend and save carefully. As we move forward, I will keep you posted about the impact the state's proposed actions will have on your child's educational program. In the meantime, please check our Web site for information and express your views to our legislators. Ask them to make sure that Piscataway gets its fair share of state funding and that our students and taxpayers are not left behind.

Sincerely,

Robert L. Copeland
Superintendent of Schools