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The Christie Reform Agenda: Governor Christie's Reforms Build on a Record of Improving Education in New Jersey

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Governor Christie Has Made Education Reform A Top Priority In His Administration's First 8 Months

- Approved seven new charter schools representing the greatest single year increase since 2001. These new additions boost the number of charter schools now operating in New Jersey to 73. The new charter schools carry a combined maximum enrollment of 928 students in 2010-11, increasing the statewide charter school enrollment to 25,570.
- Protected already-underfunded charter schools from further cuts in FY 2010-2011 budget.
- Called for one-year salary freeze and 1.5% health benefits contribution, provides path forward for school districts to protect New Jersey school children, prevent layoffs and program cuts
- Signed (S-920) legislation to encourage public-private partnerships for higher education institutions.
- Unveiled a proposal to cap and reform school administrators' salaries.
- Signed A-355/S-1073 establishing a permanent Interdistrict Public School Choice Program.
- Approved \$270 Million in facilities grants for school districts with more than 175 Regular Operating Districts statewide eligible for partial state funding of 740 projects.
- \$45.3 million in School Improvement Grants Targeted to improve schools and opportunities for thousands of urban children.
- Announced nearly \$16 million in state funds for 25 Vocational School District Facilities Projects.
- Offered plan to provide additional state aid to school districts that adopt salary freeze.
- Ordered and directed the creation of the New Jersey Higher Education Task Force.
- Outlined additional reform measures to challenge New Jersey's public education system to deliver results for children and parents.
- Giving All Children the Same Hope and Opportunity that Comes from a Top-Notch Education
 - Attract the Nation's Best Charter School Operators to New Jersey
 - Increase Charter School Authorizing Capacity
 - Promote Charter Best Practices
 - Spur Charter Innovation and Creativity
 - Provide for Greater Equity Between Traditional Public and Charter Public Schools.
- Giving Children and Parents Hope by Aggressively and Immediately Implementing Interdistrict School Choice Law
- Provide Rapid Relief for Children in Failing Schools by Urging the Legislature to Immediately Act on the Bipartisan Opportunity Scholarship Act
- Announced a partnership with Newark Mayor Cory Booker and Facebook Founder and CEO Mark Zuckerberg to support education reform in the Newark Public School System with a \$100 million challenge grant
- Along with Geoffrey Canada, president and CEO of the Harlem Children's Zone in Harlem, New York, holds a town hall discussion on education reform.
- Announced that administration is moving forward with a comprehensive plan to enact fiscal discipline and promote the prudent use of scarce property tax dollars by capping salaries for superintendents. The regulations, announced in July, will result in a salary reduction for more than 360 school superintendents who serve school districts with low numbers of students.

Governor Christie Continues His Push To Strengthen Schools And Education In New

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Jersey

- "We cannot continue to ask children and families stuck in chronically failing public schools to wait any longer. Quite simply, parents and children deserve a choice," said Governor Christie. "We must be able to fulfill our obligation to provide parents and their children with educational alternatives that include expanding high quality charter schools and providing interdistrict public school options. By giving parents the power of choice, we are ensuring that students will have the opportunities they deserve for a bright and successful future." (The Christie Reform Agenda: Education is the Civil Rights Issue Today, 9/30/2010)
- "We will do many good things for charter schools. In fact, I've held charter schools harmless in this budget because you already pay enough," he told more than 250 charter school educators. "There are going to be more charter schools a year from now than there are today." (MaryAnn Spoto, "N.J. Gov. Chris Christie leaves charter school budget untouched," The Star-Ledger, 3/18/2010)
- "You are the masters of doing more with less because you have been consistently underfunded by the statute that was passed to establish you," Christie said of charter schools. "...This is a fight worth having and I'm doing what I know is right," Christie said. "New Jerseyans are hard workers who speak loudly and care deeply. It's about time you've had some leadership to match." (Kimberly Steinberg, "Christie puts state's support behind charter schools," Atlanticville, 3/25/2010)
- "We want to have a robust public inter-district choice program so that those districts that are succeeding are encouraged and incentivized to allow children from failing districts to come there because the bottom line is we want all types of choice for folks." (Governor Chris Christie at the American Federation of Children National Policy Summit Dinner in Washington, D.C. on Monday, May 3, 2010)
- "Our basic principle is this, and I know this is yours, parents and children deserve a choice. Now this is a very, very simple straight forward principle that you would think in the abstract, that none can disagree with. But let's not stop there, let's add the layer to it, that parents and children who are being failed by a public school system whose cost are exuberant, and whose results are insulting, deserve a choice." (Governor Chris Christie at the American Federation of Children National Policy Summit Dinner in Washington, D.C. on Monday, May 3, 2010)

Students deserve high-quality and accountable teachers; teachers deserve to be rewarded for excellent achievement in the classroom.

- "Merit pay, tenure reform, greater teacher accountability – they are all part of Gov. Chris Christie's promises for improving public education in New Jersey." (John Mooney, "School reforms can't proceed without data," The Star-Ledger, 5/11/2010)
- "I believe that merit pay has to go to individual teachers. I believe that if there are layoffs, that those layoffs should be based upon merit and not based upon seniority..." (Teacher union fumes as Governor Christie ties performance pay to bid for \$400 million grant, Associated Press, 6/2/2010)
- On education, he said he wants to change the tenure system and reiterated his support for teacher pay based on student performance. (Matt Friedman, "Gov. Christie pushes reform agenda for N.J. ethics rules, pension and health benefits," NJ.com, 9/8/2010)
- Among the ideas the governor is pushing is paying for teachers based on their performance. ("Christie Slams N.J. Teacher Union, Calls For Ed. Reform," CBS-2 New York, 9/7/2010)
- As an example of the need for education reform, he pointed at Newark, spending \$24,000 per student – mostly state funded per the Abbott ruling – yet has a 50 percent dropout rate. He pitched a new teacher merit pay system, among other things. (Timothy J. Carroll, "Christie reform: 'cleaning up the empties,'" PolitickerNJ, 9/7/2010)
- ...He called for paying teachers partly based on how well their students perform. The idea is to hold educators accountable... (Geoff Mulvihill, "NJ governor says he'll start laying out reforms," Associated Press, 9/7/2010)

Restoring fiscal discipline and further ending the abuse of property tax dollars, capping salaries for superintendents keeps money in the classroom where it belongs.

- "In these difficult economic times, when fewer resources are available for our schools, it is not acceptable for superintendents in districts with fewer than 1,000 students to be paid salaries of \$150,000 and greater," said Governor Christie. "Capping pay to reasonable levels is a commonsense initiative that will end abuses that have been permitted for too long at the expense of our children's education. By bringing superintendent salaries in-line with district needs, we will be able to save millions in tax dollars and put that money back where it belongs – in the classrooms." (Christie Administration Acts on Superintendent Pay Cap Reforms to Put Students First, 11/1/2010)

Reforming higher education is vital to creating jobs and spurring economic growth.

- "New Jersey's higher education institutions must be given the necessary tools to plan their growth through creative and responsible arrangements that do not leave the funding burden solely on institution budgets," said Governor Christie. "Public-private partnerships are a key mechanism to provide that flexibility and accommodate growth in our state and county colleges, while creating jobs and spurring economic growth. The legislation signed today provides needed tools that will be critical to maintaining our colleges' status as world-class learning centers." (Governor Christie Signs Legislation to Encourage Public-Private Partnerships for Higher Education Institutions, 5/5/2010)
- "To compete and be prosperous in this 21st century economy, we must have a system of higher education that keeps up with the demands of today's changing marketplace," Governor Christie said. "New Jersey's institutions of higher learning are critically important to the economic growth of our state and must be afforded the necessary tools to stay competitive." (Governor Christie Takes First Steps Toward Long-Term Higher Education Reform by Creating New Jersey Higher Education Task Force, 5/7/2010)

The Governor's bold reforms have garnered considerable attention of opinion makers in New Jersey and around the country.

- “Educational reform is one of the few issues in the galaxy that can bring the political agendas of President Obama, Gov. Chris Christie and Newark Mayor Cory Booker into near-perfect alignment. There’s a common vision and growing bipartisan support behind the reforms outlined by the Republican governor this week — like paying teachers based on merit, and weeding out the ones who are incompetent. Christie wants to blow up the existing salary guides, those monuments to an antiquated system in which competence in the classroom means nothing. Instead of basing pay on seniority or accumulated degrees, Christie wants to focus on merit. He also wants to get rid of the bad teachers by removing tenure protections. The idea that a terrible teacher should go on teaching forever is just nuts...But give the governor credit for this launch. He has put the discussion where it belongs — on student performance. That is a healthy starting point for reform.” (“New deal for teachers: Support is bipartisan for merit pay, ending tenure,” Star-Ledger Editorial Board, 9/30/2010)
- “Christie vows to proceed with the changes he wants anyway. That could be good since some of his ideas are more in line with the reforms that the Obama administration wants to make to improve public education, including linking teachers’ pay to student performance and making it easier to fire bad teachers. The plan would also eliminate seniority and use teacher effectiveness to make job cuts. Those are much-needed steps to improve failing schools and hold educators accountable for student achievement. It means rewarding the best teachers and principals.” (“Editorial: There’s a better way,” Inquirer, 6/5/2010)
- “...we agree with Governor Christie’s move to cap superintendent salaries at \$175,000 annually, plus up to a 15 percent merit bonus. New Jersey property taxes are the highest in the nation, and school levies are the biggest slice of the pie. Compensation for top school brass has exploded since tenure protections for superintendents were eliminated two decades ago, creating a class of high-paid free agents. To remain competitive, local Boards of Education have been digging deep — too deep — into taxpayers’ pockets to lure administrators to town. Caps can even the playing field.” (“Days of thunder,” The Record, 11/18/2010)
- “...we think this is the sort of tight cost-control undertaking that taxed-out New Jerseyans have long desired. It’s part of why they elected Chris Christie governor. If this cap does as it should and brings down district-level administrative costs across the board in this state, then the cap rules will indeed be serving their purpose. It is a harsh mandate but one that years of unchecked spending have now made a necessity. The pendulum is, after years of swinging one way, perhaps finally swinging back in the other direction now — toward taxpayers.” (“Don’t limit pay caps to superintendents,” Courier-Post, 11/9/2010)
- “What he is doing is what government should be doing - freeing the citizenry to decide for themselves and forcing marginal or poor schools to heed their “customer base” or “go out of business”. The message is market based but aimed at government run education - “the free ride is over”. Christie points out that in Newark, NJ, taxpayers pay \$24,000 per pupil per year. So in a class of 20 you have almost a half a million dollars spent. I’d like to say “invested” but it’s hard to do with a system Christie characterized as an “absolutely disgraceful public education system.” So cheers to Christie.” (Bruce McQuain, “Speaking truth to power – New Jersey style,” Washington Examiner, 6/4/2010)
- “There is no easy and neat way to rein in property taxes in New Jersey. If there was, previous governors would have done it. Besides his so-called tool kit reform package, Gov. Chris Christie is trying to get a handle on the mess by taking unilateral action whenever he can with the best example of that being a \$175,000 a year cap on superintendents’ pay. That takes effect on Feb. 7...the superintendents’ cap is necessary because it’s an attempt to get public education spending under control. If one lowers the salary of the superintendent, the salaries of other administrators may be reduced over time...For school boards, it should mean recognizing the value of showing fiscal restraint when state aid is down and when employees in many districts were laid off this year. One district realizing that is Dover, where school board President Susan Shauer said circumventing the cap “doesn’t seem like the right thing to do.” So there will be no new contract in advance of the cap for superintendent Robert Becker. Good for Dover.” (“Getting around Christie’s Cap; It may be legal, but it’s not right,” Daily Record, 11/18/2010)
- “...Areas in which Christie insists he has no intention of compromising — like merit pay and abolishing seniority-based layoffs...The governor said he was so committed to the items on his reform agenda that “they should not be compromised to achieve a contrived consensus among the various affected special-interest groups.” Good for him... But it’s refreshing to see a politician who not only understands the need for serious education reform but is wholly committed to it — in action as well as words. Well done, governor.” (“Grade-A governor,” New York Post, 6/6/2010)
- “The Christie administration has taken another step that shows he’s serious about changing public education. Proposed salary caps published last week would limit how much school districts can pay their top administrators. No more lucrative salary packages that taxpayers can’t afford, or bonuses that cannot be justified. Gov. Christie calls it restoring fiscal “sanity,” but reality might be a better word to describe the situation. Districts must find ways to cope with less funding under the state’s new 2 percent cap on property-tax increases. But the salary caps for administrators can be good news for students, if the \$9.8 million saved annually as a result is pumped back into classrooms.” (“Super-sized salaries,” Inquirer Editorial, 11/8/2010)
- “We need children to thrive in every one of our neighborhood public schools. That tough job will be done by teachers, not bureaucrats. Leadership is a tricky thing, and diagnosing problems and hypothesizing about big-picture improvements are a lot easier than actually improving education. The governor has made good headway on superintendent pay, with new caps and bonuses based on merit. Perhaps that can serve as a way forward on merit pay for teachers.” (“Race is on,” The Record, 8/1/2010)
- “The incredible salaries paid to school superintendents in New Jersey have always troubled us. How do they do it? How do these superintendents or prospective superintendents convince school boards to pay them such big bucks? Many superintendent salaries in Atlantic, Cape May, Cumberland and Ocean counties hover around \$200,000. In northern New Jersey, the salaries are even higher. Why do the school boards agree to these sums?...And the problem, of course, is not just the salaries, but the pensions that these superintendents walk away with based on

those salaries...And this week, after the Parsippany school board - again, why? - tried to circumvent the coming cap and give its superintendent a contract extension that would pay him an average salary of \$225,064 a year over the next five years, Christie cracked down again...Christie called the deal that Parsippany Superintendent LeRoy Seitz tried to get "the definition of greed and arrogance"...The caps will be a big help. More than half the state's school superintendents could see their salaries cut at the end of their current contracts because of the caps. Statewide, the savings are estimated at \$9.8 million. That's money that could make a big difference in the classroom (which superintendents rarely visit) ... or in taxpayers' pockets." ("School superintendent salaries / Relief at least," Press of Atlantic City, 11/19/2010)

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