

Governor Christie Takes Historic Legal Action to Improve Public Education

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Tags: [Education](#)

Trenton, NJ – Governor Chris Christie directed the Office of the Attorney General to file a historic legal action with the state Supreme Court today to clear statutory and contractual impediments that have interfered with New Jersey's maintenance of a "thorough and efficient system of free public schools," as required under the state constitution.

This legal action asks that the Commissioner of the Department of Education be given the authority to set aside unconstitutional impediments posed by state laws and labor agreements in order to hire and retain the best teaching staff available for New Jersey's poorest and lowest-achieving school districts. The action seeks to reopen the 30-year-old case of *Abbott v. Burke*, which has yielded a series of rulings by the Supreme Court designed to improve educational programs for children in our neediest districts and resulting in ever-increasing contributions of taxpayer funds to those districts.

"We've tried it for 30 years. What we know now is, more money alone does not translate into a better education. Better teaching methods, more instruction time and improved educational programs make the difference, and we cannot in good conscience fail another generation of children living in the Garden State's poorest school districts by denying them access to a proper education that is delivered by eager and capable teachers. This situation must change," said Governor Christie.

The differences in per-pupil spending of state aid in what are known as the "School Development Authority" or "SDA" districts is now triple and even five times more than the state aid provided per-pupil in other districts.

New Jersey has spent nearly \$100 billion in tax revenue on the 31 targeted districts since 1985, yet the students in those school districts continue to perform far below state education standards and the other districts in the rest of the state. Students in these districts also have lower graduation rates, and many of their graduates require costly remedial courses before attending college.

"It would be criminal to allow this situation to continue," said Governor Christie.

Today's legal filings ([linked here](#) and [here](#)) seek to allow the Commissioner of Education to bypass – when necessary to maintain a thorough and efficient system of public schools – laws and collective negotiation agreements that prevent school districts from rewarding and retaining their best teachers, dismissing under-performing instructors, introducing improved educational programs and extending the amount of time students are in class and being taught by teachers.

Additionally, today's legal action seeks to hold state funding for SDA districts at current levels, while the legislative and executive branches enact a new system for funding education that is fair and constitutionally sound.

"While advocating my Fairness Formula over the past few months, I have noted that we can no longer tolerate a tenure law that places seniority above effectiveness, or tolerate limits on teaching time that restrict teachers to less than five hours of a seven-hour school day in districts where our students most need quality teachers and intensive instruction," Governor Christie said. "These are obstacles to a quality education and should be removed. Increased funding should be tied to outcomes, and obstructive laws and contracts must yield to the state's moral and legal obligation to provide all students across the state with the best education possible."

Governor Christie, through his Fairness Formula, has proposed equalizing the per-pupil state spending in New Jersey. He has been conducting a series of town hall meetings on his plan, and he will travel today to the Bayville section of

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Berkeley Township to host a Town Hall on The Fairness Formula.

See the details at <http://nj.gov/governor/taxrelief/>.

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Transcript:

Governor Christie: If money equaled success, Newark would be the greatest school system in New Jersey, because it's been more well-funded than any school system anywhere in the state. So you can continue to be part of the old orthodoxy, I understand that. You know, go across the street, you know, talk to those cats. I'm sure they'll tell you that give me more money, and they'll give you even this much better. But go and talk to parents in neighborhoods in Newark and ask them, ask them why they're flocking to charter schools in the thousands. Answer the question as to why our growth in charter schools across the state has been based upon enormous demand in our urban centers, which we're not even close to meeting yet, because those parents want to vote with their feet. So I just continue to reject the premise of your question, which is that more money equals better results. It simply doesn't. It doesn't, John. And I don't know how many more years we're going to have to spend more money until I can convince guys like you and others that more money doesn't equal better results. Competition will equal better results, longer school day, longer school year, getting rid of these work rules, getting rid of last in and first out. Getting rid of all these things that impedes student progress are as important, if not more important than just continuing to pour more money into the system.

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