



Governor Chris Christie Calls on School Districts and Education Associations to Work Together to Protect Children and Prevent Property Tax Increases

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Trenton, NJ – In a letter distributed today, Governor Chris Christie called on local school districts and education associations to come to the table to work together in finding cost savings and new efficiencies, spending reductions, and budget solutions that protect education in the classroom and prevent property tax increases.

"While the budget challenges for school districts across the state are significant, they are not insurmountable. Achieving the needed savings and finding budgetary stability will require all parties to step up, pitch in, and work toward the common goal of protecting our educational priorities," said Governor Chris Christie. "I'm confident this middle road can be found if school districts and local education associations come to the table, find common ground, and act quickly to find the difficult, but needed savings in these budgets."

Through the Department of Education, Governor Christie has already directed the Executive County Superintendents to exercise their authority to closely examine school district budgets that have been submitted in order to identify and disapprove excessive administrative spending and budgeted expenditures that are not essential to education.

"In these difficult economic times, we cannot afford to overlook savings that can be achieved through reductions in administrative and non-educational spending. The Executive County Superintendents, in cooperation with Commissioner Schundler, will be working with school districts to achieve savings in those areas first," added Governor Christie.

In addition to cutting spending that is not essential to education, Governor Christie called on school boards and local education associations to act on the following cost-savings initiatives prior to April 3, the final date by which all school boards must have their budgets adopted:

- Implementing a salary freeze for fiscal year 2011 in all collective bargaining agreements;
- Requiring that school district employees make contributions to their health benefits that equal those required of State employees under the New Jersey State Health Benefits Program.

These are the types of concessions and shared sacrifice being asked of all public employees. Senate Bill 3, signed into law yesterday, requires a minimum contribution to health benefits no later than upon the expiration of all public employee contracts. The new law will save local taxpayers an estimated \$314 million in the coming fiscal year. By extending a similar contribution requirement to all public employees, including those covered by existing contracts, additional savings can be achieved and, together with a one year salary freeze, mitigate any anticipated property tax increases and avert cuts to classroom instruction.

Additionally, Governor Christie has instructed Education Commissioner Schundler to issue guidelines to each school district to implement this call to action. These guidelines will provide a framework for districts and bargaining units to work together, find common ground, and identify the needed reform and savings to protect the quality of education for New Jersey children.

A PDF of the Governor's letter can be found as an attachment to this release.

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