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Acting Governor Kim Guadagno Makes Appointments To The New Jersey Education Funding Task Force

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Trenton, NJ – Taking steps to ensure a common sense approach to New Jersey’s system of education funding and to root out abuse and fraud, Acting Governor Kim Guadagno today named seven representatives from the public and private sectors as members of the New Jersey Education Funding Task Force. Created by Executive Order in March, the Task Force will evaluate the effectiveness of the Free and Reduced Price School Lunch Program as a proxy for measuring “at risk” students and, more broadly, make recommendations to address areas of the school funding formula that may be subject to manipulation, fraud, or distortion, including municipal tax abatement programs.

“I thank these qualified individuals for taking on this challenge and working on an issue that is critical to improving education for children in every part of our state,” said Acting Governor Guadagno. “The Education Funding Task Force will evaluate the use of the Free and Reduced Price School Lunch Program as a measure for ‘at-risk’ students, explore the viability of alternative measures, and generally provide recommendations to address aspects of the school funding formula that are susceptible to fraud and abuse. By finally taking a look at these critical issues, we will ensure that education dollars are distributed in a fairer and more equitable manner for every child in New Jersey.”

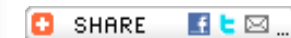
The New Jersey Education Funding Task Force will be chaired by Secretary of Higher Education **Rochelle Hendricks (Fair Haven, Monmouth)**, who previously served as Acting Commissioner of Education and will include: Common Sense Institute of New Jersey President and former Randolph Board of Education President **Jerry W. Cantrell (Randolph, Morris)**; Former Paterson Public Schools Director of Early Childhood Education **Anna Lugo DeMolli, Ed.D. (Little Falls, Passaic)**; Fort Lee Public Schools Interim Superintendent **Steven Engravalle (Howell, Monmouth)**; Stern & Kilcullen Partner **John P. Inglesino, Esq. (Rockaway, Morris)**; St. Benedict’s Prep

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Headmaster and Essex County Vocational and Technical Schools Board President **Rev. Edwin D. Leahy, O.S.B. (Newark, Essex)**; and Former Absecon City Councilmember **Charles Urban (Absecon, Atlantic)**.

These direct appointments do not require Senate confirmation and each member will serve without compensation. The Task Force will issue a final report to Governor Christie outlining its recommendations within 120 days after organizing and will expire after issuing their report.

Currently, the School Funding Reform Act (SFRA) distributes greater amounts of school aid to districts serving greater numbers of students who are economically at-risk and districts with less property wealth. The participation in the federal Free and Reduced Price Lunch Program serves as the proxy for classifying and counting economically at-risk students. Recent high levels of fraudulent enrollment in the program, which undercut the state's ability to fairly and appropriately determine aid levels for schools, have been reported. A 2011 report by the State Auditor found that as many as 37 percent of the students in the program are enrolled fraudulently.

The Task Force is specifically charged with considering the following issues and providing recommendations to Governor Christie on:

- Economically effective measures of student poverty;
- Educationally sound measures of defining at-risk students;
- Appropriate adjustments to the SFRA to account for municipal property ratable bases that may be artificially deflated as a result of municipal property tax abatements;
- Identifying all aspects of the SFRA that may be susceptible to fraud, or subject to undue outside manipulation and recommendations to address these abuses; and
- All other such matters as may be referred to the Task Force by the Governor.

The Department of Education's Education Funding Report first called for this Task Force in February, in a recommendation aimed at exploring the use of a new measure for at-risk students in place of participation in the Free and Reduced Price Lunch Program. The funding report outlined a series of common sense measures to improve the school funding formula and to help close the state's persistent achievement gap by making education funding more closely follow the child.

The Education Funding Task Force was created by Executive Order No. 89.

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