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## "Education Reform Has Waited Long Enough"

Thursday, March 15, 2012 • Tags: [Education](#)

The Legislature Must Take Action To Ensure That Every New Jersey Child Receives A High Quality Education

"These are not radical reforms; they are common sense. They are not rash; they are long overdue. And they are not luxuries which can afford to languish for another six months or another year; they are essential for New Jersey's success. I have a message that is not from me, but from the single mom in Newark, and the struggling parents in Camden, as well as the employers in our state: education reform has waited long enough."

– Governor Chris Christie, State Of The State Address, January, 17, 2012

### IMPORTANT REFORM TO FIX NEW JERSEY'S BROKEN EDUCATION SYSTEM AWAITS LEGISLATIVE ACTION

The School Children First Act

S-2881 Introduced in the Senate: 5/19/11; A-4168 Introduced in the Assembly: 6/23/11

The quality of the teacher in front of the classroom is the most important in-school factor affecting student achievement. New Jersey must establish a system that rewards the many quality educators in our state, provide support to those who need improvement, and, when necessary, remove those who are unable to improve.

Modeled after Governor Christie's proposals, The School Children First Act reforms the rules for teacher evaluation, tenure and compensation to ensure that teachers and schools are held accountable for student progress while rewarding excellence:

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- **Evaluating Teacher Effectiveness:** This bill establishes an evaluation system for teachers based on multiple performance measures:
  - There will be four annual rating categories: ineffective, partially effective, effective, and highly effective.
  - Teacher evaluations will be based in part on classroom observation by trained professionals.
  - 50 percent of the evaluations will also be based on objective, quantifiable measures of student learning.
  - Struggling teachers will be provided meaningful opportunity to improve before receiving an ineffective rating.
  - This evaluation system will be used in making decisions such as compensation and the awarding of tenure.
- **Tenure Based On Effectiveness:** The bill will change the state's antiquated tenure rules so that teachers will keep or receive tenure based on what matters the most – whether students are actually learning.
  - Teachers will earn tenure if they are rated effective or highly-effective for three years in a row.
  - A teacher will lose tenure if they are rated ineffective and may be subject to dismissal by either the board of education or the school principal.
- **Compensation Based On Need:** The bill requires school districts to adopt a compensation policy designed to attract and retain effective teachers, especially in New Jersey's most challenging schools and fields.
  - Teaching in a failing school and teaching in a difficult to staff subject area will be factors that determine a teacher's compensation.
- **Protecting Quality Teachers:** The bill also stipulates that teacher layoffs must take into account effectiveness rather than relying solely on seniority, ensuring that New Jersey public schools retain the best teachers.
- **End Forced Placement:** A teacher will no longer be assigned to a school without the mutual consent of the teacher and principal of the school.
  - If a principal does not consent, the teacher may continue to receive compensation as they continue to search for a mutually agreeable placement.
  - If such a placement is not found after 12 months, the teacher may be placed on permanent unpaid leave.

Governor Christie: "Let's talk first about what this issue really is and what it isn't. This is not an issue about attacking teachers. This is not an issue about saying teachers are bad and need to be thrown out of schools. This is, in fact, exactly the opposite. This issue is about first and foremost our children and how much those teachers who really are good and really care about education, how they can be empowered to teach those children and prepare them better for higher education or for a career."

### **The Opportunity Scholarship Act**

S-1872 Introduced in the Senate: 5/10/10; A-2810 Introduced in the Assembly: 6/10/10

Every child deserves a high-quality education, but too often, low-income and lower middle-income children are trapped in failing schools. The Opportunity Scholarship Act will help thousands of children escape their chronically failing schools by establishing a tax credit program to fund scholarships for low-income students in the state's lowest performing public schools. The scholarships will enable students to attend out-of-district public schools, or non-public schools anywhere in the state that choose to participate in the program.

- The bill establishes a five-year pilot program to provide tax credits to entities contributing to scholarships for certain low-income students in districts with chronically failing schools.
- The bill defines a chronically failing school as one in which, for the past two school years:
  - More than 40% of the students did not pass the language arts and math subject areas of State assessments;
  - Or more than 65% of students did not pass either the language arts or mathematics subject areas.
- The bill also establishes a five-year Educational Innovation Pilot Program in the Department of Education, under which the DOE will award competitive grants to chronically failing schools to implement innovative educational programs.

Governor Christie: “I will sign this Legislation if it reaches my desk. It is just that important. It’s about parental choice it’s about parents having the opportunity to choose what’s best for their child regardless of their economic circumstances or their zip code. Now I don’t know who could be opposed to that.”

### **Charter Reform Bill**

A-4167 Introduced in the Assembly: 6/23/11

Sweeping changes to New Jersey’s charter school laws are needed to remove barriers and roadblocks to the growth of high-quality charter schools. The current laws and rules governing charter schools act as a deterrent to growth instead of fostering expansion. It is time to aggressively encourage some of the nation’s most-respected and successful charter school operators to come to New Jersey while making it possible to implement the same model of innovation and results in other new and existing charter schools.

The Charter Reform bill will encourage greater expansion and innovation of high-quality charter schools:

- Permitting public higher education institutions as well as local boards of education to act as charter school authorizers.
  - These authorizers will also be responsible for soliciting, approving, overseeing and evaluating charter schools.
- Expanding the list of entities that may establish a charter school, including private for-profit operators.
- Permitting local boards of education to convert a district school to a charter school, and the commissioner to convert a failing public school to a charter school.
- If the charter school founder has been designated a “high performing charter school,” or if the charter school founder is designated as an “approved operator” their application will be eligible for a streamlined application process.
- The bill also makes several changes to help charter schools succeed:
  - Eliminates the requirement that all teachers and support staff at a charter school hold the appropriate New Jersey certification;
  - Extends the limited length of charter school renewals;
  - Gives charter schools the right of first refusal to purchase or lease at or below fair market value a closed public school facility or property.

Governor Christie: “It is not acceptable that a child who is neglected in a New Jersey school must accept it because of their zip code. Charter schools give parents and children a choice and provide a much-needed alternative to help ensure every child in New Jersey receives a quality education. We cannot ask children and families that have been relegated to failing public schools to wait any longer for relief while their hope is stolen away.”

## **NEW JERSEY HAS ALREADY TAKEN THE FIRST STEP TOWARD EDUCATION REFORM WITH THE PASSAGE OF THE URBAN HOPE ACT**

Newark Mayor Cory Booker: “I am in full support of the Urban Hope Act, which will provide for additional learning space and new, high quality public school options for Newark’s young people. The Act offers much needed relief in parts of our district that have experienced chronic overcrowding, and will inject new energy, resources, ideas and learning models into our school system.” (“Statement Of Support On Urban Hope Act - Mayor Cory A. Booker,” Press Release, 1/9/12)

Camden Mayor Dana Redd: “For far too long, our urban youth have struggled to break through the achievement barriers found in the chronically failing schools in urban communities like Camden. This Transformation Schools initiative will give these students and their parents renewed hope, access to quality educational opportunities and the ability to reach their potential for a productive and successful future.” (“Governor Chris Christie Announces Innovative Transformation Schools Initiative,” Press Release, 6/9/11)

Sen. Donald Norcross (D-Camden/Gloucester): “Students in Camden, Newark and Trenton are being forced to attend failing schools where they are deprived of the quality education they deserve ... It is our responsibility to provide them with access to better educational options. With school construction projects at a standstill and alternative educational opportunities out of reach for so many, this allows local school districts to partner with nonprofits to provide new hope to our children for success.” (Trish Graber, “Norcross, Fuentes, Wilson-Sponsored ‘Urban Hope Act’ Heads To Governor,” PolitickerNJ, 1/9/12)

Sen. Robert W. Singer (R-Ocean County): “Republican State Sen. Robert W. Singer of Ocean County said he hoped the program was eventually expanded to Lakewood, his home town. He noted an Asbury Park Press article that highlighted the fact that only 37 percent of Lakewood High School students graduate.” (Jason Method, “School election changes, private-public schools OK’d by Legislature,” Asbury Park Press, 1/10/11)

Assemblyman Angel Fuentes (D-Camden/Gloucester): “The fact that thousands of students in our state are trapped in failing schools is shameful ... It is incumbent upon us as public officials to do everything we can to provide them access to good schools in their communities that will give them the skills they need to be successful in college or in the workforce. With construction of schools in these cities stalled, this bill creates a mechanism to allow for new projects to go forward with the use of private funding.” (Trish Graber, “Norcross, Fuentes, Wilson-Sponsored ‘Urban Hope Act’ Heads To Governor,” PolitickerNJ, 1/9/12)

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