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## NJDOE News

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### **Department of Education Submits [Second Biennial Report to Legislature](#) *Recommends Increased Per-Pupil Funding Amounts for Thorough and Efficient Education for the 2001-2002 School Year***

The Department of Education has submitted its second biennial report to the state Legislature recommending increased per-pupil spending and funding amounts for the 2001-2002 school year. The report recommends the greatest level of per-pupil increases for children in elementary school and in special education programs. The report is required by the Comprehensive Educational Improvement and Financing Act and it is intended to allow the executive and legislative branches time to consider and discuss in advance the per-pupil costs on which state aid in the 2001-2002 school year is based. The first biennial report was submitted to the Legislature in 1998.

"The report recognizes the need to provide the greatest possible amount of financial support for educational programs that benefit children," said Commissioner of Education David Hespe. "With the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century upon us we must do all we can to provide a bright and successful future for our children.

"Also, increasing the recommended per pupil expenditures would benefit local taxpayers through a greater level of state support for education," he said.

"The greatest recommended per-pupil increase was for elementary schools," continued Hespe. "Research has shown that smaller class sizes result in better performance from our youngest children. Therefore, we lowered class sizes, upon which funding is based, from 21-18. We also increased expenditures for foreign language instruction to allow for at least one full period of instruction per week for each class. In addition, expenditures at the elementary level were increased to allow for one period of prep time each day for all elementary teachers."

"We have also heard the concerns of school districts and parents about the level of special education funding and therefore we have recommended substantial increases in the per-pupil amounts for the children who need these very important programs."

The latest report recommends regular education per-pupil spending amounts of \$3957 for Kindergarten, \$7913 for elementary schools, \$8195 for middle schools and \$8782 for high schools in the 2001-2002 school year. The per-pupil amounts in the current school year are \$3541 in Kindergarten, \$7083 in elementary school, \$7933 in middle school and \$8500 in high school.

In the area of special education the report also recommends increases in all four of the funding "tiers," in the 2001-2002 school year. It is recommended that Tier 1 be increased from \$300 per-pupil this year to \$315 per-pupil in 2001-2002. Also, Tier 2 would be increased from \$3155 to \$3260. Tier 3 would rise from \$4207 to \$6607 and Tier 4 would rise from \$12,620 to \$13,037. The funding for each of the tiers is based on the resources necessary to provide the services for children in varying degrees of classifications. The children in Tier 4 require the most intensive special education services.

The per-pupil amounts recommended in this new report represent the Department of Education's recommendations. Under CEIFA, these amounts are deemed approved unless the Legislature by October 15, 2000 adopts a concurrent resolution requesting amendments. If the Legislature requests changes, the Department of Education must recommend the final amounts by December 1, 2000. These final per-pupil costs will be increased by the rate of inflation for 2002-2003.

"The biennial report gives the Department of Education an opportunity to review and adjust the current per-pupil amounts to reflect the changing needs of school districts and children," said Hespe. "It is our hope that this process also aids school districts in their future planning."

It is important to note that these are only recommendations and can be adjusted by the Legislature. Also, these per-pupil amounts cannot be used reliably at this time to compute school aid for the 2001-2002 school year. Other information that will not be available until next fall, such as changes in districts' wealth and enrollments, is also needed to determine actual aid amounts.

The report's recommendations are not intended to apply to the Abbott school districts, the funding levels of which

are determined by parity with the per-pupil spending amounts of the DFG I&J school districts.

In addition to regular education spending ranges, the Biennial Report also recommends per-pupil state aid amounts for the various other categories of educational funding such as early childhood programs, demonstrably effective programs, special education, bilingual education, transportation, the creation of distance learning networks, county vocational schools aid, and adult and post-secondary education aid.