



## **Christie Administration Announces Highest Levels of K-12 State Aid Funding in New Jersey History**

***Funding Reflects a Continued Commitment to Public Education in New Jersey***

**For Immediate Release**

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**Trenton, NJ** - Demonstrating the Christie Administration's continued commitment for supporting public education in New Jersey, state aid figures for districts based on the proposed Fiscal Year 2014 Budget released today represents the largest appropriation of K-12 education dollars in the state's history. The Governor's proposed budget includes nearly \$9 billion in state aid, an increase of \$97.3 million over Fiscal Year 2013.

"Throughout my time in office I have continuously argued that in order to grow New Jersey's economy we must invest in education, and my proposed budget is a reflection of my commitment to our educational system and communities across the state," said Governor Christie. "However, even as we continue to fund education at the highest levels in state history, we must remain willing to reflect on how we are spending our money and work towards solutions that make every dollar we invest count."

The \$97.3 million increase in education aid is the third year in a row of increases in education funding. On average, districts across the state will receive an increase of \$75 per pupil. All districts will receive an increase in K-12 formula aid or maintain flat funding from the previous school year.

"New Jersey ranks in the top three in the country with its per-pupil spending on public education and this year's proposed budget continues that trend," said Commissioner Cerf. "But it takes more than money to provide an effective education and we will continue to focus on ways to support our educators, districts and schools in order to ensure all of our students receive a high-quality education that prepares them for the expectations of college and careers in the 21st century."

Governor Christie's proposed budget also includes several new aid categories designed to provide additional funds to districts and students:

### The Education Innovation Fund

As part of Governor Christie's continued commitment to creating high quality school options for all students, the budget provides \$5 million for an Education Innovation Fund to incent innovation and reward success. The Fund will be used in two ways. First, a portion will be used to provide financial awards to schools and districts that have addressed achievement challenges. For example, awards might be given to the elementary school that achieved the biggest one year increase in third grade literacy for disadvantaged students, the district with the largest improvement in its attendance rate, or the high school with the biggest jump in its graduation rate.

The remaining portion of the fund would provide resources to districts and schools that develop innovative solutions to address defined problem areas, such as low graduation rates, poor-performing special education students, or low scores in fourth grade mathematics. The Department would fund the best reforms and monitor their implementation and impact, ultimately identifying and bringing the most efficacious to scale statewide.

### Funding For Opportunity Scholarship Grants

Acting on his belief that every New Jersey child deserves a high quality education regardless of zip code, Governor Christie's proposed budget includes \$2 million for scholarship grants to allow children in chronically failing schools to attend alternate educational placements. This pilot program will help fill the gap and create opportunities for children with no other options.

### Under-Adequacy Aid

The Governor's budget includes a new category of aid to benefit districts that are currently 10% or more below their adequacy budget. Approximately \$16.8 million will be distributed to 131 districts across the state with districts receiving an average of approximately \$128,000 each. Awards are capped at \$500,000 for each eligible district.

### Supplemental Enrollment Growth Aid (SEGA)

First signed into law last summer, the Governor's proposed budget continues to provide additional aid to districts that experienced enrollment growth greater than 13% from October 2008 to October 2011. A total of \$4.141 million will be provided to the 13 districts that received SEGA funding in Fiscal Year 2014.

### New Geographic Cost Adjustment (GCA)

The Geographic Cost Adjustment is an index that is applied to each district's adequacy budget in order to account for cost differences across the state. The GCA was revised using new data from the U.S. Census Bureau and minor modifications were made to reduce variations by county.

### School Choice Aid

The Governor's proposed budget continues to provide aid to districts that are participating in the Inter-district Choice Program. For the 2013-14 school year, 105 school districts will participate in the program, up from 70 during the 2012-13 school year. In total, \$49 million is proposed in Fiscal Year 2014, an increase of \$16 million from Fiscal Year 2013.

Former Abbott districts continue to receive almost three times the state average in state aid per pupil. The overwhelming amount of total per pupil education spending in the former Abbott districts has, and will continue in Fiscal Year 2014, to come from direct state support.

### **Average State Aid Per Pupil In the Fiscal Year 2014:**

- State Average: \$5,881
- Non-Abbotts: \$3,291
- Former Abbotts: \$15,261

However, as the past 40 years have demonstrated, just spending more money will not close the achievement gap – it matters not only "how much" money is spent but "how well" it is spent. Despite funding levels that consistently rate among the highest in the nation on a per pupil basis, New Jersey continues to have one of the largest achievement gaps in the country. Funding alone will not meet New Jersey's obligation to give a great education to every child. Changing the way money is spent is by far the most important means of actually changing the behavior of schools and the school systems. Over the past three years, the Christie Administration has implemented significant reforms to address this achievement gap. Among others, these include:

### Focusing On The Lowest Performing Schools:

The Christie Administration has undertaken bold reform to turn around the state's persistently failing schools. As one of the first states in the country to receive flexibility from No Child Left Behind, the Department of Education is recognizing high performing "Reward" schools and shifting significant resources and support to "Priority" and "Focus" schools, those schools that are the lowest performing in the state or that have significant achievement gaps. The Department is providing the day-to-day support of dozens of expert educators through Regional Achievement Centers to help these schools improve.

### Historic Bipartisan Changes To The Nation's Oldest Tenure Law:

Marking the first extensive reform of New Jersey's tenure law in over 100 years, Governor Christie signed into law the Teacher Effectiveness and Accountability for the Children of New Jersey (TEACHNJ) Act, a sweeping, bipartisan overhaul of the oldest tenure law in the nation. The legislation was the result of nearly two years of consistent and vocal advocacy for real education reform by Governor Christie and good faith, bipartisan cooperation with members of the Legislature, education reform advocates, and stakeholder groups. The legislation, for the first time, directly ties the acquisition, maintenance, and loss of tenure to a teacher's effectiveness in the classroom while simultaneously shifting away from compliance-based, low-impact, and mostly perfunctory evaluations to a focus on educators as career professionals who receive meaningful feedback and opportunities for growth.

### The Urban Hope Act:

The Urban Hope Act is designed to expand the education options available for children and parents by authorizing the conversion of failing schools into renaissance schools in three of our highest needs districts: Camden, Trenton, and Newark. Districts are able to partner with one or more nonprofits to construct as many as four "renaissance schools" in each district. The non-profit applicants must have a proven track record of operating quality schools in low-achieving districts and commit to both building the new school's facilities as well as offering a rigorous academic program designed to prepare every student for college, career, and beyond. Renaissance schools will be subject to the same standards as any other public school and will be evaluated annually by the Department of Education to determine whether they are meeting their goals and improving student achievement. The first application for a Renaissance school was submitted last fall in Camden from the KIPP Cooper Norcross Academy.

### Attracting The Best Charter School Operators:

The Christie Administration has made significant steps towards improving its charter authorizer responsibilities, which include both approving only high-quality new school applications as well as holding existing charter schools accountable for results. The Department has strengthened its new school approval process and aligned it with national best practices, and created the Performance Framework for all new and existing charter schools which have helped define charter school success and created a comprehensive and systemic review process for all charter schools. The work of the Administration over the past two years has been reflective of the commitment to excellence and has resulted in the Department opening 18 new charter schools, closing 5 schools for poor

academic performance or organizational and fiscal issues, and placing another 17 schools on probation.

Inter-District School Choice Program:

The Inter-district School Choice Program was signed into law by Governor Christie in September 2010 and fully implemented beginning with the 2011-12 school year. The program is designed to increase educational opportunities for students and their families by providing students with the option of attending a public school outside their district of residence without cost to their parents. Enrollment has tripled in the past three years to 3,357 students in 2012-13, and it is anticipated to grow to more than 6,000 in 2013-14.

State Aid allocations by district can be found here: <http://www.nj.gov/education/stateaid/1314/>

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