



NJ School Funding Learning Series

NEW JERSEY STATE AID 101: PART I

History

NEW JERSEY'S CONSTITUTIONAL MANDATE

The Legislature shall provide for the maintenance and support of a thorough and efficient system of free public schools for the instruction of all children in the State between the ages of five and eighteen years.”

Article VIII, Section IV • N.J. State Constitution (adopted in 1875, carried forward in the N.J. Constitution of 1947)

Where it began

1973 New Jersey Supreme Court Ruling of Robinson v. Cahill

The ruling

Paying for public schools mostly with local property taxes was unfair and unconstitutional. Districts with lower property values could not raise enough money, no matter how high they set their tax rate.

Why it mattered

It violated the state constitution's promise of a “thorough and efficient” system of free public schools, making adequate school funding a state responsibility.

The response

Public School Education Act (1975). New Jersey's first state aid formula, paid for by the state's first income tax in 1976.

Key takeaways

- ▶ **A constitutional duty**
New Jersey is constitutionally required to give every child a thorough and efficient education — an obligation of the state, not the federal government.
- ▶ **An unequal funding base**
That education is paid for largely through local property taxes, so communities with different wealth can raise very different amounts per student.
- ▶ **The formula bridges the gap**
The state funding formula is a critical mechanism that connects the constitutional promise to unequal local means.