

WOODBURY CITY PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT
OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT
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Joseph Jones, III
 SUPERINTENDENT

February 24, 2010

Acting Commissioner Bret Schundler
 State of New Jersey Department of Education
 Post Office Box 500
 Trenton, New Jersey 08625-0500

Dear Acting Commissioner Schundler:

I am the superintendent of the Woodbury City Public Schools, a district designated as a District Factor Group B by the New Jersey Department of Education. As the new state aid numbers for the 2010-11 school year are being developed, I want to be sure that you have a clear picture of how the current state aid funding for districts has played out at the local level – particularly for those of us who have been SIGNIFICANTLY UNDERFUNDED according to the new formula associated with the School Funding Reform Act (SFRA).

SFRA has been in place for the last two school year budget cycles. The amount of money due Woodbury City Board of Education through full implementation of the funding formula would be significantly more state aid than was actually realized:

State Aid Shortfall for Woodbury City		
	2008-09 School Year	2009-10 School Year
State Aid Calculation by Formula	\$14,261,911	\$14,821,467
Actual State Aid Received by Woodbury	11,432,822 - 80,041 (connected to pension deferral) = \$11,352,781	11,930,033 - 714,085 (excess surplus, etc.) = \$11,215,948
Amount "Short"	\$2,909,130	\$3,605,519
Impact of this shortfall in state aid on the Local Taxpayer	@ \$37,000 raised/penny: 78.63 cents	@ \$37,000 Raised/penny: 97.45 cents
% of State Aid provided to school compared to "Full Funding"	Originally: 80.16% With added cut: 79.60%	Originally: 80.49% With added cut: 75.67%

Though we were never promised the full funding level during these early years, there was a plan for districts who were seriously underfunded to have larger increases in funding (+20%) so that there would be a chance to “catch up” over the course of a few years. Since we did not receive that 20% “catch up” increase for this 2009-10 school year (Woodbury state aid only increased by 5%), we are still very close to the same 80% level of full funding. It is difficult to explain to the local Woodbury City taxpayer why this situation exists in Woodbury while many other districts across the state are much closer to full funding, some are fully funded, and others are OVERFUNDED.

Please note that the Woodbury City Board of Education did provide the taxpayer a significant amount of savings due to the original 20% increase in state aid funding. For the 2008-09 budget, the city residents experienced a 27.3 cent decrease in the school tax levy. Now, the resulting reduced tax levy means that our ability to raise additional funds through local taxes has been compromised. Couple this with the failure of the state to deliver on the state aid increases promised by formula, and we have a devastating financial picture at the local level. We did the right thing with the state monies by returning them to the taxpayer, but we are now negatively impacted by this decision.

Recognizing that the economic times of today will continue to make it difficult for the state to fully fund the SFRA aid formula for schools across the board, I would hope that equity and fairness concerns associated with this funding will surface as an area needing to be addressed. As you participate in conversations regarding the 2010-11 state aid, communities like Woodbury implore you to have all districts receive aid in a similar proportion to what would constitute full funding (i.e., everyone should be funded at a given percent – say 88% of the state aid funding formula). How long can the Woodbury City taxpayer be asked to make up the difference between the amount of state aid that we should receive and the amount that actually is provided? How fair is this current allocation of state aid when other towns are receiving their full share, or more, in accordance to the formula?

If you desire, I would be happy to meet with you to discuss the impact of this situation or clarify the concern. The fiscal crisis that the State of New Jersey faces is real. It should be one that local school districts address by working with the same proportion of financial support from the state in accordance to the SFRA allocations.

Sincerely,



Joseph Jones, III
Superintendent

C: Governor Christopher Christie, New Jersey Office of the Governor
Dr. Mark Stanwood, Executive County Superintendent
Assemblyman Angel Fuentes, New Jersey State Assembly – 5th District
Assemblyman Gilbert L. Wilson, New Jersey Assembly – 5th District
Senator Donald Norcross, New Jersey State Senate – 5th District
Assemblyman Patrick J. Diegnan, Jr., New Jersey Assembly Education Committee Chair
Senator M. Teresa Ruiz, New Jersey Senate Education Committee Chair
Senator Stephen M. Sweeney, President of the New Jersey State Senate