



# KINGSWAY REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

*Committed to Excellence*

*Dr. James J. Lavender, ext. 4205  
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March 23, 2017

Dear Parents/Guardians:

Earlier today, I sent out a press release, [Kingsway brings fight for fair funding to Assembly Budget Committee](#), regarding Kingsway's presence at the Public Hearing on the State Budget at Rowan University on Wednesday. At the hearing, school funding fairness was a recurring and dominant theme; it is clear that funding fairness must become a priority for Trenton lawmakers. We also heard from a number of members of the Committee who encouraged us to continue this school funding fight.

### **Kingsway adopts 2017-18 Tentative Budget**

This past Thursday, the Board of Education adopted our tentative budget, which reflects significant cuts necessary to close a \$2.4 million deficit. You can read through our [2017-18 Tentative Budget Summary](#) for more details regarding enrollment projections, significant challenges, our large deficit explained, and our reduction plan. The tentative budget has been submitted to the Executive County Superintendent and is scheduled for final adoption at the Board of Education meeting on April 27<sup>th</sup>.

### **What has been cut from the budget?**

The following positions have been cut from the 2017-18 School Budget: (4) Administrators; (1.5) Teachers; (2) Counselors; (1) Athletic Trainer; (5.5) Secretaries; (3) Paraprofessionals; (2) Custodians; (1) Maintenance Staff; and, (1) School Resource Officer. In addition, the following programs have been cut: all middle school and freshmen sports; our Alternative High School (Twilight); the late bus; all PSAT testing for 9<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> graders; all out-of-district professional development; various equipment and capital improvement items; multiple co-curricular activities; and more.

### **This fight is far from over**

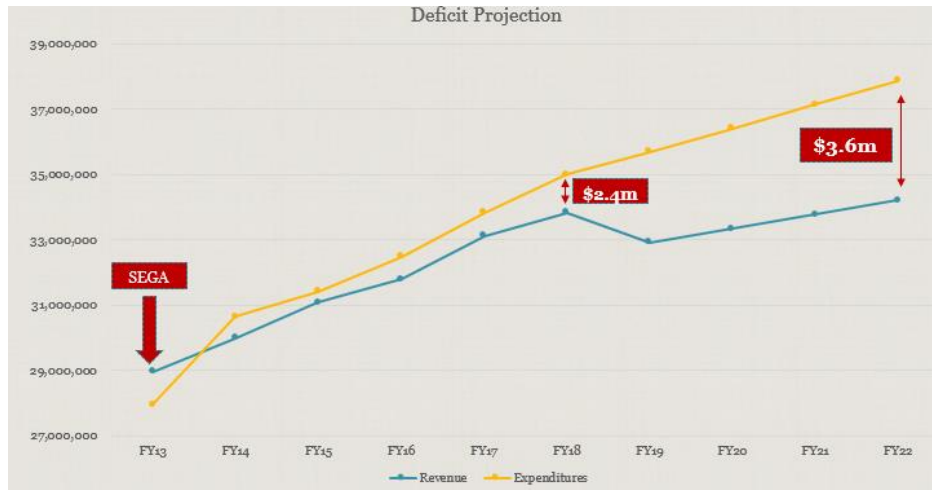
Earlier this week, I had the unfortunate task of issuing nearly thirty layoff notices to talented, hardworking employees. It is not fair that we are losing these positions, nor is it right that these employees, our colleagues, will soon be unemployed. Trenton is solely to blame, including the Governor, Education Commissioner and the Senate and Assembly branches of government. We can't quit now!

Some of you may be tempted to think that this is a 'one-time problem' that is resolved by making tough choices. I wish it were that easy. Our funding dilemma is far from over. If this state aid fiasco is not rectified by the FY19 school budget adoption, we can project that we will face another \$1 million plus deficit. This will grow larger every year following, assuming continual flat state aid, as our expenses will continue to outpace revenue. By FY22, we will face a deficit of approximately \$3.6 million. You need to ask yourself: How many positions and programs will we lose by then?

*Home of the Dragons*

The graph below demonstrates that the last time we generated enough revenue to carry our costs was in FY13. This occurred after having received Supplemental Enrollment Growth Aid (SEGA). After that infusion of state dollars, the cost to maintain our operation began to increase at a rate that exceeded our revenue growth. With each passing year, the deficit grows and, as a result we continually make moves to close the gap (i.e. shared service revenue offsets; fund balance used to supplant state aid). Some of you may have heard me talk about *being pushed to the cliff* if state aid doesn't change. That cliff is now! And now that we are pushed over, the deficit will continue to grow wider until I reduce enough of our costs to match revenue.

**Figure 1: Kingsway's budget deficit projection**



**What can I do?**

Nothing adds pressure to sitting elected officials like ongoing phone calls. They do and will respond when the heat is turned up. You can continue to call the Assembly Speaker, Vincent Prieto (D32) at (201) 770-1303 and/or email him at [AsmPrieto@njleg.org](mailto:AsmPrieto@njleg.org). I also want to add the Assembly Budget Chairman, Deputy Speaker Gary S. Shaer (LD36) at 973-249-3665 or by email at [AsmSchaer@njleg.org](mailto:AsmSchaer@njleg.org). It was clear to me yesterday, during my public testimony ([watch it here](#)) that Deputy Speaker Shaer is in Assembly Speaker Prieto's camp and seems to be moving with little urgency. And, Assembly Education Chair Marlene Caride (LD36) at 201-943-0615 or [AswCaride@njleg.org](mailto:AswCaride@njleg.org).

**School funding must be fixed now!**

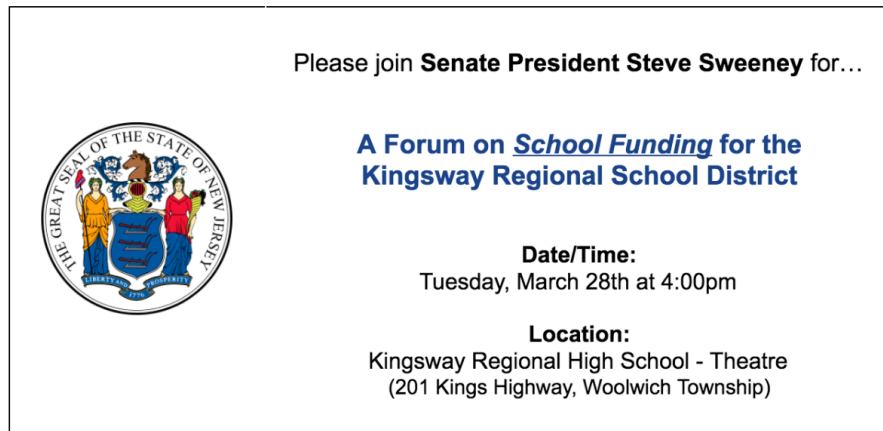
This morning I penned an op-ed piece, with two of my colleagues from Sussex and Monmouth Counties, leading school districts facing the same financial problems we face. Our op-ed piece, [School funding needs to be addressed now; can't wait for new governor](#), is in direct response to the NJEA's President, Wendell Steinhauer's op-ed piece, [Leave school funding to the next governor](#), which ran in the Star Ledger on Monday. It is critical that the NJEA advocates for all our school districts, including the 100 underfunded school districts, like Kingsway, who have experienced significant enrollment growth without proportional increases in state aid. (*Kingsway's resident student enrollment has grown by 44% since the adoption of SFRA in 2008*).



### School Funding Forum – Tuesday, March 28th

I have exhaustively reached out to the Governor's office, over the years, including multiple times in recent months. The Governor has, unfortunately, never returned a call. I have also reached out to the Lt. Governor and the Assembly Speaker to no avail.

There is no question that we have had a powerful ally in Senate President Steve Sweeney, who has championed the reform we need to rectify this school funding fiasco. I have often said, "Sweeney's plan is Kingsway's plan," having been in his ear for years to address this problem. So, in the wake of adopting our tentative budget, I've asked the Senate President to return to Kingsway, to discuss the issue of school funding with our school community. He has agreed and will be here next **Tuesday, March 28<sup>th</sup> at 4:00 p.m. in the Eitel Theater**. You are all encouraged to attend, ask questions, and speak your mind. Please see the invitation below.



As we prepare for the 2017-18 school year, we will not lower our standard of excellence. Despite how badly our school district, students and taxpayers are being wronged, we will continue to figure out ways to deliver a superior educational program. I am proud of what we have accomplished at Kingsway and recently told my administrators, faculty and staff, that the hardworking, dedicated and caring people at Kingsway is what distinguishes our school system from the rest. Despite having said that, I do not concede the fact that we are significantly underfunded and under-resourced. This fight for our fair share of tax dollars needs to be waged in Trenton. I am asking you, our parents and taxpayers, all of whom have a vested interest in the quality of our schools, to demand that our elected representatives in Trenton fix this problem now!

Should you have questions regarding our school budget or our fight for fair school funding, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Very truly yours,

Dr. James J. Lavender  
Superintendent of Schools

