

Woolwich Deserves Its Fair Share of School Funding

Woolwich Twp., NJ- On this Tuesday, April 20th, Boards of Education across this State will ask you to consider voting on your local school budgets. This is an annual process that typically generates little fanfare. This year is different. This year's budgets are more than numbers. This year's budgets are referendums on the value we as a society place on public education.

As a proud father of three girls just entering the public elementary school system in my hometown of Woolwich Township, Gloucester County, this year's budgets are about the elimination of academic and co-curricular programs essential to providing a constitutionally mandated thorough and efficient education. As a public educator, this year's budgets are about the outright dismantling of a public school system that provides opportunity for children to dream and achieve levels unimaginable in other countries. And, as the Deputy Mayor of the fastest growing municipality in New Jersey, this budget reflects the outright hypocrisy and inequity of a Governor's plan that has slashed aid for the lowest spending school district in the state.

The Swedesboro-Woolwich School District has been grossly under funded for nearly a decade. The promise of our "fair share" was realized in 2008 with the passage of a new school funding formula under the School Funding Reform Act (SFRA), which assured districts with growing enrollment twenty percent increases in state aid. A Supreme Court ruling just last year assured us that our growing district would see that the undue burden placed on our tax payers would be reduced. However, just one year removed from that guarantee, Governor Christie has rendered the SFRA promises unfulfilled.

With Christie's plan, the S/W School District has lost more than \$1.75m in state aide, which is in addition to the twenty percent SFRA funding the District will not see. Mr. Christie has espoused that these cuts are necessary in an effort to reduce the burden placed on the highest taxed state in the nation. Mr. Christie is wrong! According to Mr. Christie's plan, Woolwich Township is staring at the highest property tax increase in our history. Mr. Christie's plan has shifted the state's responsibility to provide adequate funding onto the backs of our residents.

It has been estimated that had Mr. Christie provided Woolwich Township its "fair share" of funding in his budget proposal, Woolwich Taxpayers would be relieved of more than \$4 million in school funding, thus reducing our property tax burden by more than \$900 on the average assessed home. So I ask Mr. Christie, how does this plan solve the financial crisis we find ourselves in? I recognize that he is cutting spending in Trenton, but he is doing so at the risk of forcing home foreclosures in Woolwich. Our residents now find themselves in between a school budget that falls \$2.97 million below adequacy and an anticipated tax hike of close to twenty percent.

To improve Mr. Christie's proposal, we need to summon the courage necessary to remind him of the value we place on education. We need to encourage Mr. Christie to consider appropriate and achievable reforms that do not pit public educators against taxpayers. And, we need to demand from Mr. Christie the resilience necessary to develop funding solutions that not only address our financial crisis but do so in a way that employs patience, precision and parity.

Please join me in lobbying Governor Chris Christie and Education Commissioner Bret Schundler for "Woolwich's Fair Share" and ask them to recognize all of our students by providing adequate funding for each and every student in our school districts.