

Support Our Students

Given the recent enactment of P.L. 2018, Chapter 67, and before irreparable harm is done to many school districts, their students, employees and their taxpayers, we the undersigned, the Support Our Students Advocacy Group- a statewide coalition currently representing 75 school districts and more than 150,000 students (more than 10 percent of school children in the state)- are respectfully, but firmly, requesting that the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) immediately cease any further action in reducing state aid from affected districts (this action should not apply to districts scheduled for state aid increases) when developing allocations for the 2019-20 budget year until the material flaws in the state aid formula are evaluated and addressed. Districts are losing state aid based on Local Fair Share (LFS) calculations that have known and serious inaccuracies.

First, the property wealth figures used to calculate LFS should include the many billions of dollars, on an equalized basis, in Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILOTS). Second, the property wealth figures in the formula cannot be relied upon until the equalized valuations are updated for the 25-plus towns that have not had legally required property revaluations in over 25 years. Third, the accuracy of the LFS numbers cannot be validated until the allocation and adjustment methodology of the property and income multiplier calculations for the distribution of \$6.3 billion in Equalization Aid is revealed and provided for all NJ school districts (the NJDOE has been unwilling to share said calculations). It should be noted that all of these factors, especially as they apply to many districts that currently receive a significant amount of state aid, would affect the LFS calculations on a statewide basis, and would therefore impact the Equalization Aid allocations for all NJ school districts. We also strongly believe that before any district loses additional aid, the factors and numbers used to calculate a district's adequacy budget must first be fully reviewed and updated in determining how much Equalization Aid a district should be entitled to.

We respectfully request that a joint legislative committee be immediately convened, with an aggressive timeline, to evaluate the concerns with the LFS calculators and the calculation of a district's adequacy budget as noted above, and to provide recommendations to the full state legislature. In addition to members of the legislature, this committee should include the NJDOE, and should also be comprised of an equal number of districts in terms of those negatively impacted, positively impacted and those with state aid allocations that have remained the same.