



TOMS RIVER REGIONAL SCHOOLS

DAVID M. HEALY

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

1144 Hooper Avenue, Toms River, NJ 08753

732-505-5514 • Fax: 732-505-9330

Email: dhealy@trschoools.com

February 12, 2019

Dear Toms River Regional Schools community members:

As you were informed by my August 2, 2018 letter to the community, you are undoubtedly aware of our district's position regarding state funding, having had [nearly \\$2.4 million removed](#) from our already-approved 2018-2019 budget under NJ's recently-passed state budget. This, coupled with the next round of aid reductions, will lead to devastating budget cuts to our district exceeding \$5 million for 2019-20 based on current projections. And with the recently-signed legislation, P.L. 2018, Chapter 67, otherwise known as S2, our district is *required* to raise taxes every year while we cumulatively lose more than \$80 million in school aid over the next six years. This means that dramatic budget cuts will have to be made each and every year over that six-year term. Make no mistake—our district will be nothing short of gutted and fully decimated if something does not change with regards to the allocation of school aid.

As we have, for the better part of two years now, relayed this message to our invaluable teachers and staff members, its often been met with a familiar sentiment: *We've been in similar situations before, and it always seems to work out. It'll be fine.* While we sincerely appreciate the faith and trust placed in our board and administration to work this out, the harsh truth is that—although we're clearly doing everything we can—this is out of our control. These cuts have already been imposed. We are already at the place many have assumed we wouldn't reach, and if things remain the same, we will lose much, including jobs. We are decidedly not fine. Therefore, this fight requires each and every one of you, all 110,000+ residents and 76,500+ registered voters in the greater Toms River area. The good news is that there is strength in numbers, and Toms River certainly has the numbers to make a difference and restore this funding for our students, staff, and community.

It's well worth explaining again the nature of these dramatic reductions to our state aid. The reported justification for the school aid reductions for districts like ours is that we have lost enrollment and should therefore lose aid, yet even with [current](#) enrollments our district is more than \$30 million under adequacy—meaning that we spend \$30 million less than the NJ Department of Education expects us to. This present and unfortunate reality is not of our own doing; in fact, as evidenced by the NJ Department of Education's Taxpayers Guide to Education spending, Toms River Regional Schools is among the most efficient and [financially-responsible](#) large districts in the state, boasting the second-lowest total cost per-pupil spending and 8th lowest administrative cost in NJ. In addition, for the fourth year in a row we have been awarded the prestigious Certificate of Excellence in Financial Reporting by the Association of School Business Officials International.

We have also—on behalf of nearby districts and those affected throughout the state, but primarily on behalf of our students, staff, and community—[proactively led the fight](#) to [retain/restore](#) threatened state aid and to [reform the outdated and seriously flawed state formula](#) that allows for such financial imbalance in the first place. We've led this fight for four years running; our efforts have been well-documented, equal parts hopeful and frustrating.

We play an active and important role in two alliances. One is a cohort of school districts, municipalities and taxpayers [actively opposed to the devastating financial impact](#) caused by the reduction of state aid resulting

from S2. This alliance is a coalition of nine school districts that have, with the support of their respective town councils through adopted resolutions, utilized the services of the Weiner Law Group, LLP to file litigation against the NJ Department of Education. The other is the Support Our Students advocacy group, or S.O.S., which as of this writing is seventy-one districts strong. We have a leadership role within the group; as recently as Feb. 1, TRRS again shared [a public statement issued by SOS back in December](#) with more than 250 media members, legislators, and state education leaders.

It is difficult if not impossible to overstate the negative short- and long-term impact of these projected cuts and, while in the past we have been cautious not to alarm or provoke anxieties, at this juncture it is incumbent on us to adequately communicate what is actually at stake, which should raise concern among those people whose voices must be heard if we expect change. To date we've pulled \$2.4 million from our reserves to backfill this year's cut—an undesirable measure certainly, but our only feasible option at this point in the year—but face cutbacks next year in areas that include but are not limited to non-mandated programs, sub-varsity athletics and co-curricular offerings at the high school and intermediate levels, courtesy and late busing, and staffing, as well as steady increases in class sizes each year.

What we present again today is another **call to action**. I cannot stress enough that is a matter of utmost importance and urgency, and one which requires the investment and engagement of our entire school community. Therefore, our district, alongside the SOS coalition, is planning a march on Trenton, March 5, 2019, the same day Governor Murphy is planning to introduce his budget for 2019-2020. Seventy-one school districts consisting of more than 100 buses and thousands of students, educators, parents and community members will attend. We have already respectfully, but firmly, requested 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.

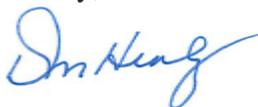
Our school board has exhibited strong and proactive leadership throughout this ordeal, especially recently. Board President Joseph Nardini has issued a formal letter to every mayor and councilmember within the greater Toms River community, making them aware of the March 5 Trenton visit, asking for their support and to help raise awareness among their constituents.

So, what can you do? Join us March 5. Attached is a flyer and FAQ sheet about the march and our current situation. Print it, share it, and sign up to march on Trenton next month by following the link in the flyer, or [by clicking here now](#). Follow us on social media for updates and, if you're on Twitter, follow the SOS coalition [@nj_sos](#). When granted the opportunity, on social media or out in the real world, make your voice heard in an informed and respectful way. *That* is what you can do.

As your superintendent, it has always been and continues to be my promise to provide the leadership necessary to foster a sound educational system. No period of adversity will ever compromise that promise or fracture the positivity we preach to our students and which we strive to practice ourselves day in and day out. We will continue to lead this fight in the spirit of hope and with expectations for success, but we do need your help. We urge you to make our collective voice louder by making yours heard. Together, indeed, we can accomplish anything.

Thank you.

Sincerely,



David M. Healy
Superintendent of Schools