



## TOMS RIVER REGIONAL SCHOOLS

*Designated a High Performing District by the NJDOE*

1144 Hooper Avenue, Toms River, NJ 08753

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December 9, 2019

To the Toms River Regional Schools community:

Late last Friday, the district received the New Jersey Department of Education's emergency aid final determination letter. Out of our request for \$4,473,821 and after a lengthy and exhaustive application process, the NJDOE only approved \$854,634, less than one fifth of what was requested and what is needed to survive into next year. This is nothing short of a slap in the face to our district, our students, our families, and our community.

What is clear, and disconcerting, is that the NJDOE either does not understand how to manage a school budget or they do not care. This response reveals they are not only ill-informed but irresponsible. The letter suggests we utilize already-allocated money-- in defiance of state mandates-- to make up the aid difference. Our community knows that the root cause is a funding formula and a distributed pool of \$6.5 billion that they refuse to fully reveal. As we embark on tomorrow's Rally to Save Toms River in Trenton, please know this: **This is "shut up money." But we will not shut up.**

Despite the disconcerting letter from Commissioner Lamont Repollet, the NJDOE makes no financial decision without the blessing of Governor Phil Murphy and the recommendation of Chief Financial Officer and Assistant Commissioner for the Division of Finance Kevin Dehmer-- who supervises the application of the state's school funding formula to determine state aid for school districts. It's also worth noting that prior to our emergency aid application being submitted, its accuracy, legitimacy, and thoroughness were reviewed and approved by the NJDOE's Ocean County Executive Business Administrator.

Because other districts that applied were awarded \$0 in emergency aid, the response to our application has been falsely portrayed as "good news," when in fact it is an offensive response to our plea.

The sole responsibility of the NJDOE is to protect the educational well being of **all children**. More than 15,500 Toms River students stand to lose as a result of these questionable decisions. Our application for emergency aid is the result of a **literal emergency**. The district has a shortfall of \$5.2 million going into 2020-2021 because of Bill S2. The state's lukewarm reply is the beginning of the end for sports, extracurriculars, critical staff positions, full-day kindergarten, and so much more.

Now more than ever, based on this latest development, #WhatTRStandsToLose is everything. **This gives us all even more reason to be in Trenton tomorrow.**