



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, Toms River Regional Schools received the New Jersey Department of Education's emergency aid final determination letter. Out of our request for \$4,473,821 (the minimum amount needed to get through this year unscathed) in emergency aid and after a lengthy and exhaustive application process, the NJDOE only approved \$854,634, less than one fifth of 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.

Through its response, the NJDOE has revealed itself as not only ill-informed but irresponsible, even suggesting we utilize already-allocated money in defiance of state mandates to make up the difference, despite the fact that what's caused this utter mess is a secret formula of their own making. 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.**

It's worth noting that, despite the underwhelming response by Commissioner Lamont Repollet and the NJDOE, the department 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, the calculation of district tuition rates, and the funding of charter schools. It's similarly worth noting, with regard to our application's accuracy, legitimacy, and thoroughness that, prior to its submission, it was reviewed by and received the blessing of the NJDOE's own Ocean County Executive Business Administrator.

Because other districts that applied were awarded \$0 in emergency aid, this response to our emergency aid application could be falsely construed as "good news." Our district is \$5.2 million short for 2020-2021 because of S2; our application for emergency aid was the result of a literal emergency. The state's lukewarm reply is the beginning of the end for all-day kindergarten, sports, extracurriculars, critical staff positions, and so much more.

The state's letter is an offensive response to our plea, which itself is the result of an ill-advised bill that is based on a secret formula that includes \$6.5 billion in taxpayer money, all of which has been cultivated by an agency whose sole responsibility is to protect the educational well being of **ALL** children. More than 15,000 Toms River students stand to lose as a result of these questionable decisions. This is the reason we all need to be in Trenton tomorrow.

Now more than ever, based on this latest development #WhatTRStandsToLose is everything.

Toms River Regional Schools