

TOMS RIVER REGIONAL SCHOOLS
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Yesterday Toms River Regional Schools learned, officially, that it stands to lose \$5.3 million as a result of state aid cuts from Bill S2 for 2020-2021, one million more than originally anticipated due primarily to the state increasing the income wealth multiplier by 5.9% for 2020-21 (after increasing it by 7.8% for 2019-20). This brings the projected total of our cumulative losses from S2 up to \$113 million, which is staggering.

Tuesday Governor Phil Murphy issued his state budget address, which included an announcement of \$50 million in stabilization aid to be distributed to the some 200 loser districts, ours included. This is a band-aid, insufficient and unsustainable. Not to mention deceiving. We have been preliminarily advised that districts will have to apply for this funding through an onerous application process similar to the one we underwent when applying for emergency aid for the past few years, and we were largely denied.

There are also questions as to the timeliness of this stabilization aid since the preliminary information provided to this district from the governor's own Chief of Staff, George Helmy, indicated that any amount of stabilization aid would not be received until mid to late fall 2020, long after we have made significant cuts to staffing, programs and services, and certainly contrary to the governor's own comments:

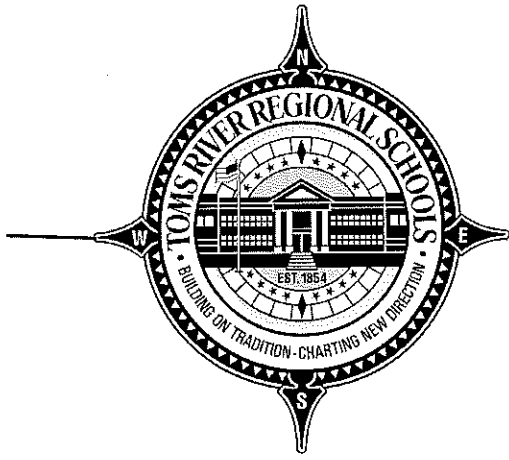
"We know that some districts continue to face challenges. So, our budget also includes \$50 million to stabilize their finances without cutting vital student programs"

This "stabilization aid" may very well do us no good for 2020-2021, and may in fact make adjusting to S2 even more difficult down the line.

The governor also touted his surplus efforts with the state budget. "Under this budget, we will also continue growing our surplus to a projected \$1.6 billion," he said. The dichotomy between talk of a growing surplus as districts like ours are hemorrhaging is incomprehensible. A reminder of what S2 will do in 2020-21:

TAKE \$158.4 million from loser districts (like us)
ADD NEW AID DOLLARS OF \$333.6 million for winners
Winners are receiving \$492 million.

"And we will make another roughly \$300 million deposit into the rainy day fund," the governor said. This statement, in the context of what we learned yesterday and as we try desperately to save our school district, is breathtakingly offensive and mind-boggling in its lack of awareness.



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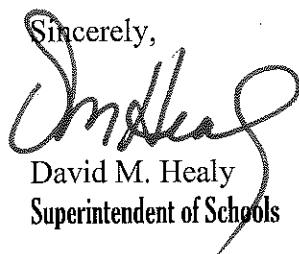
This is the rainy day. It's a deluge, in fact. This is the very emergency for which surpluses are established in the first place. In combination with the \$50 million allocated for stabilization aid that the governor has already promised to loser districts, he could simply cut his "rainy day fund" deposit to \$200 million for *just this year* and school aid reductions could be halted without taking a single dime from the 'winner' school districts. Hundreds of thousands of students' futures saved for 2020-21, just like that.

Yet here we are. This week has added insult to our injury. The state has yet to disclose how it disperses \$6.5 billion in equalization aid; the formula on which S2 is based is clearly and critically flawed; efforts to stabilize loser districts like ours have been literally too little too late; the one bill, S4289, that would have provided an exemption to the 2% property tax levy cap was vetoed; and boasts of hundreds of millions in rainy day funds and billions in surpluses have us shaking and hanging our heads.

None of this makes sense and can only lead one to question the motivations driving these short-sighted and destructive decisions. How else should one interpret the fact that intelligent lawmakers are willing to ignore the public, passionate, and persistent pleas of tens of thousands of people, and instead support legislative action that will cause irreparable harm to hundreds of thousands of children and counting?

Is this the legacy our state leaders want to leave behind?

Sincerely,



David M. Healy
Superintendent of Schools



William J. Doering
Business Administrator