



TOMS RIVER REGIONAL SCHOOLS
OFFICE OF KATHY EAGAN
BOARD PRESIDENT
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The following is a joint statement from Kathy Eagan and Joseph Nardini.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 25, 2024— Yesterday the New Jersey Department of Education continued their dictatorial and iron-fisted reign over our regional school district and our board. Unlike previous directives from the tyrannical Department that imposed absurd regulations, the latest [proclamation](#) from Trenton (the letter we received directly is included at the end of this message) unilaterally imposed a 9.9-percent tax increase on the residents of this district, **which this board already rejected.**

Our board attorney William Burns noted during his statements on July 3 that discussions with the state have grown contentious and even hostile, including the NJDOE threatening the forfeiture of Superintendent Michael Citta and Business Administrator William Doering’s licenses and careers if the district did not submit a balanced budget. The state’s most recent announcement targets our Toms River Regional Schools Board.

“Our ongoing dialogue with the NJDOE began, from our perspective, in earnest, hopeful and diplomatic,” said Board President Kathy Eagan. “But that good faith was clearly one-sided, and this latest action on the state’s part reveals their contempt for this community and their willingness to cast blame on anyone but themselves for the untenable and unjustifiable position they’ve placed us in.”

Let us be clear: Your elected board members rejected a tax increase only to have a non-elected bureaucrat usurp our authority and impose taxation without representation. Not only does this action run afoul of the very principles our country was founded upon; it directly contradicts the Commissioner’s prior missive regarding the ecology of local control.

“Local control for this Commissioner must mean only blind adherence and enforcement by local boards of each and every ridiculous mandate promulgated by the Department of Education, not actual governance by locally-elected officials” continued Eagan.

This board rejected the budget that the state unilaterally imposed because it does NOT provide our students with a thorough and efficient education. Again, the budget the state imposed with a 9.9-increase does not provide our kids with the education our constitution requires and the education they deserve.

The Toms River Regional School district, even with the state-imposed 9.9-tax increase, remains nearly \$80 million under adequacy. Our students, based on the NJDOE’s own calculations, are enrolled in a district that is underfunded by almost \$80 million because of state aid cuts.



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“The state, over the last seven years, has reduced Toms River Regional Schools’ aid by over \$137 million,” said Board Vice President Joseph Nardini. “Now, the state, recognizing the harm that the massive and inequitable reduction has caused, shifted the burden from the seemingly limitless state coffers to working residents’ wallets.”

This board will do everything in its power to fight the state and protect our students. The Toms River Regional Schools Board calls on you– the residents, taxpayers, students and families of our district– to join in our fight for our kids.

We must continue to stand united and show the state we are unified– in court, in the statehouse, and in our community. We, and more importantly our kids, need your help, your support, and your participation. Thank you.

Kathy Eagan, Board President

Joseph Nardini, Board Vice President



State of New Jersey

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TRENTON, NJ 08625-0500

PHILIP D. MURPHY
Governor

TAHESHA L. WAY
Lt. Governor

KEVIN DEHMER
Acting Commissioner

July 24, 2024

Ms. Kathy Eagan, President
Toms River Regional School District Board of Education
1144 Hooper Avenue
Toms River, NJ 08753

Dear Ms. Eagan,

As of this writing, the Toms River Regional School District Board of Education has not adopted its annual budget for the 2024-2025 school year. The final adoption deadline was July 22, 2024. Therefore, I have no choice but to exercise my delegated powers, pursuant to *N.J.S.A. 18A:7-1*, et seq., and *N.J.A.C. 6A:23A-1.1*, to adopt a 2024-2025 budget for the Toms River Regional School District.¹

On July 3, 2024, your district submitted, and my office approved, a tentative budget for the 2024-2025 school year. Your board scheduled a public hearing and vote on that tentative budget for July 17, 2024, but during that meeting removed those items from the board's agenda. The board has not had a meeting since July 17, 2024 and thus has failed to adopt a budget for the 2024-2025 school year.

As a result of the board's failure to adopt a budget, as required by *N.J.S.A. 18A:7F-5* and *7F-6*, I am adopting that July 3, 2024 budget for the district without any reductions or reallocations, including a general fund tax levy of \$193,201,141. This figure is to be used by the district to submit a requisite "Certificate of and Report of School Taxes" (Form A4F) to the district's tax authorities. The following lists pertinent facts of the budget, as reported by the district to the Department in the FY25 budget software:

1. Total projected resident enrollment of 14,382 students, an increase of 0.8% over 2023-2024.

¹ Regulations at *N.J.A.C. 6A:23A-1.1* require the financial accountability of district boards of education and ensure that each district board of education adopts an annual budget that provides all potential efficiencies and administrative operations. In addition, these rules set forth the roles of the Commissioner of Education and the Executive County Superintendent in overseeing the district board of education budgeting and expenditures. Regulation further provides that the ECS has been delegated the powers, tasks and duties that support efficiency of district operations in accordance with *N.J.S.A. 18A:7F-43* et seq. and *N.J.S.A. 18A:7-1* and 8.

Ms. Kathy Eagan, President

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2. \$264,585,974 Total Operating Budget, an increase of 6.9% over 2023-2024.
3. \$8,065,955 in Total Revenues from Federal Sources, a decrease of 55.37% from 2023-2024. More than two-thirds of that decrease stems from the expiration of ARP ESSER funds.
4. \$1,259,209 in Stabilized School Budget Aid, pursuant to P.L.2024, c.13.
5. A general fund tax levy of \$193,201,141, inclusive of the full 9.9% increase permitted pursuant to P.L.2024, c.13.
6. \$69,749,965 appropriated for Total Regular Programs – Instruction (Account 11-1XX-100-XXX), a 2.8% increase over 2023-2024.
7. \$9,383 in Total Classroom Instruction costs per pupil, a 2.8% increase over 2023-2024.

The failure of your district to adopt a budget within the timeframe required by law is a serious matter and potentially bears upon your ethical responsibilities under *N.J.S.A. 18A:12-24.1(a)* “...to uphold and enforce all laws, rules and regulations of the State Board of Education, and court orders pertaining to schools.” I am taking this action out of necessity to ensure an operating budget to deliver resources necessary for a thorough and efficient system of education for the students of the Toms River Regional School District.

Sincerely,



Susan Naples
Interim Executive County Superintendent
Ocean County Office of Education

- c: Dave Corso, Assistant Commissioner, Finance and Business Services
Jordan Schiff, Interim Assistant Commissioner, Field Support and Services
Robert Gregory, Executive Director, Field Support and Services
Tina Trueba, Executive County Business Official
Michael Citta, Superintendent