

Fair Funding for Piscataway Schools

By Senator Bob Smith

On Saturday November 13th, a group of Piscataway parents visited my Legislative Office here in town to join together in the fight for fair funding for the Piscataway School District. We all have a vested interest in ensuring that Piscataway Schools maintain proper funding and, at present, the current state administration is not adequately funding our schools. Echoing the concerns that were voiced to me, as your State Senator, I have been doing my best to work with the Governor and the Department of Education for our school system, the students and for our community as a whole. This has been a challenging prospect. We all know that our property values are a direct correlation to our school system.

The Piscataway School District has been a victim to an anomaly in the prior New Jersey school funding formula, resulting in significantly less funding in state aid to comparable school districts. The School Funding Reform Act of 2008 attempted to solve this inequity by increasing state aid to Piscataway by 20% over multiple years. However, under the new administration our students suffered the loss of the Piscataway School Board's surplus monies compounded by the Governor's 800 million dollar cut in Educational Aid resulting in a 4 million dollar cut in aid to the Piscataway Schools.

The Piscataway School District is a model for other districts in the State of New Jersey as one that has adjusted to financial pressures. Through shared services, energy savings initiatives, and a greater faculty to administrator ratio than the state average, the Piscataway School District has tightened its belt to stay on budget while still serving its students to the fullest potential.

The future of our state and nation lie in our children. In order to compete in an ever growing, globalized economy, we must devote our resources to develop an education system that allows our children to be contenders. If we wish to see our children flourish in an economy that is invested in fields such as math and science, we must adequately prepare them with a well-rounded, quality education, abundant with opportunities. When districts such as Piscataway are faced with draconian funding cuts that result in larger class sizes and teacher layoffs, how can we promise our children a brighter future? Piscataway students and our taxpayers deserve to be treated fairly!

However, maintaining this excellent level of service in the upcoming years becomes increasingly difficult. With the cut in state aid reaching 28.7% for the Piscataway School District's 2010-2011 Budget, the problem of inadequate and unfair education funding for the children of the Piscataway School District continues to grow.

A sound school system is the backbone of a good community. My wife and I, while both attending Rutgers and living in the married student housing grew to love this community so much that we settled here. Our two children attended and graduated from Piscataway Schools where they received a top notch education. When my children were young, I taught chemistry at Middlesex County College and education has always been a valued priority for me. My respect for teachers is unsurpassed. Teachers prepare our children for the future and good teachers make for a quality school system and people want to live and raise families and stay in a town with a good school system.

No matter what insurmountable obstacles that the current administration lays in our path we will fight together for our schools, our children and our community.