

Good morning. My name is Dr. Carolyn Kossack and I am the Superintendent of the Little Silver School District in Monmouth County. My comments focus on **funding equity** regarding special education. **Thank you** for keeping special education funding as part of your conversation when devising the 2020 State Budget.

Our school district is a small, PreK-8 district with approximately 850 students. Little Silver maintains high levels of student achievement at a low per pupil cost of \$16,000, which is *thousands* less than the State average. Our fiscal prudence over the years has now left us *crippled*. Special Education students comprise 14% of our student population, yet 25% of our budget supports those needs - resulting in increased class size for general education students.

Special education funding is a topic on both sides of the aisle. S2 set forth Senator Sweeney's commitment to fully fund *Special Education Categorical Aid*, and to fully fund *Extraordinary Aid*. The Republican Caucus proposed *Every Child Counts*, which would make special education funding 100% categorical instead of the *current* 1/3 categorical and 2/3 wealth equalized breakdown.

Based on the released State Aid numbers, Little Silver will be realizing an *increase* of about \$50,000 in Special Education Categorical Aid due to the increase of \$206 million to Formula Aid. We *appreciate* the increase, but it is simply *not enough*.

In addition to Special Education Categorical Aid, we are faced with significant expenses pertaining to Extraordinary Special Education costs. During the last school year, Little Silver expended close to \$1 million dollars (including transportation) for our children with the highest needs. This handful of students required 7.5% of our total budget.

While every district's financial landscape varies, we all share the common challenge of special education spending. In Little Silver, the local tax levy supports about 94% of the budget. Our adequacy budget is about \$11 million dollars. Our school budget is about \$15 million dollars, and our Local Fair Share is about \$20 million dollars. Therefore, we are above adequacy, but *almost* \$5 million dollars below our local fair share. We don't qualify for **any** cap adjustments; therefore, we have a hard cap of 2%.

I am keenly aware of the fact that the State of New Jersey faces a fiscal crisis. I recognize that the State budget has many moving parts, and that the determination of a final budget takes compromise. That said, I implore the Assembly to ensure a *Thorough and Efficient Education* for **all** students by considering the following options:

1. Fully fund SFRA as opposed to the current 58% funding.
2. Make special education funding 100% categorical by removing the wealth indicator.
3. Provide an **additional** cap adjustment option that would allow school districts that are BELOW their Local Fair Share to increase Special Education Categorical Aid spending beyond the 2% cap. This would allow districts to make up the difference between what the State is capable of funding *up to* the 100% threshold.

Districts like Little Silver have maintained prudent budgets for years, and our diligence has resulted in cutting staff to afford our special education expenses. **Please** invest in our future by making a bipartisan commitment to support equitable school funding for **all** students.