


WOODBURY CITY PUBLIC SCHOOL DISTRICT
OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT
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Joseph Jones, III
SUPERINTENDENT

June 8, 2009

Assemblyman Joseph J. Roberts, Jr.
Brooklawn Shopping Plaza
Route 130 and Browning Road
Brooklawn, New Jersey 08030

Dear Assemblyman Roberts:

The Woodbury City Board of Education was pleased with the recent ruling by the New Jersey Supreme Court regarding the constitutionality of the state's new funding formula for schools – the School Funding Reform Act (SFRA). Woodbury has benefited from the new funding formula due to the fact that the educational needs of at-risk pupils are recognized regardless of where those children attend school.

As you are aware, the funding formula caps growth for districts severely underfunded – like Woodbury. Thus, for the first year the formula was applied (2008-09 school year) Woodbury's increase in state aid was capped at 20% even though the computation of the formula without a cap would have resulted in a substantially greater increase.

Given that we are still in a serious, underfunded status as determined by the new SFRA formula, it was the district's expectation that we would again receive another 20% increase for the 2009-10 school year; this is what the funding formula indicates. Even an increase of this size would still not meet the state's obligation under SFRA if uncapped. Nevertheless, the process would have moved us closer to full funding.

Unfortunately, our increase for 2009-10 was arbitrarily capped at 5% when funding information was released this past March. The New Jersey Supreme Court indicated:

Our finding of constitutionality is premised on the expectation that the State will continue to provide school funding aid during this and the next two years at the levels required by SFRA's formula each year. [emphasis added]

In addition, the court noted an expectation that there may be a need in the future to adjust the formula to keep it operating at its optimal level:

Our approval of SFRA under the State Constitution relies, as it must, on the information currently available. But a state funding formula's constitutionality is not an occurrence at a moment in time; it is a continuing obligation. Today's holding issues in the good faith anticipation of a continued commitment by the Legislature and Executive to address whatever adjustments are necessary to keep SFRA operating at its optimal level. The three year look-back, and the State's adjustments based on that review, will provide more information about the efficacy of this funding formula. There should be no doubt that we would require remediation of any deficiencies of a constitutional dimension, if such problems do emerge.

Regardless of any future need to adjust the formula, the Woodbury City Board of Education wants to call your attention to the additional funding currently required by this funding formula. For Woodbury, this expected funding amounts to an additional \$1,704,290 for the upcoming 2009-10 school year.

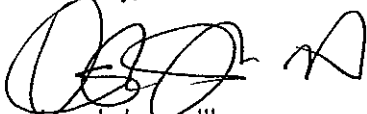
Additionally, SFRA language expands high quality, full-day preschool to all at-risk three and four year olds in the state. Woodbury City Public Schools submitted a plan that anticipated 54 students receiving full-day programming for the 2009-10 school year. We stand ready to provide the services as outlined in our plan but require the additional state funding to accomplish this mandate of SFRA; this state aid is also missing in our current allocation.

Again, we are excited to have a formula that recognizes the need for funding to follow the challenges associated with students living in difficult financial circumstances. Woodbury City celebrates the SFRA as a victory for Woodbury students. Unfortunately, as the Supreme Court indicated, the formula only works if it is fully funded.

The ability of the state to provide for school districts in an equitable fashion will create a more balanced property tax situation. Currently, the Woodbury City resident manages an equalized school tax rate that is in the top 20 of the state and nearly twice as high as the median rate school tax rate. Appropriate SFRA funding will help this school district reduce its portion of the local tax burden.

I thank you for your time in this matter. We at Woodbury desire to see steps taken to have this matter is quickly addressed by the state government in time for corrective action in advance of final budget approval.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joseph Jones, III', with a stylized flourish to the right.

Joseph Jones, III
Superintendent