



Newton Public Schools

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PRESS RELEASE

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NEWTON BOARD OF EDUCATION AND NEWTON TOWN COUNCIL AGREE TO FILE JOINT LAWSUIT AGAINST STATE FOR SCHOOL FUNDING EQUITY

Newton, NJ - The Newton Town Council and Newton Board of Education have passed resolutions committing to filing a school funding equity lawsuit against the State of New Jersey. Specifically, local officials charge that the State treats Newton's taxpayers differently than those in other municipalities and school districts in violation of the State Constitution which reads in part, "The fund for the support of free public schools ... shall be ... for the equal benefit of all the people of the State ..."

The Newton Public Schools are among a group of 96 school districts throughout the State that are both overtaxed and severely underaided -- defined as (a) receiving less than 70% of their state aid; and (b) taxing above 100% of their local fair share. This group of 96 districts is being shorted some \$739 million in state aid in FY18, and trying to make that up in part by taxing their residents more than \$475 million above the State-calculated local fair share. These districts and their municipalities are being invited to form a coalition to file the litigation within the coming weeks.

The Town Council passed its resolution at a public meeting held on Monday November 27. Mayor Wayne Levante commented, "For the last eight years, the State has failed to adequately and reasonably fund education in the Town of Newton. Over that time we have been funded at less than 60% and shortchanged to the tune of \$30 million. The situation has and continues to be burdensome and unacceptable for our students, educational professionals, residents, and taxpayers. The Newton Council and Board of Education are committed to recovering and restoring the full funding to which we are entitled."

The Board of Education passed a similar version the next night at its regular meeting. President Stella Dunn stated, "I'm happy that the Board has decided to work with like-minded districts and municipalities to continue pushing for the fair funding that the taxpayers and students of Newton

deserve. This Board has worked tirelessly for the last two plus years to fight for equity in state aid, and 57% is just not fair. While we were able to provide some relief in this latest budget, we look forward to providing additional assistance to our community in the future. The proposed litigation will continue to demonstrate our seriousness to state officials. We are not going to stop fighting until there is an equitable resolution.”

Some legislative success was achieved in this year’s state budget compromise, which unfortunately shut down state services for several days in July. The Newton Board of Education received additional state aid in the amount of \$221,748, all of which was passed on to its taxpayers. Legislative advocacy efforts will continue along with the proposed litigation to forge a sustainable path to equitable distribution of state aid to all school districts moving forward.

The Board and Town are being represented in this litigation by attorneys Schwartz, Simon, Edelstein & Celso LLC, and Laddey, Clark & Ryan LLP, respectively.

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