



Christie Administration Again Announces Historic Levels of K-12 State Aid for New Jersey Schools

In Spite of Economic Challenges, Funding Reflects a Continued Commitment to Public Education

For Immediate Release

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Trenton, NJ – The Christie Administration today released state school-aid figures that reflect the highest levels of K-12 funding in the history of the State of New Jersey. Direct state aid for education will now exceed the \$9 billion mark, as nearly \$37 million in additional aid will ensure that every school district across the board will receive a funding increase.

"Our Fiscal Year 2015 Budget provides the most funding in New Jersey history for education for a fourth year in a row," said Governor Christie. "By committing more than \$12.9 billion, we are furthering this Administration's commitment to ensure that every child, no matter where they live, has the opportunity for a quality education. With a record-setting \$9 billion in direct aid to schools, nearly \$40 million more than the previous year, we are continuing the path of education reform necessary for students to succeed in the 21st century."

On Tuesday, Gov. Christie proposed a \$34.4 billion fiscal year 2015 budget. By law, state aid to school districts must be announced within two days of the governor's budget address.

Total state aid for education will increase by \$36.8 million, from \$8.977 billion this year to a total of 9.014 billion in fiscal 2015. In addition to more than \$9 billion in direct school aid, the fiscal year 2015 budget continues to provide school districts with other significant financial support, including \$519.8 million for construction debt service, as well as a total of \$3.36 billion for teachers' pension, Social Security and post-retirement medical costs.

"In spite of enormous economic challenges, state funding for New Jersey's public schools is at the highest levels ever," said Education Commissioner Chris Cerf. "New Jersey's commitment to education includes additional funding to promote innovation such as longer school days and school years; upgrading technology for use in the classroom and for high-quality assessments; and providing local school officials with a great deal of decision-making authority to focus on improving academics in their hometown schools."

New Jersey's per-pupil spending already ranks among the highest in the nation, and nearly a quarter of the fiscal year 2015 state budget is proposed to go toward direct aid to schools. "However, it is important to understand that it's not only how much we spend on education, but how effectively we spend our education dollars that matters," Cerf noted.

Additional Aid for Every Student Every K-12 school district will see an increase in aid based on its projected student enrollment. The per-pupil funding – which amounts to an additional \$20 for every student – will be added to the amount that each district received last year and would be available through two new aid categories:

- **Per-Pupil Growth Aid:** Nearly \$13.5 million will be allocated to Per-Pupil Growth Aid, which can be used for virtually any general fund budget item. The decision on where to spend these funds will be made at the local level.
- **PARCC Readiness:** Another amount of nearly \$13.5 million will be available for PARCC readiness. PARCC, the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, is a consortium of 18 states collaborating to develop a common set of K-12 English and math assessments that reflect the core standards that determine college and career readiness. The PARCC assessments, which tap the same technologies that students often already use in the classroom as part of a 21st century education, will replace the existing paper-and-pencil NJ ASK and HSPA tests by the spring of 2015. Schools that are fully prepared for technology demands can use the funding stream for any other general fund budget item, at the local school board's discretion.

While all school districts will receive funding for Per-Pupil Growth Aid and PARCC Readiness, other districts may take advantage of other available funding streams, including:

Innovation Fund The governor's proposed budget provides \$5 million for an Education Innovation Fund to cultivate innovative practices and reward success. The Innovation Fund will provide New Jersey's educators with

the support and resources necessary to pioneer innovations leveraging extended learning time, educational technology and personalized learning, share successes and challenges with fellow leaders, and replicate successful new models of teaching and learning across the state. A major priority in the Innovation Fund will be for districts that develop different approaches to extend students' learning time, including extended school day or school year. The Innovation Fund will be distributed through a competitive grant process, and the best and most effective of these initiatives will help bring extended learning time and other innovations to scale statewide.

School Choice In September 2010, when Gov. Christie signed into law the Interdistrict Public School Choice Program allowing students to attend school at a participating Choice district, the state had a limited pilot program with 15 districts participating. The Choice program has become immensely popular, swelling to 105 districts serving 4,682 students by this current school year. The governor's proposed additional appropriation of \$4.88 million will bring the total funding to nearly \$53.95 million next year, opening the program to 130 districts and serving more than 5,100 children.

Extraordinary Costs of Special Education The Governor's proposed budget increases the state's share of extraordinary costs of special education by an additional \$2.27 million, to a total of \$165 million. Local school officials have long noted that their budgets are pinched when faced with extraordinary costs of special education. This funding covers a portion of a district's expenses over \$40,000 per student for children who are served in-district, or a portion of expenses over \$55,000 for students who are served outside the district.

Other Aid Categories The proposed fiscal year 2015 budget increases funding for preschool education by an additional \$4.77 million, to a total of \$652.8 million. This is due to anticipated growth in the number of children enrolled in qualifying preschool programs, which will fund 143 districts and more than 50,000 students.

In addition, the state's fiscal year 2015 spending plan anticipates a decline of \$1.5 million for Unknown District (Homeless) expenses, as the need is expected to decline post-Sandy.

District-by-district state aid allocations are online at: <http://www.nj.gov/education/stateaid/1415/>