



Lenape Region Support Our Students Coalition

Dear Governor Murphy, Commissioner Repollet, Senate President Sweeney and Assembly Speaker Coughlin,

At this time of year, school districts throughout New Jersey are beginning to prepare budgets for the 2020/2021 school year – always a formidable task as we balance the education of the children in our communities with the real financial concerns of our taxpayers. Once again, we in the Lenape Region must also grapple with the serious negative impacts of Senate Bill 2 (S2) and near and long-term effects it will have on the education, and ultimately opportunities, of nearly 21,000 students in the Lenape Region. The bill directly affects all families with school-aged children in Evesham, Medford, Medford Lakes, Mount Laurel, Shamong, Southampton, Tabernacle, Woodland, and the Lenape Regional High School District and it affects the taxpayers in these communities who have a strong interest in seeing our schools succeed.

On the surface the plan sounds ideal, a chance to redistribute school funding to help those districts that were chronically underfunded. However, S2 is and will continue to have devastating impacts on 500,000 children statewide in order to help the previously underfunded. S2 has established a false perception of haves and have nots, creating an atmosphere that pits students, parents and communities against each other, rather than celebrating – and working toward sustaining – New Jersey's recent #1 ranking for providing a stellar public education to every child.

Make no mistake, we completely support long-underfunded members of the Lenape Region such as Mount Laurel and Medford Lakes and other districts throughout the state whose aid has been increased in S2 to begin addressing that inequity. Those adjustments, however, must be accomplished in a manner that does not destroy educational programming for students in school districts now losing state aid. In our case, the impact of a diminished secondary education will negatively impact the economy in all eight of our elementary sending communities.

The funding formula under S2 is now over a decade old and the schedule for redistributing state aid is deeply flawed. We ask that the phasing out of state aid under S2 is extended until the full scope of its impact is understood, and that the phasing in of state aid to the chronically underfunded continues on the current schedule established by S2 with new revenue for state aid earmarked to these districts.

Revenue set aside for new non-mandated projects should cease and it should first be allocated to fulfill the state's obligation to fund public education. Otherwise, thousands of children – many your youngest constituents – will be negatively impacted. The silence from high ranking officials around this critical issue is troubling and problematic.

The school districts in the Lenape Region are exceptional, setting the bar high for other districts to emulate statewide and around the nation. Our students have outstanding educational programming, including a myriad of extra-curricular activities to enrich their educational experience. The pending reduction in state aid will severely diminish educational programming for our students across the region, with implications for college and career success.

Districts throughout the Lenape Region already have instituted a multitude of cost-saving measures to maximize fiscal efficiency and maintain educational programming for our students – even before the passing of S2. These measures have included, but are not limited to, shared services pertaining to transportation, professional development, banking, and a substitute teacher consortium. Some districts in the region made the difficult decision to privatize food service operations and paraprofessionals. The assertion by some prominent politicians that the overfunded districts have not planned or been fiscally responsible is simply not accurate and quite frankly unfair.

We cannot absorb the cumulative loss of state aid and continue to provide the quality education that our students deserve. Collectively, our districts will lose an estimated \$24 million by the 2024/2025 school year.

We appreciate and recognize the challenge of generating revenue to adequately fund education in New Jersey. However, we implore you to work towards a solution that will ensure that every student in New Jersey receives the education he or she so deserves. S2 as presently constructed is not the answer. Helping some students at the expense of others defeats the purpose of a fair education for all.

We're certain it is not the intent to create, endorse and sign divisive legislation that will have damaging and long-term consequences for children and families. We doubt that any official would support such outcomes. However, that is exactly what is occurring.

Before we begin to dismantle educational programming with negative consequences for every child in the Lenape Region, we respectfully ask that you do what you need to do to halt the negative impact of S2 on the children, families and communities you serve.

Sincerely,