

Radarscreen DLT 1-2-3

Dec 2006/ Jan 2007

Brought to you by the Scotch Plains – Fanwood PTA District Legislative Team (DLT)

Have a question Ask the Team!

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Contact DLT newsletter editor at webmaster_council@spf.k12.org

DLT 1: Local Issues

➤ **SPF Board of Ed. passed a Resolution regarding recommendations by Legislative Task Force.**

The resolution, which passed 8-1 on Dec 7th, was sent to Trenton. Key points were:

- Recommendations have unintended consequences
- Information about actual savings has not been verified completely
- Board supports a process that allows fair, open, public debate
- State aid for Sp. Ed. be kept as a categorical aid, so that the cost of sp. ed. programs does not increase
- Board rejects the idea of a political appointee in the role of "Super" County Superintendent
- Board rejects moving of school board elections to the partisan November general elections

Read the [entire resolution on page 3](#).

- **SPF Marching Band recognized on Dec 21st for placing as NJ State Champions in Group 6A**
- **Board to approve administration of NJ PASS to 9th & 10th graders on Dec 21st**

DLT 2: State Issues

Legislative Session holds Countywide District Pilot and Executive County Superintendent bills. Major Highlights are:

- **Countywide District Pilot bill** (A-8 in Assembly & S-49 in Senate) attempted to create **one single school district for the entire county** with a political appointee of the Governor as the **County Superintendent**. [Read more on Page 2](#).
- **Executive County Superintendent bill** (A4 in Assembly & S10 in Senate) attempted to **replace the current county superintendent with another one having more powers**. [Read more on page 2](#).
- Introduced in the legislature & tabled for voting in **less than 2 weeks with no public input**.
- Due to the tremendous outpouring of anger from parents & communities, these **bills did not pass** in the Senate, though it was passed in the Assembly.

DLT wishes to **thank the Scotch Plains & Fanwood communities** for their support at such a short notice. Thank you for standing up for our children. Together we have so far succeeded in getting the powers that be, to slow down their potential fast-track enactment of hastily constructed and unvetted legislation.

But this is not the end - we have to **continue persevering** throughout this year to see that changes that may transform our public schools will be positive, and not negative. The **next legislative session** is on **January 8th**. These bills may be reintroduced with amendments.

New school funding formula stirs criticism before it is even public. (Star Ledger 12/19/06)

A new school funding formula is being formulated as part of the state's broader effort to ease property taxes and provide aid more equitably. The developing plan took **hard hits** from school officials and interest groups **on Dec 18th** at the **1st public hearing** that outlined the proposed process to be used for deciding the formula. This has been detailed in the "**Cost of Education**" report (100 pgs long). See [highlights on page 2](#). Attendees at the hearing declared that it would shortchange education statewide. **One size does not fit all!** Among many of the concerns expressed, some were:

- **Timelines** have **not allowed for full in-depth analyses**, open discussion & understanding of the district-by-district impact
- Approach used in the "Cost of Education" report is **not based on reality** and not backed up by knowledge of practical application
- **Per pupil cost** measure **does not demonstrate the state's goal/expectations for quality education** in NJ
- Students with **special needs and disabilities** should **receive state support aid no matter where they live**.
- With one formula for a group of districts, **standard of education** will be **leveled down**
- **State's share** in funding in every district should be **fair & equitable**
- "**Hard caps**" applied **across the board** with no exception other than enrollment growth is **unrealistic**. Two factors alone (increase in health benefits & sp. Ed. costs) made up 61.5% of local levy growth from FY02 to FY06.

Remember, the Legislature will be back in session on Jan 8th. These bills may be reintroduced with amendments. Stay alert!

Contact info of Key Legislators

Senator Nicholas P. Scutari
 District Office: 1514 E. Saint Georges Ave., 2nd Floor, Linden, NJ 07036 (908)-587-0404
Assemblyman Jerry Green
 District Office: 17 Watchung Ave., Plainfield, NJ 07060 (908)-561-5757
Assemblywoman Linda Stender
 District Office: 1801 East Second St., 2nd Floor, Scotch Plains, NJ 07076 (908)-668-1900
Governor Corzine: 609-292-6000 and 973-648-2640 (North Jersey Office)
Senate President: Richard Codey(973) 731-6770
Senate Minority Leader: Leonard Lance (908) 788-6900

Countywide District Pilot Bill

This bill (A-8 in Assembly & S-49 in Senate) would have created a **countywide district** in one NJ county with the **Executive County Superintendent** in charge. Highlights were:

- **10-year pilot** program. Board of Chosen Freeholders of the county would apply to be this pilot. Public would not have any say in this vote.
- It would be **evaluated** for its **administrative and educational effectiveness**
- In effect on **July 1, 2008**.
- Local **Boards of Education** would be **"advisory"** capacity or could **vote to dissolve**.
- **Only four members** of the countywide **Board** would be **appointed** by the **County Superintendent** or the head of the County Board of Chosen Freeholders.
- The **Executive Superintendent** would be **appointed by the Governor** and must have appropriate certification.
- The **Executive Superintendent** and the **4-member Board** would have **general supervision over all aspects**, including fiscal operations and instructional programs.
- Each municipality would have a **"district supervisor"** instead of a superintendent.
- Instead of a local budget vote, there would be one **countywide Board of School Estimate**, made up of 2 members of the County Board of Ed, 2 Freeholders and either the Executive Superintendent or the head of the Freeholders.

A-8 was passed by the Assembly on Dec. 11th. **S-49**, the companion bill **did not get enough votes to pass** on Dec.14th.

Executive County Superintendent Bill

This bill would have done away with the current county superintendent in every county in NJ and **replace** this person **with an Executive County Superintendent**. Highlights of this bill were:

- **"Super" superintendent** would have **final authority over fiscal and administrative matters** in every school district in the county, but not over curriculum and instructional program.
- Each **district and Board of Education** would have **still existed on its own**.
- The **Super Super** would have had **final veto over spending and personnel matters**.
- The **main role of this Super Super** was to **find cost "efficiencies"** with no regard for local decisions or desires.
- **School Board Elections** moved from **April to November**

A-4 passed in the Assembly on Dec 11th and **S10 was pulled from the Senate** on Dec 14th due to lack of support.

Highlights of Funding Formula Cost Study

- Primary purpose of report is to **calculate costs of NJ school districts** in meeting **state performance & accountability standards**.
- **Costs** addressed are:
 1. **Per pupil "base costs"** (Sp. Ed. needs not included)
 2. **Adjustments to "base costs" to reflect special ed. needs**
- To identify these costs, report examined 4 methods of which the **Professional Judgment Panel Approach (PJP) was chosen**. This called for a set of panelists to determine the cost of maintaining a hypothetical school district that measures to NJ performance requirements.
- Results of this approach indicates **median "base cost" for K-8 district** as being **\$7,367** & **K-12 being \$8,496**. Added cost weights for students with special needs was provided as "weights" (e.g. A weight of 0.41 for K-12 districts for Speech)
- Entire report is available at <http://www.state.nj.us/njded/news/2006/report.pdf>.

FYI ...

Comparison of **Freshman Graduation Rates 2003-4** between **New Jersey** and **other states** that are **under countywide school district organization**

Florida 66.4% Maryland 79.5% NJ 86.3% South Carolina 60.6%

Statistics from NCES [National Center for Education Statistics/USDOE]

WHAT THEY ARE SAYING...

"These are based on cookie-cutter models that bear little resemblance to any of our communities."

- Rosie Grant, program director for the Paterson Education Fund.



"Not a chance!"

- State Assemblyman Joseph Cryan (D-Union) on whether the funding formula will be ready before Gov. Corzine's budget address in late winter



"You need to balance it. The bulk of the increases would go to the rim districts, but to go two or three times more what they're getting now, that leaves a lot of others wanting the money, too."

- State Senate President Richard Codey (D-Essex).



The President of one Union County school board said all the talk of "adequate" school spending has left out an important ingredient.

"Quality is way down the list of priorities as the Legislature rushes to pass bills. Why are we not talking about quality?"

- Ann Bushe, President of the Summit school board.

Scotch Plains-Fanwood Board of Education Resolution Regarding Legislative Task Force Recommendations

Adopted on Dec 7, 2006

WHEREAS, the four New Jersey Legislative Task Forces charged with finding sustainable change to bring about property tax reform have made 98 recommendations, and

WHEREAS, many of these recommendations have unintended consequences that may actually cause higher taxes for some communities, treat children unequally, and adversely affect the quality of education in New Jersey, and

WHEREAS, the Scotch Plain-Fanwood Board of Education has a duty to inform its communities and elected representatives of these unintended consequences, and

WHEREAS, little information has been verified as to the actual savings should these recommendations be adopted,

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Board of Education demands that the Legislature and the Governor follow a process that allows for fair, open, public debate concerning the proposals before rushing to pass new laws whose consequences are not thoroughly understood, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the Scotch Plains-Fanwood Board of Education demands that state aid for special education be kept as a categorical aid, separate from basic formula aid, so that the cost of special education programs are not added to the already over burdened property tax levies. If our school district, which receives no basic state aid, loses the state's special education categorical aid, that loss of \$2,936,944 can only be covered by drastic cuts in local program and teacher positions, resulting in larger class sizes, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT this Board rejects the idea that a political appointee in the role of "Super" County Superintendent could more efficiently make decisions about school budgets, operations or local priorities than can the local community members elected by the public to serve on local Boards of Education, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT we reject the intrusion of state-level partisan politics into local school districts that would come about from a politically appointed "Super" County Superintendent and from the moving of school board elections to the partisan November general elections, and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED THAT copies of this resolution be shared with the public and with our local municipal officials and sent to our Legislative representatives, the Speaker of the Assembly, the President of the Senate, the members of the Joint Legislative Committee for Public School Funding Reform, and the Governor.

Resource Center

SPF District website: http://www.spfk12.org/

Garden State Coalition of Schools Website: www.gscschools.org

Special Session on NJ Property Tax Reform: http://www.nileg.state.nj.us/PropertyTaxSession/specialsessionpt.asp

About DLT: http://www.spfk12.org/ptacouncil/Membership/Legislation.html