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# Our Children/Our Schools

## Campaign Principles

### Spring 2007

*“The Legislature shall provide for the maintenance and support of a thorough and efficient system of free public schools for the instruction of all the children in the State between the ages of five and eighteen years.” (New Jersey State Constitution, Article VIII, § IV, ¶ 1.)*

Our Children/Our Schools is a group formed to support the realization and long-term sustenance of education justice in New Jersey. Members assert the following as our core principles:

1. Every child in New Jersey has a constitutional right to a high quality education under the “thorough and efficient” clause of the New Jersey State Constitution. Excellent public education for all is the basis for long-term prosperity for all residents of New Jersey.
2. Public school funding laws must comply with the requirements of the Constitution and New Jersey Supreme Court rulings. Some key Constitutional principles require that a funding law must:
  - *Provide the resources needed for all New Jersey students to master the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards (NJCCCS).*
  - *Provide foundation per pupil funding at the level spent in New Jersey’s most successful suburban school districts, unless the Legislature can convincingly demonstrate that all students can achieve the standards at a lower spending level and that the difference represents excess spending in the successful suburban districts.*
  - *Provide funding for both required and demonstrably needed K-12 programs and services for low-income students based on the actual cost of those programs and services.*
  - *Provide funding for preschool programs based on the Abbott preschool program standards.*
  - *Continue to require the State to implement the Abbott accountability measures and education reforms in “special needs” or “Abbott” districts until such time as the State certifies that a district’s students are receiving a thorough and efficient education, as evidenced by student acquisition of the NJCCCS.*
3. Strong accountability mechanisms must be adopted and implemented to ensure that public funds are put to the most effective and efficient use to educate the children. Mechanisms must include: clear benchmarks against which the educational progress of all children can be gauged, clear lines of responsibility, measures to ensure that the public is informed on children’s educational progress, and procedures for correcting performance that does not meet progress benchmarks. These mechanisms must apply to educators at all levels of educational governance: from the local school districts to the New Jersey Department of Education.
4. The State is responsible for ensuring that all children receive a public education that meets Constitutional standards regardless of the child’s family income, the fiscal condition of the child’s home district, and the state’s fiscal condition overall. The State must provide additional resources to ensure that disadvantaged students receive a high quality education. Disadvantaged students include children and youth with disabilities, students from low-income households, English language learners, and children who live in concentrated poverty.