

Delayed torpedo for Jersey City schools

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In yesterday's editorial, this newspaper voiced concern over Gov. Jon Corzine's new school funding plan because there are more questions than answers. Last week at a Senate hearing, there were many numbers and promises, but no one made the actual school aid formula available - a clear sign that the administration did not want to debate the measure.

It is this newspaper's opinion that this bodes ill for Abbott school districts and in particular, Jersey City.

It is apparent to other areas of the state as well. Here is an insightful opening paragraph from an article about the proposed school aid plan that appeared yesterday in the Asbury Park Press:

"If Gov. Corzine's new funding formula were applied today, Jersey City schools would be out \$111 million in state aid."

The Journal noted that there were plenty of people who spoke at the Senate public hearing on the proposal who said they do not have enough information to fully judge it.

On its face, Corzine's plan would change how the state distributes \$7.8 billion to public schools, increasing overall state aid by \$532 million next year. The aid for any district is capped at 20 percent, but the extra funding would make certain that every municipality got at least a 2 percent increase in school funding.

What does this mean to Jersey City and other Abbott districts?

They get a three-year "reprieve." The Hudson County seat's school district would get a 2 percent aid increase each year for three years, but the district needs 4 percent annually, said legislative sources.

As a result, there will be some layoffs and schools will be forced to put more students in classrooms at a time when progress in education came about with smaller teacher-to-student ratios.

In the fourth school year, Jersey City goes cold turkey with no aid and the Corzine formula is applied. The results would be tantamount to a catastrophic loss of \$111 million out of its school budget, according to legislators. Another Abbott district, Newark, will have to overcome an \$88 million gap when the formula is applied.

This is when the taxpayer would have to make up the funding difference.

Is this a manifestation of Corzine's call for all to pay their "fair share?"

If state lawmakers cannot properly debate the issue before they vote on the administration's plan, then it will be argued as result of inevitable lawsuits from those who defend the poorer school districts.

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