

# Statewide Education Organizing Committee – SEOC

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Good morning, members of the Assembly Budget Committee:

My name is Carla Larsen. I am the Vice President of the Statewide Education Organizing Committee and a leader in our Asbury Park chapter, the Asbury Park Parent Listening Project. We represent parents in Jersey City, Newark, Paterson and Asbury Park. We are also members of the statewide Our Children/Our Schools campaign. As a parent of a public school child, I want you to carefully consider as you review the state budget for education the urgent concerns we have for the following:

1. We hope you will support the increase in aid to education that Gov. Corzine has included in his proposed budget. That increase, in the case of most Abbott districts, will at least keep the funding level with last year. Further, the judge in the Abbott SFRA Remand Trial yesterday recommended that supplemental funding remain in effect for the Abbott districts. I would like to urge the Legislature to take the necessary steps to make sure that supplemental funding remains available.
2. A very particular problem with the SFRA is that instead of providing aid to special education children based on a careful study of the actual needs in each district, it applies an average based on overall census data and ignores the real needs in our schools. We hope the Legislature addresses this very serious shortcoming in the SFRA.
3. Finally, we know that the so-called Secondary Reform program that the Department of Education is promoting is also a program that has serious problems. The main problem is that it starts at the wrong end with tougher exit exams and required courses, instead of starting with evaluating what is needed at the elementary and middle school years to prepare our youth for success in high school. In terms of your review of the education budget, we urge you to examine just how the Department of Education plans to require science courses throughout the state without first making sure that there are adequate, up-to-date science labs and materials in place. Such an examination would undoubtedly lead to a proposal for more funding for many schools and this, too, should be included in the state's budget for education. We urge your support of legislation, A-3692 and S-2574, that, in fact, would require the Department of Education to evaluate Phase I of these reforms before going on to impose Phase II.

Thank you for keeping these concerns in mind as you study and vote on the budget for education.