

Statewide Education Organizing Committee – SEOC

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Chairman of the Assembly Budget Committee:

My name is Elizabeth Smith. I am the Treasurer of the Board of the STATEWIDE EDUCATION ORGANIZING COMMITTEE (SEOC) and a partner of the Our Children Our Schools Campaign.

SEOC is a non-profit grass roots organization whose mission is to organize parents, grandparents and others who are committed to work together for improvements and reform in New Jersey's urban districts. Our Children Our Schools Campaign is a group of advocates, businesspeople, students and other allies who believe in education equity.

There are several issues that SEOC and OCOS have been involved with, but I want to focus on Pre-school and Secondary Reform.

The ABBOTT Preschool program has proven to be a pivotal investment in our State's education reform efforts. It is identified as a model program nationwide! SEOC supports a fully funded expansion of preschool programming in **all** of the other districts that have the need. New Jersey has the track record of success, because there was a strong financial and philosophical commitment to preschool education. Please do not cap the funding for universal preschool at the level of the federal monies available.

On the topic of Secondary Reform, The State Board of Education is poised to adopt a program that would require high stakes exams in order to receive a diploma for high school graduation. SEOC and OCOS strongly support a curriculum that is rigorous for New Jersey high school graduates. However, we urge a thorough needs assessment. Are all schools equipped with the facilities to provide the science labs required for all students? Are there enough qualified teachers available to teach all of our students? What has been the experience in this first year? What are the results of these first exams? Will as many students graduate this year, as might have without the new requirements? Commissioner Davy has testified that the rollout of this new program will require no additional funding. I urge you to look carefully at this issue in the "NJ Secondary Education Redesign Review Act" NJ Senate Bill (S2575) and Assembly Bill (A3692) from our funding standpoint so that our students are not blamed for poor performance when there is not a sound opportunity for success.

Someone recently said to me that education is not about innate intelligence, but about acquiring skills. I had never thought about it in quite that way before.

However, when I think that our children and grandchildren will be required to pay back our heavy national debt we must guarantee that they have the skills to compete globally. It is imperative that each and every one of us to work towards assuring that all of New Jersey's school children have access to a superior education from pre-school to high school, and that New Jersey maintains, no exceeds it current excellent rate of high school graduation.