

End delay on school funding

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The Legislature has ignored its court-ordered obligation to find the money for rebuilding schools in New Jersey's poorest districts. The lawmakers are now running out of time to get that job done.

The Education Law Center, which represents the so-called Abbott districts, has asked the state Supreme Court to set a June 30 deadline for refunding the construction program. The \$6 billion originally appropriated ran out, with most of the projects still on the drawing board. Figuring out how to pay for what must be done is the Legislature's responsibility.

There is nothing easy about the task, but it will only be more difficult if it has to be done with a deadline days away. There are 30 Abbott districts, with schools that have been neglected and overcrowded for decades. As time passes, conditions worsen, and the price goes up.

The \$6 billion originally appropriated, along with \$2 billion for non-Abbott schools, was not enough to get the job done under the best of circumstances. The original state Schools Construction Corp. was the worst example of waste and inefficiency. Lawmakers demanded, and we agreed, that the SCC be revamped before it got more money. That was not an excuse for inaction, however. The SCC has made substantial reforms. It is the Legislature that has dawdled.

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