

June 26, 2013

Governor Chris Christie
Office of the Governor
P.O. Box 001- State House
Trenton, New Jersey 08625

**HEALTHY
SCHOOLS
NOW!**



Dear Governor Christie,

We, the undersigned 43 organizations, representing parents, school employees, students, and healthy schools advocates, write to ask you to take immediate action to ensure the health and safety of students, teachers, and school staff.

On average, New Jersey's 2,500 school buildings are 50 years old and are four times more densely populated than office buildings.¹ Age, overcrowding, and deferred maintenance strain ventilation, heating, and electrical systems, which, in many cases, result in dangerous conditions that threaten the health of students and staff and impede students' learning. Everyday, students in New Jersey are exposed to hazardous conditions like mold, lead, PCBs, and poor indoor air quality resulting from decades of delayed repairs and the failure to start and complete new school construction projects.

On May 24, 2011, the New Jersey Department of Education, together with the New Jersey Schools Development Authority, requested that each SDA district (formerly known as Abbott Districts) identify and describe any potential emergent conditions that may exist in the district's school facilities. The DOE regulations² define an emergent condition as "so injurious or hazardous that it causes an imminent peril to the health and safety of students and staff." In response, school districts submitted more than 700 applications for emergent projects to be reviewed by the DOE on an "expedited basis" as required by the regulations. In the spring of 2012, a mere seventy-six of the applications were approved. Now, over a year later, the SDA has completed only a few of these projects and has not committed to complete the remaining projects by the beginning of the 2013-2014 school year. This is unacceptable. Allowing repairs to wait for over two years unnecessarily exposes students and staff to unsafe and unhealthy conditions. We request that you ensure all approved emergent projects be completed by this September -- before our children and staff return to school.

Communities across the state remain in desperate need of functioning, modern, and safe school facilities. Every day our students and those entrusted to teach and care for them, enter buildings that are unhealthy and unsafe. If we expect to have thriving schools and effective learning environments, these emergent repairs must be addressed.

While the SDA has met with us several times over the past year and engaged in informative dialogues, it is clear to us that the SDA needs to change the way it does business. They must develop procedures that are accountable and transparent to the people who work and learn in these buildings. Parents, students, and school employees deserve procedures that ensure timely repairs and construction, so that all our schools are healthy and safe. All emergent repair projects should be addressed as priorities with clearly delineated timelines for completion.

¹ Healthy Schools in New Jersey: Preventing Hazards to Students, School Employees, and Construction Workers: A report from the NJ Work Environment Council issued February 25, 2002.

² Educational Facilities Construction and Financing Act (EFCFA), New Jersey Administrative Code (6A:26).

Governor Christie, we ask that you live up to your commitment to education by making safe, healthy, and modern public schools a priority. The \$3.9 billion approved by the Legislature for school facility work was to ensure that every student in New Jersey would attend schools in safe and healthy learning environments. The SDA works under your direction and we therefore send this letter to ask for your immediate attention to our children and the schools they attend.

Please reply to Mo Kinberg, Campaign Organizer, NJ Work Environment Council, 142 West State Street, Third Floor, Trenton, NJ 08608 (or via email at mkinberg@njwec.org). Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Taimer Singleton, Youth Media Symposium, Program Coordinator, Abbott Leadership Institute

Dierdre Glenn Paul, Professor and President, African American Caucus-Montclair State University

Donna Chiera, President, American Federation of Teachers New Jersey

Reginald T. Jackson, Executive Director, Black Ministers Council of New Jersey

Phyllis Salowe-Kaye, Executive Director, Citizen Action

Amy Goldsmith, State Director, Clean Water Action New Jersey

Cuthbert Ashby, Chair, Coalition for Effective Newark Public Schools

Avery Grant, Executive Director, Concerned Citizens Coalition (of Long Branch)

Mark Broach, President, Concerned Pastors of Trenton

David G. Sciarra, Executive Director, Education Law Center

The Rev. Fletcher Harper, Executive Director, GreenFaith

Rev. Ronald Tuff, Board Chairperson, First Hopewell Multi-Purpose Center

Ann Twomey, President, Health Professionals and Allied Employees

Doc Doherty, President, International Brotherhood of Teamsters, Local 877

Joseph Della Fave, Executive Director, Ironbound Community Corporation

Raymond Ocasio, Executive Director, La Casa de Don Pedro

Bill Colon, Executive Director, Latino Institute

Kerry Margaret Butch, Executive Director, League of Women Voters of New Jersey

Tom Puryear, President, Oranges and Maplewood Chapters National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

Sharon Krengel, Facilitator, Our Children/Our Schools

Jaysen Bazille, President, Newark Student Union

Joseph Del Grosso, President, Newark Teachers Union

Trina Scordo, Executive Director, New Jersey Communities United
Barbara Keshishian, President, New Jersey Education Association
Deborah Kim Gaddy, Environmental Justice Organizer, New Jersey Environmental Federation
Charlotte Arr, President, New Jersey Parent Teacher Association
Gordon MacInnes, President, New Jersey Policy Perspectives
Jeff Tittel, Director, New Jersey Sierra Club
Carol E. Gay, President, New Jersey State Industrial Union Council
Josephine Paige, Secretary, New Jersey Vocal Minority
Rick Engler, Executive Director, New Jersey Work Environment Council
Bill Holland, Executive Director, New Jersey Working Families Alliance
Linda Reid, President, Parent Education Organizing Council
Sharon Smith, CEO, Parents Unified for Local School Education
Peter A. Tirri, President, Paterson Education Association
Rosie Grant, Executive Director, Paterson Education Fund
Terry Moore, New Jersey Information Coordinator, Save Our Schools March
Julia Sass Rubin, a founding member, on behalf of Save Our Schools New Jersey
Elizabeth Smith, Executive Director, Statewide Education Organizing Committee
Diana MTK Autin, Executive Co-Director, Statewide Parent Advocacy Network
Andrew Bobbitt, Taiwanda Terry Wilson, Coreen Grooms, Education Committee, Team Trenton
Kimi Wei, CEO/CKO, The Wei
Lucye Millerand, President, Union of Rutgers Administrators-American Federation of Teachers, Local 1766

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Marc Larkins, CEO, Schools Development Authority
Ed Walsh, Chair, Schools Development Authority
Chris Cerf, Commissioner, Department of Education
Mary E. O'Dowd, M.P.H., Commissioner, Department of Health
Harold J. Wirths, Commissioner, Department of Labor
Senator Teresa Ruiz, Chair, Senate Education Committee
Assemblyman Patrick Diegnan Jr., Chair, Assembly Education Committee
Senator Donald Norcross, Chair, Joint Committee on Public Schools, Sub-committee on School Facilities & Construction