



State of New Jersey

OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

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CHRIS CHRISTIE
Governor

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Dear School Board Member:

"The time for real reform is now... We must empower principals... We must... focus our efforts on teachers and children. I propose that we reward the best teachers, based on merit, at the individual teacher level. I demand that layoffs, when they occur, be based on a merit system and not merely on seniority. I am committed to improving the measurement and evaluation of teachers... And perhaps the most important step in that process is to give schools more power to remove underperforming teachers."

Those were my words from the State of the State Address on January 11th. And with the end of yet another school year coming in to view, I believe these words ring true now more than ever.

We are fortunate to have some of the best schools in the country right here in New Jersey – thriving educational communities full of great teachers and motivated students. I was lucky enough to attend one of these excellent public school districts in Livingston, where I grew up.

But not every child is so fortunate. Not every school is as good as the one I was fortunate enough to attend. In fact, in more than 200 perpetually failing schools, more than 100,000 of New Jersey's children are trapped without access to the educational opportunities that my classmates and I received.

Teachers, as you know, are the pillars of our educational system and the key to a school's success. We need to make sure we're attracting the best and the brightest teachers, that we're demanding accountability and that we're rewarding success. Our kids – and candidly, our teachers as well – deserve nothing less.

Our charge is simple: we need to fix our failing schools. And make our best schools even better.

How?

By attracting, inspiring and rewarding teachers who are passionate, creative and caring.

That's why I've made good on the words I spoke in the State of the State Address. Last week, I put forth a package of landmark legislation to establish a statewide evaluation system for teachers and principals, fundamentally reform the state's tenure system, provide merit pay to New Jersey's best teachers, and protect good teachers by ending "last in, first out" laws and the practice of forced placement. I have called for the legislature to take immediate action on the reforms to finally make the long-overdue transformation of public education a reality for New Jersey families – both for those in our best schools, and for those in our struggling districts.

The seven bills I submitted to the legislature call for:

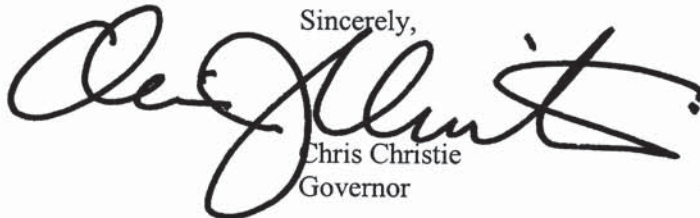
- Implementation of a multiple measured statewide evaluation system by the 2012-2013 school year that requires observation and evaluation of all educators at least twice per year with summative evaluation at the end of the school year using the rating categories of highly effective, effective, partially effective, or ineffective.
- Tenure attainment only after ratings of “effective” or “highly effective” have been received for the proceeding three years. Tenure status is lost after an evaluation as “ineffective” for one year or partially effective for two years.
- Reforming laws governing reductions in force (“Last In, First Out”) so that any layoffs are based on effectiveness – not seniority – and determined by an evaluation system established by the Commissioner of Education.
- Mutual consent that calls for agreement by both the principal and teacher on all teacher assignments to schools. Where a principal does not consent to a tenured teacher's placement in his or her school, that teacher will continue to receive compensation for 12 months while searching for an assignment in the district, after which he or she will be placed on unpaid leave.
- Reforming teacher compensation to focus on an educator’s demonstrated effectiveness in advancing student learning, as well as whether the educator is teaching in a failing school or is teaching in a subject area that has been identified as a difficult-to-staff subject area.
- Due process changes to eliminate a provision requiring a teacher against whom tenure charges were filed to begin receiving full salary and benefits after 120 days of start of the process as well as implementing a firm deadline requiring Administrative Law Judges hearing tenure revocation cases to render a decision within 30 days.
- Allow for school districts to opt out of the Civil Service System.

The vast majority of teachers in our state do a superb job every day. I want to recognize and honor their exceptional service – and reward them for it. Our children deserve to have access to educators continually striving for excellence. Similarly, we do our children a disservice by exposing them to teachers who aren’t enthused or equipped for the profession. We need to reward and promote the best, and demand accountability from those who aren’t performing.

We know we will face the same tired attempts to block these reforms at every pass. The big moneyed special interests in Trenton are more interested in protecting themselves and their status quo than in improving our schools. They’re more concerned with protecting the worst of their membership than they are with rewarding their best. And they certainly don’t have students’ interests at heart.

That’s why I’ve been meeting with teachers from all over the state – away from the glare of television cameras and reporters’ notepads. And in our private meetings, I’ve spoken with educational professionals who are a true credit to their craft. The teachers with whom I speak are inspiring tomorrow’s leaders, just like my teachers in Livingston inspired me. I want to reward their excellence and give our children every opportunity in life to succeed. Our reforms will do *exactly that*. **I hope our reform legislation will have your support.** Our kids can’t wait another school year for us to do what needs to be done – for them.

Sincerely,



Chris Christie
Governor