

Testimony at NJ Assembly Budget Hearing

Public Hearing @ State House Annex – Trenton, NJ

Wednesday, March 27, 2019

By Miriam Stern, Cherry Hill Public Schools parent, Cherry Hill Township

As a parent of 3 children in the CH Public schools I'm here to paint the real picture of Cherry Hill's current school district. The picture of Cherry Hill as an affluent suburb is simply no longer accurate. We have had significant changes in our population, in our township and our school.

- Our students: 69 native languages spoken, 2274 bilingual students and 383 English Language Learners.
- 2000+ students qualify as having special needs
- 24% of our entire student body identifies as African-American, Hispanic, or Two of More Races
- Our average elementary school enrollment is 375 students, we have 12 elementary schools

Finally after 3 years of funding increases Cherry Hill is due to receive \$1718 per student next year. Three of our neighboring towns which are in the same Factor Group receive the following per student funding:

\$2815

\$3997

\$4649

10 years of dramatic underfunding has caused irreparable harm and has had a compounding effect. As a parent of middle and high schoolers I now understand this on the deepest level. We have so many schools with leaking roofs, mold, mice and asbestos that we cannot remediate successfully. One of our 50+ year old high schools needs immediate repairs for **some** of its walls, totaling close to \$6 million

literally just to prevent them from further crumbling. And that's just a few walls in one school. 10 years of dramatically reduced funding has forced us to forgo much needed maintenance. But we can't kick the can down the road anymore. We need immediate relief for the health and safety of our students. It would be nice to have money for new textbooks, consumable learning materials, 1:1 technology, to afford busing for all of our student athletes to compete in athletic events, to fund our robotics club program whose 120 students are some of the top robotics competitors in the state, to upgrade the dingy lighting or re-paint the school walls. But those are unrealized dreams because they far exceed our District's budget. What we desperately need is funding for **some** of our 19 schools. Our legislators have promised assistance in finding alternative funding sources outside of the State Aid provided for FY20. I am asking you to support our legislators to find that alternative funding so we can address the health and safety needs of our students.