



March 6, 2015

Mr. David C. Hesse
Commissioner
New Jersey Department of Education
P.O. Box 500
Trenton, New Jersey 08625

Dear Commissioner Hesse:

We want to first thank you for the chance to speak with our Board members regarding our concern about the current fiscal status of the district. Please note that this memorandum does not reflect concerns of more than five Board members. As you are aware, Paterson is facing a serious fiscal crisis concerning our 2015-16 annual budget. To that end, we are reaching out to you to express some very serious concerns regarding the budget process. In 2013, the Board instructed the office of the State District Superintendent to prepare for the impending fiscal cliff that we now face. At that point, we recommended to Dr. Evans that measures should be taken to ensure this reduction in our budget. Unfortunately, these recommendations were met with an increase in central office staff from that period to now. The same recommendation was made at a Board retreat at Seton Hall University in 2014, in which very little action on the budget and impending cliff was taken. In fact, former Board of Education president, Christopher Irving, informed you of the Board's concerns regarding the budget several times last year, hoping that the severity of the situation would trigger some action from the State or County Office.

At this point, we are no longer comfortable with sitting on the sidelines while this district, we have been elected to serve, continues its fiscal downward spiral. The Board has asked for several documents from the office of the State District Superintendent, and continues to be left with very little information on how best to support the State in its creation of the budget. At times such as this, we believe help defines leadership and ultimately the future of our city. We are asking for your support to insert the Board of Education into the budget process as an equal and necessary partner.

Specifically, there are several measures that should be examined as this budget process unfolds, which should include conversations related to, but not limiting the following:

1. Assessing health insurance plans and potential changes for savings.
2. Contracting Professional Services: Instructional Aides, Substitute Teachers, Speech Therapy, and IT.

3. Examining the budgets of all departments over a three year period to assess true departmental needs.
4. Creating an effective reduction in force list.

These are just some of the recommendations that have come from our Board members related to the budget. We believe that we can be of support to the State Department as equal partners in this process, if you see fit. Lastly, no matter what your decision is, we believe that there needs to be a formal process put in place to monitor the spending of our district budget, now and in the future. Our current Acting Business Administrator and Deputy Superintendent can and should serve as the first line of defense in this effort, coupled with action taken by the Board of Education.

Commissioner, we are not naive to the fact that this situation can have potential ramifications on the return of Finance to the Board under the NJ QSAC regulations. With that said, we stand poised now, as we have over several years, to prove our own fiscal prowess and ensure that no matter what reduction is seen in our budget, that they are done for the purposes of ensuring the quality education that we believe all children in our city deserve.

Thank you for your time and we look forward to speaking with you.

Regards,

Kenneth Simmons, Vice President

Chrystal Cleaves

Christopher Irving

Flavio Rivera