

**Government relations report to NJASL  
December 12, 2006**

**State Board of Education:** The State Board of Education will consider high school redesign at its meeting on December 20, 2006.

**Department of Education:**

**Cost of Education** - On December 11, 2006, the department issued a report entitled, [Report on the Cost of Education](#). The posted document is undated and authored by Allen Dupree of the department and Augenblick, Palaich and Associates, the consultant that worked with the department on its 2003 costing out study. No press release or other explanation accompanies the report on the department's website and it is not clear if this cost of education is being offered by the department to the legislature to be used as part of the new state school funding formula called for by the Joint Committee on Public School Funding in its report.

The Education Law Center has [criticized the study](#), arguing that conclusions are based on hypothetical model districts and the study is based on outdated data.

The Garden State Coalition of Schools is reporting on its website that the department will hold public hearings on the funding formula - its design, concepts, and methodology - next Monday, December 18 in Bordentown in the morning and at Kean University in the afternoon and evening. More info as it becomes available.

**Districts in Need of Improvement** - On December 5, 2006, the Department of Education announced that [54 New Jersey school districts](#) and six charter schools have been designated as "Districts in Need of Improvement" pursuant to the provisions of No Child Left Behind.

Education Commissioner Lucille Davy said that districts may face sanctions such as loss of funding, the replacement or relocation of staff, and the implementation of a new curriculum. But immediate consequences are limited, as many of the cited districts -- many of them poor and urban -- have dozens of individual schools already sanctioned under the same law. Davy said a newly created program will be implemented in January that will allow the education department and other experts to better monitor districts and intervene quickly when necessary.

**State House:**

**Property Tax Reform** - A flurry of activity has been taking place in Trenton in the few weeks since the four joint committees on property tax reform released their reports. The first round of proposed legislation consists of includes 17 bills which include more than 40 specific proposals. The Assembly passed several of the bills at its session on Monday, December 11, 2006 while the Senate postponed action until Thursday. For a summary of these 17 bills, see the attached synopsis from the Ocean County Observer.

The governor and Democratic legislative leaders engaged in a mild skirmish this past weekend after the governor first asked legislative leaders to hold off on proposals affecting public employee pensions and benefits and then telling them to go ahead after the legislative leaders expressed concerns. By late Monday, December 11, the leadership had reportedly agreed to delay action on pension and benefits issues. The governor believes these issues are best left to the bargaining process but legislative leaders fear a falling off of support for the total package of reforms is public employee provisions are left out.

New Jersey public employees, led by the members of the state teachers' union, staged a massive rally in Trenton on Monday, December 11, 2006, to protest proposals that would affect their benefits. The crowd was estimated at between 7000 and 10,000.

Many legislators and citizens are disappointed in the first round of proposals because proposals on key issues have not been presented. These issues include the specifics on the 20 per cent property tax credit to households earning \$100,000 or less and the new formula to determine how state aid is allocated to schools.

**Office of the Governor:** No separate report.

**National:**

**Supreme Court considers voluntary integration plans** - On Monday, December 4, the United States Supreme Court heard argument in a case to decide the constitutionality of voluntary efforts by school districts to achieve racial integration in schools. As [reported by the New York Times](#), the tenor of the arguments indicated that the court was not likely to approve of such plans. The essence of the constitutional question is whether the measures to achieve integration should be subject to the same harsh scrutiny as the forced segregation at issue in the historic case of *Brown v. Board of Education*. It appears, based on their questions from the bench, the conservative majority on the court would answer yes to this question. A decision is expected by summer.