



# STATE OF NEW JERSEY OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

## **Governor Chris Christie Announces Innovative Transformation Schools Initiative**

*Joins Camden Mayor Dana Redd to Discuss Public-Private Partnership to Turn Around Chronically Failing Schools*

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**Trenton, NJ** – Governor Chris Christie joined Camden Mayor Dana Redd today to announce an innovative education project aimed at turning around chronically failing schools. The public-private partnership is designed to expand the education options available for children and parents who are trapped in some of New Jersey's school districts with the largest achievement gaps. This pilot program will authorize public "Transformation Schools" operated by school management organizations and is limited in scope to specifically target students with the greatest need in order to ensure every child in New Jersey has access to the same quality education. In New Jersey, 100,000 New Jersey children are trapped in nearly 200 chronically failing schools.

"While we pursue a comprehensive reform agenda to deliver positive results to every student in New Jersey, we simply cannot continue asking parents and children in failing schools to wait for relief," said Governor Christie. "This pilot program will provide an innovative alternative for those children who need it most, bolstering our efforts to ensure opportunity for every child in our state. Perhaps most importantly, through the knowledge that change is on the way, this program will begin to restore hope in communities where failing schools deny children hope and opportunity. I thank Mayor Redd for her leadership and commitment to addressing the tough challenges facing this city, and local leaders for getting behind this needed program."

This pilot program will be established by legislation that will allow for a board of education to apply to the Department of Education to create a public-private partnership. These Transformation Schools will be operated by a school management organization and will be subject to the same educational standards as any other public schools and be accountable to the Department of Education.

"For far too long, our urban youth have struggled to break through the achievement barriers found in the chronically failing schools in urban communities like Camden," said Mayor Dana Redd. "This Transformation Schools initiative will give these students and their parents renewed hope, access to quality educational opportunities and the ability to reach their potential for a productive and successful future."

As of December 2010, school management organizations operated in 31 states, in over 700 schools across the country, including elementary, middle, and high schools, and educating over 350,000 students. Under President Barack Obama, funding for School Improvement Grants (SIGs) has increased and is awarded based on the requirement that states direct the funds to the lowest performing schools and adopt one of four intervention models to turn around the low performing schools, including utilizing school management organizations

### **The Transformation Schools Pilot Program:**

- **Limited to School Districts with Persistently Failing Schools.** Districts where students face a chronic achievement gap will be able to apply to the Department of Education to create Transformation Schools.
- **Participation in the Pilot Program is Voluntary.** Eligible school districts can choose whether or not to apply and the Department of Education will be permitted to authorize up to five Transformation Schools.
- **Eligible Board of Education Must Demonstrate to the Commissioner of Education Clear Measures for Success.** Whether the application is to build a new school or to convert a persistently failing school, the same standards apply.
  - o The Board of Education supports the application. If the board does not support the application, it will not be considered by the Department of Education;
  - o School management organization has experience operating and managing schools, has been successful in doing so, and is financially healthy and sound;
  - o All construction costs will be borne by the school management organization.
- **School District Spending.** For each student enrolled in the Transformation School, the school district will pay the school management organization no more than 90% of the district's per-pupil expenditure (the same amount as the Charter School rate).
- **Enrollment.**
  - o **Converting Failing School.** If a failing school is converted, all students who were enrolled in the failing school will automatically be enrolled in the Transformation School unless they opt out. If the Transformation School is larger than the failing school it replaced, enrollment for the additional openings will be open to all students in the district based on a random selection process.
  - o **New School.** Enrollment will be open to all district students based on a random selection process that will not discriminate on the basis of intellectual capacity, aptitude, proficiency in the English language, or any other basis that would be illegal if used by a school district.

Under the proposed legislation, Transformation Schools would be authorized for five years, with the ability to apply to the Commissioner of Education for re-authorization. At the end of the first five years, the Commissioner of Education will be required to submit a comprehensive report to the Governor and Legislature concerning the effectiveness of the Transformation Schools and making recommendations as to whether the pilot program should be expanded.

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