

GOVERNOR'S FY12 BUDGET AGAIN GOES "OFF FORMULA," IGNORING STUDENTS' FUNDING NEEDS

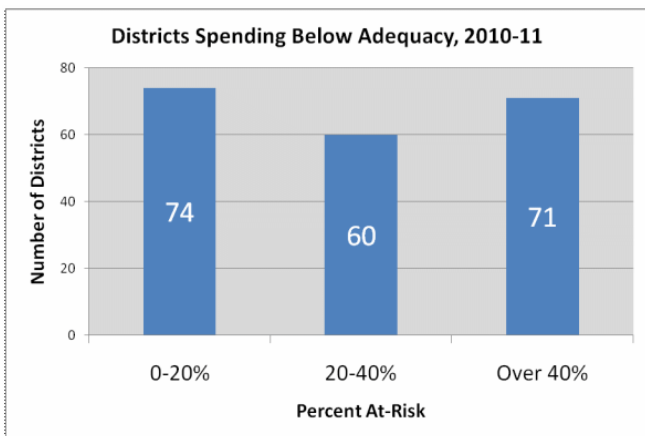
205 DISTRICTS "BELOW ADEQUACY" WILL FALL FURTHER BEHIND

Newark, NJ -- March 7, 2011

For the second straight year, Governor Chris Christie's proposal for K-12 state aid ignores the legal requirements of the State's school funding formula, depriving over one-third of NJ districts of the funding necessary to deliver the Core Curriculum Content Standards to students, particularly those at risk of academic failure.

The Governor's FY12 aid proposal comes as Special Master Judge Peter Doyne is examining the State's massive aid cut in the current school year -- 2010-11. Judge Doyne, under a directive from the NJ Supreme Court, is assessing the impact of the aid cut on the delivery of the CCCS in districts with varying concentrations of student poverty across the state. Judge Doyne will file his report with the Supreme Court by March 31st.

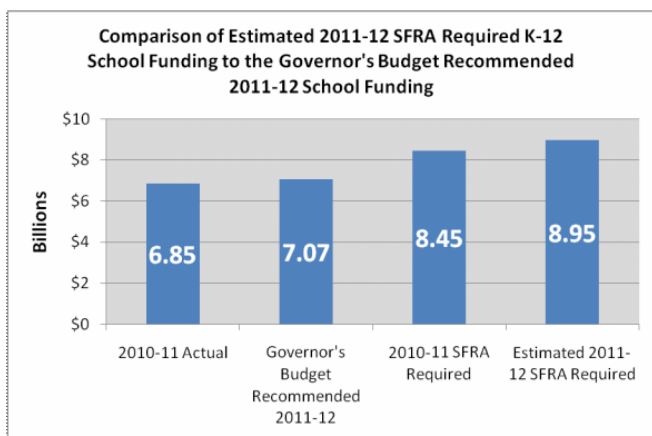
In the hearing before Judge Doyne, the State conceded aid was cut in the current year by \$1.08 billion from the 2009-10 level, or 13.6% of state aid. And, for the first time, the State revealed the real aid shortfall to districts: a \$1.6 billion cut from the level required if the SFRA formula had been fully funded, or almost 20% of state aid.



Adequacy Gap Will Widen in FY12

As this chart shows, the gap between state aid provided in the current year (2010-11) and the amount required under the SFRA formula is \$1.6 billion. Under the Governor's FY12 proposal, the "adequacy gap" will widen next year to an estimated \$1.88 billion.

Districts Below Adequacy Will Fall Further Behind in FY12



The evidence before Judge Doyne also showed that the number of districts spending "below adequacy" under the SFRA, or the funding level to deliver the CCCS calculated by the State, rose from 161 in 2009-10 to 205 this year. Even worse, districts below adequacy, which serve almost three-fourth of NJ's at risk students, fell further behind the State's defined adequacy level. This chart shows the number of districts below adequacy in 2010-11 by the district's concentration of at-risk students:

A more [detailed analysis](#) of the below adequacy districts shows:

- The budget shortfall in the 205 districts below adequacy under the SFRA is currently over \$1 billion.
- As a percent of the districts' current budget, the

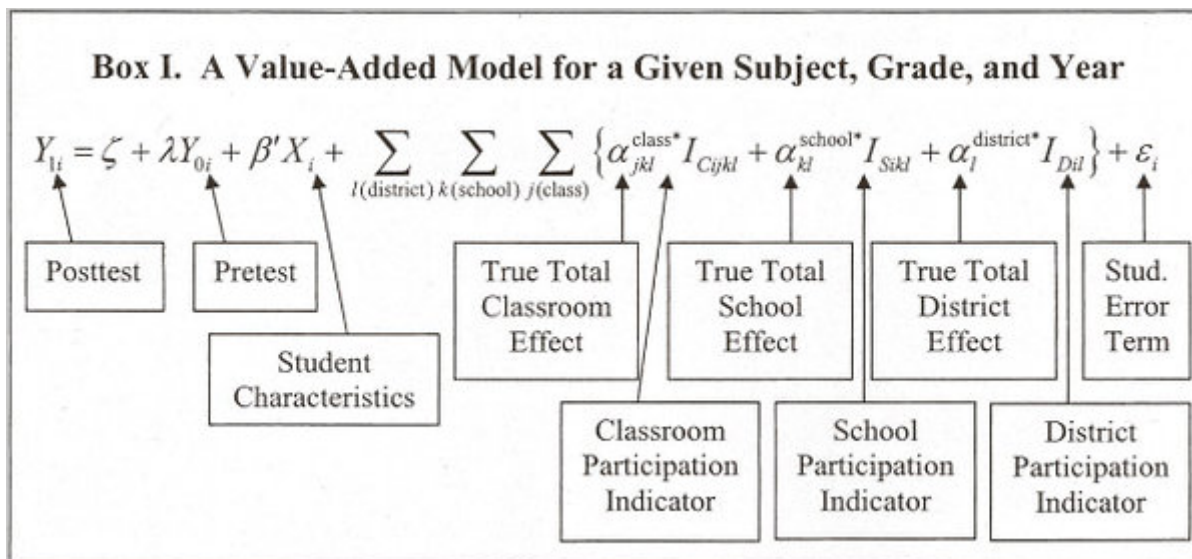
Guttenberg district has the highest adequacy gap -- 78%. In 91 districts the adequacy gap exceeds 10% of total budget.

- The Governor is proposing to distribute a \$217 million aid increase in FY12 without any regard for whether districts are spending below adequacy. The increase is also below the current Consumer Price Index of 1.23%.
- The Governor's proposed increase will do nothing to close the districts' adequacy gap. Instead, by ignoring the SFRA formula, the gap in below adequacy districts will widen even further next year.
- "The aid cuts in 2010-11 represented a devastating blow to the provision of equitable and adequate funding to enable all districts to provide students with the CCCS, which is the measure of a thorough and efficient education under the NJ Constitution," said David G. Sciarra, ELC Executive Director. "The Governor's school aid proposal for next year does not even make a dent in the intolerable funding gap in over 200 districts now below adequacy, or the amount the State itself says our students need to achieve the CCCS."

FROM *The New York Times*

ON EDUCATION

Evaluating New York Teachers, Perhaps the Numbers Do Lie

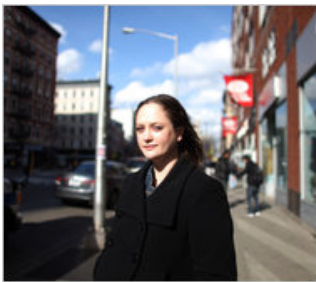


A statistical model the school system uses in calculating the effectiveness of teachers.

By [MICHAEL WINERIP](#)

Published: March 6, 2011

No one at the [Lab Middle School for Collaborative Studies](#) works harder than Stacey Isaacson, a seventh-grade English and social studies teacher. She is out the door of her Queens home by 6:15 a.m., takes the E train into Manhattan and is standing out front when the school doors are unlocked, at 7. Nights, she leaves her classroom at 5:30.



Chang W. Lee/The New York Times

Though her principal praised her work, Stacey Isaacson received a poor ranking in a statistical model used by New York City schools to evaluate teachers.

"She's very dedicated," said Tejal Baht, a fellow teacher. "She works way harder than I work. Yesterday I punched in at 7:10 and her time card was already there."

Last year, when Ms. Isaacson was on maternity leave, she came in one full day a week for the entire school year for no pay and taught a peer leadership class.

Her principal, Megan Adams, has given her terrific reviews during the two and a half years Ms. Isaacson has been a teacher. “I know that this year had its moments of challenge — you always handled it with grace and presence,” the principal wrote on May 4, 2009. “You are a wonderful teacher.”

On the first day of this school year, the principal wrote, “I look forward to being in your classroom and seeing all the great work you do with your students,” and signed it with a smiley face.

The Lab School has selective admissions, and Ms. Isaacson’s students have excelled. Her first year teaching, 65 of 66 scored proficient on the state language arts test, meaning they got 3’s or 4’s; only one scored below grade level with a 2. More than two dozen students from her first two years teaching have gone on to [Stuyvesant High School](#) or [Bronx High School of Science](#), the city’s most competitive high schools.

“Definitely one of a kind,” said Isabelle St. Clair, now a sophomore at Bard, another selective high school. “I’ve had lots of good teachers, but she stood out — I learned so much from her.”

You would think the Department of Education would want to replicate Ms. Isaacson — who has degrees from the [University of Pennsylvania](#) and Columbia — and sprinkle Ms. Isaacsons all over town. Instead, the department’s accountability experts have developed a complex formula to calculate how much academic progress a teacher’s students make in a year — the teacher’s value-added score — and that formula indicates that Ms. Isaacson is one of the city’s worst teachers.

According to the formula, Ms. Isaacson ranks in the 7th percentile among her teaching peers — meaning 93 per cent are better.

This may seem disconnected from reality, but it has real ramifications. Because of her 7th percentile, Ms. Isaacson was told in February that it was virtually certain that she would not be getting tenure this year. “My principal said that given the opportunity, she would advocate for me,” Ms. Isaacson said. “But she said don’t get your hopes up, with a 7th percentile, there wasn’t much she could do.”

That’s not the only problem Ms. Isaacson’s 7th percentile has caused. If the mayor and governor have their way, and layoffs are no longer based on seniority but instead are based on the city’s formulas that scientifically identify good teachers, Ms. Isaacson is pretty sure she’d be cooked.

She may leave anyway. She is 33 and had a successful career in advertising and finance before taking the teaching job, at half the pay.

“I love teaching,” she said. “I love my principal, I feel so lucky to work for her. But the people at the Department of Education — you feel demoralized.”

How could this happen to Ms. Isaacson? It took a lot of hard work by the accountability experts.

Everyone who teaches math or English has received a [teacher data report](#). On the surface the report seems straightforward. Ms. Isaacson’s students had a prior proficiency score of 3.57. Her students were predicted to get a 3.69 — based on the scores of comparable students around the city. Her students actually scored 3.63. So Ms. Isaacson’s value added is 3.63-3.69.

What you would think this means is that Ms. Isaacson’s students averaged 3.57 on the test the year before; they were predicted to average 3.69 this year; they actually averaged 3.63, giving her a value added of 0.06 below zero.

Wrong.

These are not averages. For example, the department defines Ms. Isaacson’s 3.57 prior proficiency as “the average prior year proficiency rating of the students who contribute to a teacher’s value added score.”

Right. The calculation for Ms. Isaacson’s 3.69 predicted score is even more daunting. It is based on 32 variables — including whether a student was “retained in grade before pretest year” and whether a student is “new to city in pretest or post-test year.”

Those 32 variables are plugged into a statistical model that looks like one of those equations that in “Good Will Hunting” only [Matt Damon](#) was capable of solving.

The process appears transparent, but it is clear as mud, even for smart lay people like teachers, principals and — I hesitate to say this — journalists.

Ms. Isaacson may have two [Ivy League](#) degrees, but she is lost. “I find this impossible to understand,” she said.

In plain English, Ms. Isaacson’s best guess about what the department is trying to tell her is: Even though 65 of her 66 students scored proficient on the state test, more of her 3s should have been 4s.

But that is only a guess.

Moreover, as the city indicates on the data reports, there is a large margin of error. So Ms. Isaacson’s 7th percentile could actually be as low as zero or as high as the 52nd percentile — a score that could have earned her tenure.

Teachers are eligible for tenure in their third year. To qualify, a teacher must be rated “effective” in three categories: instructional practices, including observations by the principal; contribution to the school community; and student achievement, including the [teacher data report](#). Ms. Isaacson was rated effective on the first two.

The past chancellor, [Joel I. Klein](#), [imposed new policies to make tenure harder to earn](#).

In an e-mail, Matthew Mittenenthal, a department spokesman said: “We are saying that a teacher’s tenure decision should simply be delayed (not denied) until that teacher has demonstrated effective practice for consecutive years in all three categories. The alternative is what we’ve had in the past — 90-plus percent of teachers who are up for tenure receive it. Do you think journalists deserve lifetime jobs after their third year in the business?”

The view seems to be gaining support. However, the number of years that it should take to earn tenure does not get to the heart of the problem.

The tougher question, says Ms. Isaacson, is how to create a system that will fairly evaluate teachers, whether it is used to grant tenure or lay off teachers. “I don’t have a problem looking at teachers based on merit,” she said. “Every job I had, I was evaluated based on merit.”

Marya Friedman, a sophomore at Bronx Science, describes Ms. Isaacson as brimming over with merit. “I really liked how she’d incorporate what we were doing in history with what we did in English,” Marya said. “It was much easier to learn” — which, of course, is what great teachers strive for.

P.E.A. “*SP.E.A. KING Out*”:

The current debate related to seniority issues is but a smoke screen by politicians in an effort to save money by turning out current senior staff members, and further weaken the pension system. All we in Paterson have to do is look backwards to the infamous “Glascoe Years” when the interloper from Virginia decided to get rid of senior staff.

There was no rationale for his actions. The Glascoe administrators took senior staff members who had been placed in Academic Support Teacher (AST) positions because of their knowledge and experience and threw them into a classroom whether they were qualified for the position or not. Many decided they had enough of the dismal treatment by the members of the Glascoe administrative staff and retired. Most did not want to go; they felt they were forced out.

As one said, “I was teaching remediation to students who clearly needed the individual assistance. The class into which I was to be transferred was working on Core Curriculum Content Standards that I had never worked with. I was not offered any in-service or training on these CCC’s. I would have to learn while teaching; using the students as guinea pigs as I re-learned the new curriculum. It would have been a disservice to the students in the classroom to which I was assigned for me to take over that class. The administration knew that, and didn’t care. They wanted to save my salary and the kids be damned.”

The Governor’s actions are both ageist and sexist. His efforts to rid the schools of senior staff puts more of a strain on the pension system by removing staff members who have been in teaching for 30 or 40 years. The fact that over 70% of the state’s teaching staff is female means that women will bear the brunt of these terminations.

One other thought: While the Governor claims he doesn’t want to kill bargaining rights, he certainly does intend to kill your union. Without the protection of seniority against arbitrary and capricious actions of administrators, many of whom have less experience than the very people they are “evaluating”, P.E.A. Delegates would have a target drawn on their backs for removal, just as we believe happened at one of our schools with last year’s RIF’s.

In a time when new staff members seek out the assistance of veteran staff to help “learn the ropes” of what this profession is all about, it is unfortunate that one man’s clear hatred of educators could change the balance of knowledge and youth in our schools, further hurting the reputations of one of the best school systems in the country. No one – not the newest staff member or anyone else – should think this is a good idea. Eventually only those who worship at the feet of the administration – school or district - will remain, and the kids will suffer once again.