

Burlington County Times

Chesterfield kicks off school funding effort

By Kelly Kultys

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Chesterfield received an additional \$401,205 in state aid last year, but officials said they still considered one of the most underfunded districts in the state. Officials are holding a meeting on Tuesday, Dec. 19 to organize their efforts for the upcoming budget cycle.

CHESTERFIELD — Despite receiving additional state funding last year, the one-school district said the fight is not over.

“We are certainly pleased with the increase of \$401,205 in state aid for the current school year,” Superintendent Scott Heino said in a letter to the community. “Unfortunately, even with that increase, the Chesterfield Township School District remains the most underfunded school district in New Jersey. It’s time to continue our fight for fair funding.”

The district has argued that it has not adequately been funded from the state, according to the state’s 2008 school funding formula. The formula was created under Gov. Jon Corzine and was designed to provide districts with their state aid based on enrollment, wealth and populations of impoverished and special needs students.

However, since it was implemented, the state has never had enough money to provide every district with all the aid the formula called for, so districts did not receive increases in their funding to match their enrollment. At the same time, other districts across the state who lost students did not have their funding reduced because the formula was originally created to ensure that none of the district lost aid.

During the budget process last year, Chesterfield was one of the most vocal districts in the state about the need for more funding for the schools that had been underfunded over the past few years. As a result, Gov. Chris Christie and both branches of the state Legislature passed a budget that added \$100 million in direct school aid, along with \$25 million in extraordinary

special education aid. The budget also cut \$31 million in aid from school districts that had previously been “held harmless” despite losses in enrollment or demographic changes. That money was redistributed to growing districts, like Chesterfield that had been labeled as underfunded since their aid did not keep pace with their enrollment.

Because of that, Chesterfield received \$401,205 in additional aid, almost double the \$419,983 they received from the state in total the year before.

Still, officials said there is work to be done. As a part of that, the school district is partnering with the township to continue to “fight this battle,” according to Heino.

On Tuesday, the groups are holding a joint meeting at 7 p.m. at the Chesterfield Elementary School, led by Committeewoman Andrea Katz, who has been the township’s most vocal advocate on behalf of school funding.

“During the meeting, you will be provided with information regarding the current status of school funding in New Jersey and how we plan to fight for fair funding this year,” Heino said in the letter.

Those in attendance can learn about how to get involved in the upcoming activities, including making calls, writing letters, attending hearings and organizing events.



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