

PISCATAWAY BOARD OF EDUCATION

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To The Piscataway School Community,

I began my career in education as a social studies teacher. I loved teaching important moments in history. The pageantry of exploration, heroism of war, eloquence at Gettysburg and the urgency of civil rights all became a grand study for my students and me.

One subject I had a hard time getting excited about was the Great Depression of the 1930's. It was a topic that just seemed too removed from my daily life at that time, a topic too mired in complex economic numbers and nomenclature – WPA, CCC, TVA. What did that all mean?

Well today, after six months of shock and dismay, young social studies teachers and old superintendents are now gaining expertise in a new nomenclature, a new vocabulary of stock derivatives, Ponzi schemes, and Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae.

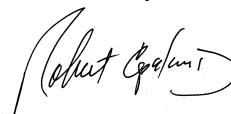
The economic crisis facing our nation is of very grave concern for all of us. Even before the collapse of major investment firms last fall, the Piscataway Board of Education directed the Administration to begin crafting a 2009-10 school budget that contained no tax increase for our community. We knew that task would be difficult even with the level of state aid we are guaranteed by law. Now, we are not even confident that the promised state aid will be forthcoming, making the task of maintaining the quality of our educational program and delivering a zero tax increase budget very difficult.

Nevertheless, the Board of Education remains mindful of its responsibility to the taxpayer and sensitive to the economic crisis we face and stands by its original mandate – provide a 2009-10 school budget with no tax increase.

Over the next several weeks, the Administration will continue to scour the budget, but I fear that unless New Jersey delivers our state aid, or assists school districts with escalating costs that are beyond our control, we will have little choice but to reduce spending through cuts in programs and staff, and increases in class size. An example of these escalating costs is tuition for special education students who attend out-of-district private schools. These tuitions, ranging from \$35,000 to \$65,000 per year for each student, are paid for by Piscataway residents and are being increased by private schools an average of 15.2 percent!!! The State must cap these tuitions if local school districts are going to hold the line on spending. In Piscataway, this cap would save about \$300,000, the equivalent of five teachers.

On Wednesday, February 25, we have scheduled an “Ask the Superintendent” forum at the Administration Building. Please come out and discuss our schools, ask questions and provide input. The meeting will take place at 7 pm. I look forward to seeing you.

Sincerely,



Robert L. Copeland