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**Advocates sue for release of report on school funding**  
**McGreevey never made public results of study on costs per child**

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An internal state report in 2003 that found New Jersey potentially underfunding its schools by at least \$500 million has become the subject of a legal scuffle, as school advocates sue the state to release its findings.

The case stems from an effort by top education officials under then-Gov. James McGreevey to answer what would seem an obvious question: How much should it cost to educate a child in New Jersey?

Consultants were hired and committees formed to figure costs for teachers, supplies and all the other components of an adequate education, including services required for students with disabilities or other special needs.

The report largely found that the state's overall spending on schools wasn't far off what's needed under the model, according to its chief author, but was unevenly distributed and about \$500 million short in a total spending package of about \$16 billion at the time.

After months of work, the final report was not released by McGreevey, his pledge of a new funding system never revisited. Now as Gov. Jon Corzine and the state Legislature confront the same issues in their efforts to quell the state's property tax crisis, advocates for the state's neediest schools want the report out.

The Education Law Center, the Newark organization that has led the Abbott v. Burke school equity lawsuits, has filed a complaint in state Superior Court demanding the state to release the report and its findings.

"It's of obvious importance to our clients, in that it is the only study that methodologically determines the cost of a constitutionally adequate education in New Jersey," said Koren Bell, staff attorney for the law center.

"We want this study for public consumption, too," she said. "It's of clear public importance, and will be increasingly so as the Legislature starts to tackle these issues in the coming months."

State officials would not comment on the complaint, only to say the report was part of the administration's own working sessions. The state has contended the document was deliberative in nature, and not subject to the state's Open Public Records Act.

## Star Ledger Article on lawsuit

Whether public or not, the report's conclusions that schools are potentially underfunded would be volatile in a debate in which Corzine and legislators have mostly claimed that schools have more than enough money.

Richard Rosenberg, who led the effort as the state's assistant commissioner for finance, said the argument about excessive spending may still hold in some districts, but the 2003 study found that New Jersey schools overall were fairly close to the mark.

He said one group, however, that appeared especially underfunded were middle-income districts that are neither wealthy enough to count on local support nor poor enough to receive the mandated Abbott v. Burke funding for the neediest schools.

"They were places like Carteret and Rahway," said Rosenberg, who is now business administrator in Englewood Cliffs. "It wasn't substantially more (money) that we spent overall, but more a matter of equalizing it."

With the annual growth in spending since 2003, Rosenberg yesterday estimated that the \$500 million shortfall figure could have risen to \$700 million to \$800 million today.

Other findings also pointed out the spending now in the state's large urban districts falling under the Abbott mandates may not be as far out of line as some politicians and policymakers have claimed in recent months.

John Augenblick, a Denver-based school finance expert, did the cost aspect of the study and said yesterday that New Jersey fit the pattern of other states where the programs needed to educate special-needs students are significantly more expensive.

For instance, he said, programs for students with disabilities typically cost more than twice that for general education students. Students with limited English skills need programs costing up to 90 percent more, he said, and students of poverty 50 percent more.