



# Education Law Center

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## GOVERNOR PROPOSES SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION FUNDING AND REFORM

Governor Jon Corzine's School Construction Working Group released its **third and final report** on September 14th. The report recommends that the Legislature authorize an additional \$2.5 billion for school facilities projects in New Jersey's urban or "Abbott" districts, along with \$750 million for projects in suburban, rural and other districts across the state.

The report, however, conditions the new funding on the adoption of a "Strategic Plan" by the state School Construction Corporation (SCC), the state agency charged with implementing the program. In addition, the Governor wants the legislative action on program reforms, and completion and final approval of all districts' 2005 Long Range Facilities Plans.

Among the legislative reforms called for by the Governor are:

- A new State Authority to manage the school construction;
- More school district involvement in the school design and construction;
- Greater involvement of municipalities in land acquisition;
- Improved collaboration between the State, districts and municipalities in the project approval process;
- More flexibility in the mechanisms used to build schools; and
- Regular progress reports to the Legislature.

The report also presents a new method for prioritizing projects for funding, including those now stalled because of a lack of funds. The report calls for more local stakeholder involvement in the prioritization process to ensure that the most urgent facilities needs are in line for the new funding.

"This report presents a solid framework for restarting the school construction program," said David Sciarra, ELC Executive Director. "We're calling on the Governor to draft legislation to implement his recommendations, and work with the Legislature to approve the new funding and reforms. Our school children have been waiting too long already. Let's not have any further delay."

ELC also remains concerned about the Department of Education's failure in moving all districts' Long Range Facilities Plans to completion and approval. Recent evidence uncovered by ELC shows the DOE is woefully understaffed in its School Facilities Division, and cannot handle its responsibilities in a timely manner.

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Close Window