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## **Broad Coalition Formed to Ensure School Construction Continues**

**Trenton, NJ** – Concerned by the halt in school construction, a new coalition has been formed to ensure its continuation throughout the state of New Jersey.

Building Our Children's Future (BOCF) is a coalition of influential school construction advocates, comprised of taxpayers, parents, education leaders, community advocates, municipalities, construction professionals, business and civic organizations. The group is committed to ensuring that the State fulfills its legal responsibility to provide educationally adequate school facilities to all children and that proper attention is focused on ensuring adequate funding and appropriate oversight for New Jersey's school construction program for both Abbott and non-Abbott school districts.

BOCF will work for immediate funding in order for school construction to continue as planned. New work is on hold while Governor Corzine awaits an assessment of the agency charged with administering the school construction program.

"New Jersey cannot wait, with school construction at a halt, while students remain in dilapidated, inadequate schools," said BOCF Co-Chair Philip Beachem, President of the New Jersey Alliance for Action, a group representing hundreds of business, labor and academic organizations. "Moreover, taxpayers cannot afford to allow the months of inaction to grow to years, while the cost of building increases every day."

Serving with Beachem as co-chair is David Sciarra, Executive Director of Education Law Center, which established the legal right to adequate school facilities in the landmark Abbott vs. Burke case.

"Every child has the right to attend school in buildings that are safe, not overcrowded and educationally adequate," said Sciarra. "While we've made progress, much more work must be done to improve school facilities in all our communities – suburban, rural and urban. We need the Legislature to provide additional funds to ensure our students get the education they deserve."

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Other coalition members weigh in with equal urgency. "Schools across the state feel the budget crunch every day," explained Edwina Lee, Executive Director of the New Jersey School Boards Association. "This constant squeeze will only get tighter if the state does not follow through on its promise. School districts must move forward to provide proper facilities in which to learn, but they cannot without the funding they so desperately need."

Echoing her thoughts, Kenneth Zimmerman, Executive Director of the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice, foretold the consequences of delay "We must move forward and get to solutions for building schools effectively and expeditiously," Zimmerman stated. "The recent stoppage has left communities with boarded homes, vacant land and dashed hopes. This program can and should be an economic catalyst for neighborhoods throughout the state."

Lynne Strickland, representing the Garden State Coalition, described the delay as a breach in public trust. "State school construction funding is direct, measurable and meaningful property tax relief to our towns and cities," said Strickland. "Voters in suburban and other towns approved 35 additional projects last year with the understanding that at least 40% of eligible project costs would be paid by the State. Failure to fund these projects violates the public's trust, leaves needed facilities in jeopardy, and could very likely cause property tax increases in the affected communities. Districts deserve fair notice from the State as to how to proceed with their bonding and their building. This continued lack of direction is destabilizing and costly to communities in terms of credibility and dollars."

Within the coming months, Building Our Children's Future will advocate for funding of the school construction program so that work can continue.

"The breadth of this coalition shows state government that New Jerseyans are serious about school construction and that funding must continue now," concluded Co-Chair Beachem. "The cost of further delay is extraordinary. Inflationary factors and the ever-shrinking supply of building materials make tomorrow's construction more costly than today's. BOCF will work with the State Legislature and Governor Corzine to ensure all New Jersey school children get the equal education they deserve and that the state's economy continues to move forward and grow."

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