



Education

in New Jersey

STEVEN
Fulop 2025
DEMOCRAT FOR GOVERNOR

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New Jersey Public Schools have been a shining example of what is possible with proper investment and commitment.

As Governor, Steven Fulop would look to build on New Jersey's successes in K-12 traditional public schools, while focusing heavily on reshaping higher education and special needs education opportunities.



IN JERSEY CITY:

Notable Accomplishments in Education

While the Jersey City school board is an autonomous entity with its own elected officials and a massive \$1 billion budget, Mayor Fulop has shown an unprecedented commitment to involvement, support where applicable, and willingness to engage in tough conversations around education.

Expanding Opportunities for Families With Special Needs

Mayor Fulop's Administration has made a clear commitment to expand resources for families with special needs. In 2023, the Department of Recreation & Youth Development completed the Special Needs Social Club launch, providing consistent opportunities for 60 special needs youth ages 6-24. Furthermore, Jersey City's summer camp is now a genuinely inclusive setting where all youth, of all abilities, are both physically and socially included and supported throughout camp activities by adding special needs support staff.



Alternative Education/Vocational Schools

The Fulop Administration has provided major grants to partner programs like Team Walker to construct vocational training programs. Recognizing that a 4-year college program is not right for every student, programs like Team Walker provide classroom learning and practical applications enabling students to earn a certification in their respective trade, paving the way for future apprenticeships and careers.



Public School Construction

Despite virtually no financial help from the State of New Jersey for new school construction in Jersey City, Mayor Fulop has found innovative ways to construct more new classroom seats than any Jersey City Administration over the last 50+ years including traditional public schools, county public schools, and charter schools, giving parents real options for their children.

NEW SCHOOLS UNDER MAYOR FULOP



- **Explore 2000** - 250 seat Hudson County middle school located in Jersey City; facilitated by a joint venture between Jersey City and Hudson County
- **PS 16 Annex** - 200 seat new construction K-5 Jersey City public school; facilitated by Mayor Fulop in public/private partnership with Veris
- **Kindle Public Charter School** - Jersey City charter school launched in the Fall of 2023 with its first class of 6th graders. Mayor Fulop provided letters of recommendation to the DOE to help push for approval.
- **Liberty Science High School** - 400 seat magnet county, public high school focused on science and technology; facilitated by a partnership between Jersey City, Hudson County, and Liberty Science Center (under construction)
- **BelovED Charter School** - 2,000 seat charter school on a six-acre property sold by Jersey City to BelovED with the clear goal of creating a six-acre campus for Jersey City students. (Under construction)



Public School Financial Support

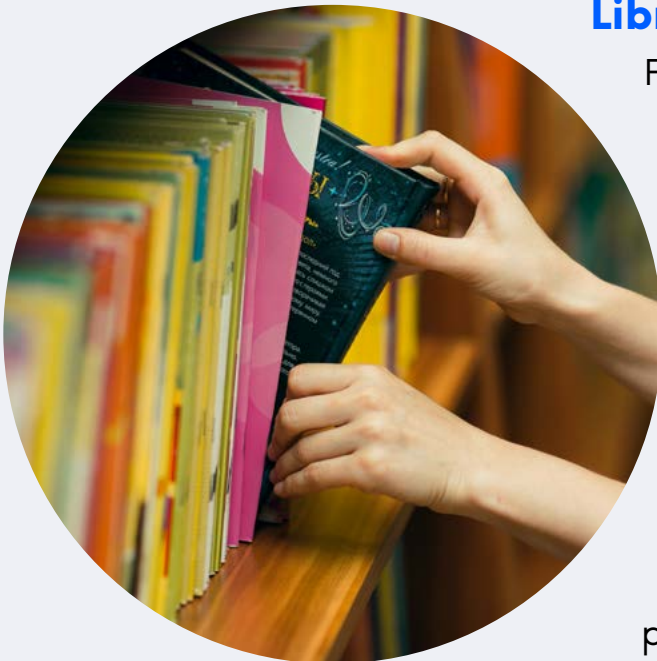
Under Mayor Fulop, the Jersey City municipal government has helped the school budget by absorbing costs including a \$15 million city investment in water purification and costs for solid waste disposal and certain public work functions. This is in addition to Mayor Fulop phasing out the use of Long Term Tax Abatements from previous administrations which has returned more than \$40 million to the school budget.

Library Improvements

For over 120 years the Jersey City Free Public Library (JCFPL) has been the largest municipal library in the state of New Jersey

In 2021, under Mayor Fulop's leadership, overdue fees were eliminated, making it the largest fine and fee-free institution in NJ. This has encouraged continued engagement from previously disappointed residents who lost or misplaced an item in the past.

Mayor Fulop has driven unprecedented investment in the library by growing the budget from \$7.9m in 2013 to \$16.4m in 2023 and by investing over \$30m since 2013 to improve existing facilities and construction of the first new Jersey City library in 50 years.





AS GOVERNOR:

Areas of Focus in Education

Governor Murphy and the state legislature have done an excellent job funding traditional K-12 public schools throughout New Jersey. As Governor, Steve Fulop will build on this success, while prioritizing reforms to higher education cost and funding, special needs programming, early childhood education, the school funding formula, and of course, segregation in New Jersey public schools.



Higher Education Reform

2% Cap on Tuition Increase

The ever-rising cost of tuition needs to be stemmed. In mid-2023 the Rutgers Board of Governors raised tuition by 6%, or \$387 per semester for full-time in-state undergraduate students. In addition, the Board increased the cost of housing by 5% and the meal plan by nearly 7%. As Governor, Fulop will institute clear guidelines for how public universities that rely on public dollars can raise costs to students. Furthermore, any proposed capital plan larger than \$50m should be subject to approvals from the state.

College Saving Reform (529)

The cost of college has become prohibitively expensive for most families. While Governor Murphy allowed New Jersey to become the 35th state to offer a 529 College savings plan, the state remains an outlier by including tax deduction eligibility only for families with less than \$200k in annual income. With the high cost of living in New Jersey, families earning over \$200k still need help covering college costs. As Governor, Fulop will lift income limits to encourage savings and help students achieve a college degree.



Commitment to County Colleges

New Jersey currently ranks as the 47th state with regard to financial support for its county colleges.

Governor Murphy's Fiscal Year 2025 budget proposed further drastic cuts in investment in New Jersey's Community Colleges with a 12% reduction in state support. County Colleges in New Jersey serve over 230,000 residents and in many ways are the gateway to an affordable degree for many residents. Under Governor Fulop, the state's investment in county colleges would match the commitment to higher education. In other words, an increase in funding for a four-year university would, at a minimum, result in the same percentage increase for county colleges.



Finally, as Governor, Fulop will proactively encourage more direct partnerships between county colleges and four year institutions to better align degrees with actual needs. This is an efficient and impactful way to help higher education prepare students to enter the workforce in fields right here in New Jersey.

Reform State's Funding of Higher Education

New Jersey's Tuition Assistance Grant (TAG) program was initially designed to help low-income students cover the balance of tuition costs. The program was intended to provide flexibility for students to choose from any qualified four year college in New Jersey (public, private, religious, etc). TAG costs the state roughly \$500m per year, yet allocation is not based on family income but rather which institution a student attends. As Governor, Fulop would reposition the program so that it is based on the needs of the student, not the cost of the university, allowing more funding to go to institutions that primarily serve students with higher financial needs.



Public School State Funding Reform

Infrastructure Improvements

The COVID-19 pandemic laid bare the need for healthy school environments - windows that open and air-conditioning are now recognized as basic needs to keep students and staff safe. Under the federal CARES Act, New Jersey schools were eligible to receive funding under the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund. This unique opportunity to update and improve aging buildings was not fully realized. NJ School Development Authority (SDA) must re-imagine its role and again become a trusted partner.

School Funding Reform Act (SFRA)

The SFRA's "local fair share calculation" which dictates a municipality's ability to capture local taxes to serve their school system is overdue for an update. Since this landmark legislation was enacted in 2008, New Jersey has raised student achievement expectations but the formula has not changed. The SFRA is too dependent on property values and it lacks transparency. Every parent should understand why their district is gaining or losing funding and how this decision was reached. A Fulop Administration would prioritize bringing the SFRA up to date by directing the Commissioner of Education to work with the Legislature to hold hearings to learn from experts in public school finance on how and why to recalibrate the formula. The SFRA will be updated within the first year of the Fulop Administration.



Confront School Segregation Directly

Despite being the most diverse state in the country, New Jersey has the dubious distinction of having some of the most segregated schools in the country. The next Governor needs to address this issue head-on as a “fair & efficient education” includes diversity. In Year 1, Governor Fulop will impanel an independent board of educators, activists, and state leaders tasked with producing a comprehensive, statewide plan to address segregation, including economic and social factors. Following that, the Fulop Administration will use the revised school funding formula as a tool to incentivize school districts to proactively seek diversity. Recognizing that middle schools in nearly every district lack extracurricular activities, the Fulop Administration will require them to combine sports, music, and arts programs with neighboring districts to benefit all students. Finally, and similar to what Mayor Fulop has done with SciTech Scity High School, he will direct the state to use magnet county schools as the key leverage point to confront the desegregation of schools.



Support for Universal Pre-K

Steve Fulop is committed to building on the goals set by Governor Murphy to create universal PreK across New Jersey. The Fulop Administration will work with the legislature on continuing to phase in programs and by identifying funding sources.



Consolidation and Shared Services

The largest cost to every municipality is school funding. There are 564 individual municipalities in New Jersey and 686 operating school districts. And while we are a home rule state, anyone can recognize that this is not only inefficient, it drains taxpayers without improving education. As Governor, Fulop will support Senator Vin Gopal's proposed legislation to require the Commissioner of Education to study the most efficient and effective means of consolidating school districts, with the exception of Pre-K or K-12 districts, into all-purpose regional school districts, with particular focus on school districts with less than 300 students.

Shared services are an easy way to reduce costs to taxpayers without any impact on the quality of education and without eliminating jobs. To start, Fulop would direct the Commissioner of Education to require waste management, insurance, communications, technology, legal, and accounting services and contracts to be consolidated.

Special Needs Funding Formula

It is imperative that New Jersey revisit its approach to funding special education. When the current school funding formula was implemented in 2007, under the Corzine Administration, it was widely accepted that special education funding needed to be revisited. Since then, no governor has chosen to correct it. The Fulop Administration will actively update the formula to ensure that the needs of special education students are met.

New Jersey, along with only a handful of states, uses a census-based formula to determine funding. As Governor, Fulop will move the state to a direct cost-basis model. This will ensure that school districts are fairly reimbursed for the services provided to their special needs students. Fulop is committed in Year 1 to bringing the best experts in the country together to update the formula in order to better serve students with special needs.



Mental Health

Increase Access to Mental Health Services

The mental health crisis for students - especially teens - has grown steadily, and was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. While there is no quick fix, studies have shown that schools are a large part of the solution. To meet students where they are, New Jersey needs to streamline resources to provide consistent mental health funding for all school districts. The current School Based Youth Service Grant program only helps about 40+ districts and without consistent funding, even these programs are not meeting the needs of students.

Governor Murphy created the NJ4S program to support youth mental health. As Governor, Fulop would move the program to the Department of Education to help streamline resources.

Recovery High Schools

Inspired by former Senator Ray Lesniak, New Jersey has created three public/private recovery high schools. There are currently three programs in the state - Monmouth, Roselle, and Cape May. As Governor, Fulop would look to build on the successes of these programs and continue to fund additional programs to increase access to students.



CONCLUSION:

The Fulop Administration will be substantive in addressing the specific challenges that affect New Jersey's students and educators

As Governor, Fulop will build upon his extensive experience supporting education initiatives in Jersey City to create greater transparency, efficiency, and support for students, parents, educators, and administrators in the State of New Jersey.

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