



## John Nichols: Chris Christie's bully politics: 'I am tired of you people'

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New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie is running hard for a second term, and for a place in the 2016 Republican presidential race.

"New Jersey has some of the best schools in the country, and this administration has done nothing but lambaste us and tell us what horrible schools we have."

When Christie started to pick at her, Corfield announced: "I'm going back to work."

A video of the confrontation went viral and the teacher from Flemington is now a top Democratic candidate for the New Jersey Assembly who says New Jersey has "a governor who leads by intimidation and not diplomacy. That is not the hallmark of a strong leader. We have been fighting against that. We are fighting against bullying instead of real leadership."

Christie's record on education issues — and respect for teachers — is so atrocious that Diane Ravitch, the author and analyst of education debates, has urgently endorsed the governor's Democratic challenger, state Sen. Barbara Buono. Though Ravitch notes the Democratic legislator's impressive resume and platform, she says:

"(Buono's) first qualification is that she is not Chris Christie. Christie has divided the state, neglected its poorest communities (other than to try to privatize their public schools), and bullied people he doesn't agree with. He disdains public schools (calling them "failure factories") and scorns the people who work in them every day to educate the children of New Jersey. He is ignorant of the fact that the public schools of New Jersey are ranked near the very top on federal tests. He actively promotes policies that segregate and disempower people of color in New Jersey. I shudder to think of an America in which someone with the character of Chris Christie were considered a role model."

That's not the sort of review any governor should want — especially one who is positioning himself for re-election and then a presidential run.

But Christie can't control his urge to bash teachers. On Saturday, as he finished a day of campaigning, the governor ran into Melissa Tomlinson, a veteran teacher who asked him: "Why do you continue to spread the myth that our schools and teachers are failing?"

Christie shot back, "Because they are!"

Then, poking a finger at Tomlinson, the governor shouted, "I am tired of you people."

He demanded to know: "What do you want?"

Tomlinson replied, "I want more money for my students."

As his supporters taunted the teacher, Christie told the teacher to just do her job.

Tomlinson kept her cool and headed home, where she wrote a poignant letter to the governor in which she explained, "I am a public school teacher that works 60 hours a week in my building. Yes, you can check with my principal. I run the after-school program, along with my classroom position. I do even more work when I am at home. For verification, just ask my children."

In her letter, she detailed the challenges caused by Christie's cuts to public education. She also reflected on the folly of focusing so much school time on preparing for and administering standardized tests and on privatization schemes.

And she asked the tough questions about the governor's constant political positioning.

"Why do you portray schools as failure factories? What benefit do you reap from this? Have you acquired financial promises for your future campaigns as you eye the presidential nomination?" wrote Tomlinson, suggesting that in order to score political points, "you are setting up the teachers to take the blame. Unfortunately, you are not the only governor in our country that has this agenda."

"What do 'we people' want, Governor Christie?" Tomlinson a