



State begins next chapter in school-funding saga

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Abbott vs. Burke has become New Je

and where.

Critics have continually pointed out that because of the court's actions, five percent of school districts receive more than 50 percent of the state aid and that per-pupil expenditures in some of those districts exceed \$25,000, while student performance has shown little significant improvement.

The governor has expressed the same sentiment, suggesting the only way to change the court's approach was to change the court's composition.

The court has a great deal at stake as well. While it may agree with the sympathy expressed by Doyne over the state's financial condition, its lengthy history with the funding issue cannot be discarded or ignored without dramatically undermining, if not destroying altogether, its credibility.

The four decades' worth of established precedent was built one case and opinion atop another, and it is unlikely that the current court would move to knock the props out from beneath that history.

Both the governor and Verniero, whose lives and careers have been involved in the law, have a deep respect for the institution and understand more than most the sanctity of legal precedent and why it would not be overlooked by the court.

The court has used the constitutional mandate for the state to establish a "thorough and efficient system of public education" as the basis for its past decisions, interpreting the phrase to require that a "thorough and efficient" education must be provided to the state's children.

That interpretation is another point of contention between the court and its critics.

While it remains to be seen what approach Verniero will take, there has been speculation that compromise is a likely outcome, that the court would grant the administration additional time to bring funding up to the formula standards or to permit a phase-in that commits the state to a specific level of additional aid for a set number of years.

It's difficult to imagine that the participants have not wearied of this long and often acrimonious dispute.

Eight governors and countless legislatures have been players in this "War and Peace" saga. It's time for less of the former and more of the latter.

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