

**Opening Statement – Lizette Delgado Polanco, Schools  
Development Authority CEO**

Good afternoon. It's a pleasure to have the opportunity to be here alongside Department of Education Commissioner Dr. Lamont Repollet to discuss our school construction program. Thank you Chairwoman Pintor-Marin, Vice Chair Burzichelli and the rest of the Assembly Budget Committee for having me here today.

I am honored to lead the New Jersey Schools Development Authority, an organization of dedicated professionals who work every day to better the educational opportunities for thousands of students.

In the short time I have been with the Authority, it is clear that the SDA's impact on the State's education infrastructure is widespread.

Our mission is to deliver efficient, high-quality educational facilities that best meet the needs of New Jersey students...Facilities that can deliver a 21<sup>st</sup> Century curriculum for our students.

The SDA's work ensures equitable learning environments, fosters sustainable communities and contributes to local economies.

In fact, since the program's inception, more than 1 million students have been positively impacted by completed projects in both SDA and Regular Operating Districts.

In 2018, the SDA opened four new and renovated facilities in Garfield, New Brunswick, Newark and Vineland.

This work represents a \$198 million investment by the State of New Jersey in schools that were opened this year.

In all of these communities, these schools will help to reduce overcrowding and ensure that students have the facilities that they need to succeed.

These schools represent OUR investment in New Jersey school children and OUR dedication to improving the quality of life and the quality of education in our State.

This past year, the SDA has also continued our work to address health and safety issues in the SDA Districts through the advancement of emergent projects.

In Camden, we completed a multi-year, \$3.8 million project at the Cramer Elementary School.

Please note...Students at Cramer Elementary now have the ability to see out the windows in their school; something that should not be a luxury, but a requirement.

While the accomplishments of the SDA are impressive, I am confident that we can do more.

Since I became the CEO, we have made a concerted effort to partner with the SDA Districts and bring a stronger and fairer New Jersey to our school children.

So far, we have conducted tours in 24 of the 31 SDA Districts...not to mention a tour of Teaneck, which is a Regular Operating District.

These tours have shown us that the SDA and the State of New Jersey MUST do more to help improve conditions and overcrowding in these Districts.

On our school tours in 2018 and 2019, we have visited more than 125 schools.

We've seen schools that were between 125-150 years old. One school in Newark, Lafayette Elementary is 170 years old. These should not be schools...they should be museums.

We've visited schools where we found windows that didn't open and classrooms that are 80+ degrees.

We've visited schools where subjects like art and music are taught beneath stairwells and bleachers due to lack of classroom space.

We've visited schools that aren't meeting STEM/Science requirements because they don't have the necessary equipment or space.

We've visited schools that aren't meeting PE requirements because they don't have gyms or the gym floors are bowed, bent and broken.

New Jersey students can't receive a 21<sup>st</sup> Century education in 19<sup>th</sup> Century facilities.

That's why the SDA is committed to building -- and sustaining -- tomorrow's schools today and being a collaborative partner with our SDA Districts.

These tours are only the beginning.

Our new vision is to involve our community stakeholders every step of the way in the planning and construction of school facility projects.

Our new vision is that every New Jersey school child should have the opportunity to receive an equitable education, no matter their circumstances or zip code.

We CAN do better. We MUST do better.

We can use these school projects as an economic development tool to uplift communities by building community partnerships, creating jobs and increasing contract opportunity for under-represented businesses.

We know that we are building a place that is more than just a school -- It's a community gathering place, a safe haven, a place for athletics and the arts, and a place where boys and girls with dreams can become men and women of vision.

In 2019, the SDA has 43 projects under active management, including 18 capital projects and 25 emergent projects.

While our dedicated staff is working on these active projects, there is currently:

- NO additional funding available to commit to new school construction in the 31 SDA Districts
- NO additional funding for grants for Regular Operating Districts
- And approximately \$60 million left for emergent projects that are approved by the New Jersey Department of Education.

We look forward to working with Governor Murphy's Administration and the New Jersey State Legislature on new funding to ensure that every school child in New Jersey receives an equitable education in state-of-the-art school facilities.

And we look forward to working with our partners in the community, school districts, city officials, legislators and other state agencies to help build tomorrow's schools today.

Thank you and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.