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PREVIEW - SENATE TO VOTE ON SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY, PILOT COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT PROGRAM MONDAY

TRENTON - The State Senate is set to vote on measures which would require greater accountability from school districts and establish a pilot program to look at the effectiveness of county administrative school districts on Monday.

"We're looking forward to diving back into property taxes on Monday, voting on several of the special session committee recommendations, and hammering out further agreements on many of the remaining recommendations," said Senate President Codey, D-Essex.

The Senate is scheduled to meet at 2 PM in the Senate chambers to consider the bills.

S-4, sponsored by Senators John H. Adler, D-Camden, and Joseph V. Doria, D-Hudson, would provide for various accountability measures in school districts. The proposals outlined in the bill include the preparation of a "user-friendly" plain language budget summary to help taxpayers understand their school budgets, measures to require school districts to take part, whenever possible, in current federal and State programs designed to foster shared services and reimburse for special education costs, and initiatives to increase transparency and fairness in runaway superintendent compensation packages. The bill was crafted from recommendations made by the Joint Legislative Committee on Public School Funding Reform, which Senator Adler co-chaired and of which Senator Doria was a member.

S-49, sponsored by Senator Bob Smith, D-Middlesex and Somerset, would establish a ten-year pilot program in the State Department of Education to organize a county administrative school district to centralize the administrative functions of individual districts throughout the county. The pilot district would be chosen by the Commissioner of Education, based on an application process by the Board of Chosen Freeholders of any county not in the first-class and with fewer than two Abbott districts within the county. According to Senator Smith, the pilot program, part of the recommendations of the Joint Legislative Committee on Government Consolidation and Shared Services that he co-chaired, would serve to illustrate the benefits, in terms of cost efficiency, of county-based school district central administration.

Also, the Senate will consider S-1263, sponsored by Senators Shirley K. Turner and Ronald L. Rice, which would establish a Joint Committee on Housing Affordability. The Committee would be charged with studying issues that impact on the cost of housing for all New Jerseyans, and make recommendations to the Legislature on ways to increase the availability of affordable housing for all Garden State residents. Given the high cost of housing in New Jersey, the sponsors contend that a panel to continually monitor and make regulatory recommendations to increase affordable homes is essential to the State's residents.