

The hammer in the Governor's tool kit

By Carl Golden

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Like ill-behaved children in the classroom, municipal and board of education officers throughout New Jersey have been sent to the principal's office by Gov. Chris Christie, accused of failing to pay attention to their duties to control spending and allowing property taxes to rise to the highest in the nation.

While the Governor politely described his 33-point plan as a "tool kit" for local governments, the underlying message was blunt:

"The responsibility for property tax rates is a singularly local one and for decades you have failed to live up to it. Consequently, the time has come for the school principal (the state) to step in, show you how to do it, and see to it that you do. No more five per cent salary increases or non-contributory health coverage or six figure severance packages."

If enacted by the Legislature, the Governor's recommendations will bring about the most fundamental change in the state-local government relationship in modern history.

It will give meaning to the consistently ignored reality that staMuch of the blame rests with both the Governor's office and
have campaigned on promises to tame property taxes despite their a
-- funds allocated in the state budget have a negligible impact on pro

There are nearly 1,200 separate and distinct local taxing entities --- c
education --- with the power to levy property taxes and spend the fur

benefits and challenging it as an unconstitutional intrusion on their collective bargaining rights.

While Christie's proposals place responsibility for taxing