



REIMAGINING THE EDUCATOR  
WORKFORCE OF THE FUTURE:  
**POLICY QUESTIONS &  
RECOMMENDATIONS**

JERSEYCAN EDUCATOR WORKFORCE REPORT SERIES

PART TWO

# Reimagining the Educator Workforce of the Future: Policy Questions & Recommendations

## JERSEYCAN EDUCATOR WORKFORCE REPORT SERIES

### PART TWO

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The COVID-19 pandemic has altered nearly every aspect of public education over the past several months and its effects will continue to shape the system for years to come. New Jersey’s current and aspiring teachers are feeling these changes acutely, requiring our leaders to act with urgency to support and sustain a diverse pipeline of effective educators and to reimagine the ways in which we cultivate a 21<sup>st</sup>-century educator workforce.

Part One of JerseyCAN’s Educator Workforce Series, published in June 2020, showed that our state was facing serious teacher workforce challenges even before the pandemic hit, including:

- A declining supply of teacher candidates;
- A mismatch between student and teacher diversity;
- A misalignment between school district<sup>i</sup> demands and teachers prepared to instruct in those areas; and
- A lack of accurate, timely and transparent data about statewide supply and demand.<sup>1</sup>

Building on these findings, JerseyCAN set out to explore district, state and national education leaders’ insights into the needs of our educator workforce in the face of COVID-19 and into the future. Through a series of interviews, leaders raised the challenges we face ahead but also emphasized the potential bright side that this crisis brings into focus: **this is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reimagine how we educate our students.** That opportunity has major implications for our teacher workforce, which is what this report, Part Two of the Educator Workforce Series, sets out to explore.

This report lays out a series of essential questions and recommendations state and local policymakers and leaders should consider when thinking about both short- and long-term issues for New Jersey’s educators across three major categories:



**Strengthening the Teacher Pipeline:  
Preparation and Certification**



**Providing Ongoing Support and  
Professional Development**



**Supporting Nimble Budget and  
Labor Policies and Improving Data**

These recommendations build on the ones included in Part One of the Educator Workforce Series and reflect the current situation that education leaders face as we prepare for an uncertain future. By focusing on this unique opportunity to advance our educator workforce, New Jersey can be a leader among states in preparing all students to reach their full potential, even in changing times.

<sup>i</sup> Throughout this report, the term “district” is used to refer to local public education agencies, including charter schools.

*As we consider ways to position New Jersey as a leader among states in advancing an agile 21<sup>st</sup>-century education system, state leaders should be thinking about the questions for our teacher workforce across the following major categories:*



**STRENGTHENING THE  
TEACHER PIPELINE:  
PREPARATION AND  
CERTIFICATION**

**PROVIDING ONGOING  
SUPPORT AND  
PROFESSIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT**



**SUPPORTING NIMBLE  
BUDGET AND LABOR  
POLICIES AND  
IMPROVING DATA**



## STRENGTHENING THE TEACHER PIPELINE: PREPARATION AND CERTIFICATION

### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

- *Do we need to adopt teaching competencies for brick and mortar and virtual settings to meet evolving student needs?*
- *How are we ensuring the supply of an ample and diverse workforce?*
- *What can the state do to incentivize local innovation around instruction?*
- *How are we addressing financial challenges for our aspiring teachers?*
- *What guidance might the state give around managing vacancies and the need for substitutes?*



### RECOMMENDATION 1:

#### Offer a Competitive Grant Program for Innovative Preparation and Teaching

Use this opportunity to spur the expansion of student-centered, educator-led innovations such as:

- A shift from seat time to competency-based learning, which prioritizes mastering skills over hourly requirements;
- Piloting standards-based grading<sup>2</sup> rather than grade point averages across the lower grades;
- Leveraging industry experts to provide real world connections to coursework; and
- Varied roles for staff that can pivot between in-person or virtual instruction.

### RECOMMENDATION 2:

#### Retain and Grow the Diversity in our Workforce

Recognizing that non-White school leaders can help to create more inclusive cultures to retain diverse staff, incentivize non-White teachers to complete leadership programming to become a supervisor or administrator. This could include:

- Requiring service agreements for one or more years in return for the coverage of programming costs; and
- Rewarding districts for increasing the diversity of their personnel and developing stronger pipelines with our educator preparation programs.

### RECOMMENDATION 3:

#### Provide Multiple On-Ramps for Educators

Establish a teacher apprenticeship program as an on-ramp for future teachers to earn as they learn and for current non-certified staff such as paraprofessionals to join a path to teaching. This pathway should aim to:

- Offer paid on-the-job training with classroom instruction to prepare program participants for highly-skilled careers in education; and

- Use stackable credentials, starting from School Resident (Step 1) to Teacher Resident I (Step 2) to Teacher Resident II (Step 3). Program participants would earn a standard license and a starting salary commensurate with experience, endorsement area and performance.

**RECOMMENDATION 4:  
Expand Inter-State Teacher Reciprocity**

Extend reciprocity to include any out-of-state teacher who has an equivalent license, has successfully taught for one year and has passed a performance assessment.

**RECOMMENDATION 5:  
Remove the State Residency Requirement**

Remove the requirement of the New Jersey First Act specifying that all state employees, including teachers, must reside in state within their first year of employment.

 **PROVIDING ONGOING SUPPORT AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

**ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:**

- *How can we support teachers with technology and new online roles?*
- *How can we support teachers with building more diverse professional networks?*
- *How can we support better teacher-family communications?*
- *What can the state do to encourage ongoing observation and feedback cycles?*
- *What can the state do to ensure sound evaluation policies despite disruptions?*



**RECOMMENDATION 6:  
Improve Access and Strengthen Skills with Technology**

Building on Governor Murphy’s July 2020 plan<sup>3</sup> to address the state’s digital divide, we must ensure students and educators along the entire Pk-12 continuum have adequate connectivity, devices and abilities to leverage technology. To do this, we should:

- Incentivize internet providers to increase the number of cell towers in rural and urban areas;
- Expand funding to the newly established Digital Schools Program, a partnership between the New Jersey School Boards Association, Sustainability Institute at The College of New Jersey and NJDOE supporting schools to leverage technology in sustainable ways; and<sup>4</sup>
- Subsidize high-speed internet similarly to school lunch programs to support access to learning.

## RECOMMENDATION 7:

### Support the Professional Development and Evaluation of Staff

State leaders should require districts to observe and coach their teachers throughout the year in brick and mortar or virtual environments and the NJDOE should provide guidance on how to use the evaluation system to support the professional growth of all personnel. We should encourage the use of recommendations from the Danielson Group, the most commonly used evaluation tool in New Jersey, for support. This guide is helpful for local professional learning communities to inform the success of hybrid and virtual instruction and share best practices. Specifically:

- We should leverage highly effective staff identified as exemplary educators to build out the state's resource library with content and tutorials they have vetted; and
- In the anticipated absence of state assessment data, we should provide districts and schools with more robust guidance on goal setting and using school-based assessments to help drive student instruction.<sup>5</sup>

## RECOMMENDATION 8:

### Consistently Solicit Educator and Student Input

We must gather feedback from teachers and students on the conditions for learning frequently and consistently; this could be done through a monthly survey sent directly from the NJDOE to teachers and students with the same set of questions throughout the school year. Quarterly, the Department should share an analysis of the trends from the responses with the legislature. These questions initially could cover topics like:

- Conditions for Learning;
- Leadership and Planning; and
- Policy and Standards.



## SUPPORTING NIMBLE BUDGET AND LABOR POLICIES AND IMPROVING DATA

### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

- *What flexibilities could be provided to district leaders during emergency situations to allow for adjustments to the budget and the labor force that serve the best interest of students?*
- *How should district leaders support staff and balance the rules for mandatory attendance with the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) in the context of COVID-19?*
- *Can we remove existing barriers that prevent the most agile staffing options?*
- *How can we proactively prepare for and respond to the impact of COVID-19 on district and state teacher shortage areas?*



## **RECOMMENDATION 9:**

### **Allow Greater Flexibility for Addressing Staffing Issues**

With the pandemic creating unprecedented budget and health and safety concerns, it is imperative to think outside the box to ensure the most agile and flexible staffing responses. To do this, we should:

- Allow for regional master classes that share staffing for high-level, low enrollment coursework, which might include:
  - College professors or industry professionals partnering with high school teachers to deliver content;
  - Extending temporary certification for current teachers who want to add another endorsement to staff a course; and
  - Exploring virtual teacher certification for instructors to reach students across district and potentially state lines.
- Modify state policy regarding the criteria used for educator layoffs.

## **RECOMMENDATION 10:**

### **Reimagine the School Calendar**

State leaders should establish a pilot program to allow districts the flexibility to create their own model calendar by spreading the 180-day requirement across 12 months. This could include:

- Responding to evolving health and safety conditions during the school year by modifying schedules and supporting the academic needs of students and staff;
- Encouraging partnerships with community organizations to support acceleration or enrichment activities, especially for families that need childcare, and utilizing school breaks for common planning and professional development for staff; and
- The expansion of community partnerships, starting in middle school, where students can have periodic internships, externships or part-time work during school breaks.

## **RECOMMENDATION 11:**

### **Study the Effects of COVID-19 on the Teacher Workforce in New Jersey**

Given the profound impact of this pandemic on teachers, students and communities, the state should commission a robust study to ensure we have the data we need to drive future decisions. Some specific topics of the study could include:

- How teacher recruitment and retention rates compare with cohorts of educators historically;
- Advances in innovative teacher competencies that promote remote and/or individualized learning;
- The long-term emotional health and well-being of this cohort of educators; and
- Student growth outcomes over the long-term with both novice and experienced teachers.



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## Overview

On March 18, 2020, Governor Phil Murphy ordered all of New Jersey’s public schools to close their brick and mortar classrooms, forcing a shift to virtual instruction under the growing threat of a global health pandemic. Along with almost every other state, our schools remained closed for the rest of the 2019-20 school year.<sup>6</sup> During these last several months, despite the best efforts of our teachers and families, we have seen how vulnerable our education system is to threats like this pandemic. However, *because* of the best efforts of our teachers and families, we are also seeing clear opportunities to strengthen the system for the future.

Practically overnight, our educators transitioned to a remote environment and worked to provide instruction, technology guidance and social and emotional support all while juggling their own home and family responsibilities. Stories from across the state highlighted the ways teachers provided connection and inspiration to their students and families – from distanced home visits by vehicle and car parades to virtual check-ins and so many more examples, it is clear just how important teachers are to their students’ well-being. It is also clear that this is a challenging time for our educator workforce, but one filled with opportunity.

Across the country, many leaders are working quickly and collaboratively to develop safe and academically rigorous reopening plans for schools. This short-term planning is critical and needs to happen transparently. Guidance for the 2020-21 school year must be responsive to shifting COVID-19 data and prioritize flexibility so that community leaders are positioned to respond to local needs. This short-term planning is a precursor to an emerging dialogue about the long-term needs that this crisis brings into focus: **this is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reimagine how we educate our students.** That opportunity has major implications for our teacher workforce, which is what Part Two of JerseyCAN’s Educator Workforce Series sets out to explore.

This report builds on the recommendations in Part One of the series published in June 2020, *The State of the New Jersey Educator Workforce*, by presenting a view of what our workforce needs to be successful not just in the 2020-21 school year but in the decades to come. As Part One highlights, our state was already facing serious challenges even before the pandemic hit, including:

- A declining supply of teacher candidates;
- A mismatch between student and teacher diversity;
- A misalignment between district demands and teachers prepared to instruct in those areas; and
- A lack of accurate, timely and transparent data about statewide supply and demand.<sup>7</sup>

The recommendations outlined in Part One provided a starting point for addressing these concerns. Part Two builds on that foundation in the context of COVID-19, laying out a series of questions state and local policymakers and leaders should consider when thinking about the long-term possibilities of and for New Jersey’s educators. This report also provides recommendations for how policymakers might explore these questions and identify policy solutions.

## Methodology

To inform this report, JerseyCAN relied on several sources: (1) a body of research previously conducted for Part One of this series, (2) a new round of interviews with national state and local education leaders and (3) a review of recent research, data, articles and opinion pieces.

In preparation for developing the Educator Workforce Series, JerseyCAN reviewed national and local educator workforce policy, conducted 15 informal interviews and reviewed research and data from over 50 sources. For Part One, JerseyCAN largely relied on data from the Federal Title II National Teacher Preparation Data and state sources, including the New Jersey School Performance Reports, the New Jersey Educator Preparation Provider Reports and the State Certificated Staff File.

Building on this research, JerseyCAN conducted a new round of interviews with national, state and local leaders to inform Part Two. Interviews included 14 individuals spanning 12 institutions, including national and state research organizations, higher education institutions, educator preparation programs and local districts. Interviewees included leaders of national organizations, economists, deans of educator preparation programs, former New Jersey Commissioners of Education and local district superintendents. JerseyCAN also leveraged findings from recent student interviews conducted by partner organization We Raise New Jersey, of which JerseyCAN is a Steering Committee member. JerseyCAN aimed to survey a wide range of perspectives – including small and large districts, alternative and traditionally run educator preparation programs, students and more.

JerseyCAN also reviewed data from national and local surveys, projections for the Fiscal Year 2021 state budget, state and national COVID-19 data, internet connectivity data for New Jersey families and data on cyber security incidents and recent natural disasters. These sources offer national and local perspectives on conditions surrounding the reopening of school. JerseyCAN also conducted a targeted review of recently published reports, articles and opinion pieces about the impact of COVID-19 and school closures on the educator workforce, including recently published guidance from the federal government, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) and neighboring state agencies.

## The State of School Reopening for 2020-21

COVID-19 and the widespread school closures of Spring 2020 were previously unprecedented locally and nationally, surfacing many urgent questions that must be answered for our districts, schools and educators to start the 2020-21 school year. Now, in Summer 2020 and with the upheaval of COVID-19 lingering, state and local leaders are called upon to develop plans to safely provide instruction to approximately 1.37 million students throughout New Jersey and keep them on track academically in the upcoming school year.

During JerseyCAN’s interviews, leaders repeatedly expressed a desire for the state to release any mandated protocols for the 2020-21 school year as soon as possible to ensure school districts would have time to react and staff accordingly. On June 26, 2020, the NJDOE issued guidance for the reopening of schools addressing many of the topics surfaced during interviews that both implicitly and explicitly affect staffing. School districts continue to release individual plans for reopening informed by the Department’s guidance and by local data, including family and educator surveys probing preferences around in-person, remote or hybrid instructional models.

Nationally and locally, opinions about how to return to school in the fall are mixed and rapidly evolving as the crisis continues to unfold. In July, the American Academy of Pediatrics released updated guidance encouraging an in-person return to school for the overall well-being of students, while emphasizing the importance of local health data and that “local school leaders, public health experts, educators and parents must be at the center of decisions about how and when to reopen schools.”<sup>8</sup>

Students themselves have shared perceptions of the impact of COVID-19 on their well-being, including concerns about the effectiveness of remote learning last spring. Highlights from surveys nationally show students’ displeasure with online learning experiences, their concerns about their ability to stay focused, motivated and on track for college and career and their struggles with anxiety and depression during the pandemic.<sup>9</sup> Recent interviews conducted by We Raise New Jersey with students from New Jersey’s Jobs for America’s Graduates (JAG) program and other student leaders revealed the significant challenges of learning from home and many students’ desire to return to a classroom environment.<sup>10</sup>

At the same time, parents’ feelings about returning to in-person instruction are shifting as COVID-19 rates change, and it is likely these attitudes will continue to evolve. Parent feelings nationally are also nuanced based on geography, race and income levels. A recent analysis of survey data published by the American Enterprise Institute indicates, “White parents (34%) are twice as likely as non-white parents (19%) to say they feel comfortable sending their children back to school in August or September...Additionally, higher

income families (39%) feel it is safe to send their children back to school, compared to just 19% of lower income families.”<sup>11</sup>

In New Jersey, a July statewide poll by Farleigh Dickinson showed parents split on whether schools should reopen for any in-person instruction.<sup>12</sup> Local data also show a wide range of parent preferences. A strong majority of parents in Chatham (90%)<sup>13</sup> and Bernards (approximately 80%) reported a desire to send their children back to school in person, while a majority of West Windsor-Plainsboro parents reported they would keep their students home.<sup>14</sup> June surveys showed one-third of parents in Jersey City<sup>15</sup> and 39% in Montclair<sup>16</sup> undecided about sending children back. Results from a statewide survey by the NJDOE, collected between June 2nd and June 8th shared that 54% of parents would send their students to school if their building reopens, 35% were undecided and 11% said no.<sup>17</sup>

While professional opinions and attitudes from families are mixed, teachers have expressed concerns about reopening. Nationally, more teachers are opposed to returning to traditional brick and mortar in-school instruction than in favor; 65% oppose going back in person until the health crisis has passed and one in five say they are unlikely to return if schools are open.<sup>18</sup> A crowd-sourced document by state educators from Summer 2020 lists hundreds of questions about the practical realities of teaching and learning in person during COVID-19, pointing to a variety of health and safety as well as classroom management concerns for teachers, students and their families, among many other topics.<sup>19</sup>

Given this complexity, it is the important role of our state leaders to continue providing guidance and guardrails for reopening schools in a way that empowers local leaders to make the best decisions they can to prioritize the well-being of their community and their teacher workforce while also providing a high quality instructional program to all students. Given the rapidly evolving nature of local and state data and decisions, this report focuses on big picture teacher workforce questions and recommendations, recognizing that local leaders are addressing operational issues and concerns.

## Policy Questions and Recommendations for Reimagining the Agile Workforce of the Future

COVID-19 and the school closures of this past spring created unprecedented circumstances that have called national, state and local leaders to initiate a larger discussion about the needs and possibilities of a 21<sup>st</sup>-century education system. As we consider the inevitable impact of expanded technology on our classrooms, our leaders must proactively and boldly reimagine existing elements of our schooling model. Former U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan described this in 2010: “Our K-12 system largely still adheres to the century-old, industrial-age factory model of education. A century ago, maybe it made sense to adopt seat-time requirements for graduation and pay teachers based on their educational credentials and seniority. Educators were right to fear the large class sizes that prevailed in many schools. But the factory model of education is the wrong model for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.”<sup>20</sup> **It is our current leaders’ charge to shape policies to meet the shifting needs of young people for a future marked by expanded access to technology. To do this, we must explore how we are building and leveraging our digital infrastructure to better support the educators and students of today and tomorrow.**

The shift to digital access has already begun to show promising trends for students. A 2017 report by the United States Department of Education (USED) highlighted the ways in which educators were already reimagining the role of technology in the classroom and the benefits for students. Between 2010 and 2017, “the conversation has shifted from whether technology should be used in learning to how it can improve learning” and illustrates the ways in which technology is “increasingly being used to personalize learning and give students more choice over what and how they learn.”<sup>21</sup> These observations were supported by JerseyCAN’s interviews with district leaders, who emphasized some unexpected benefits of online learning for students this past spring. Several leaders shared that while some students have struggled with online learning, others are thriving in ways their schools never would have predicted and this has been echoed by leaders nationally.<sup>22</sup>

While these trends are promising, both the USED report and district leaders cautioned that we must not lose sight of the important work that still needs to be done to close the digital divide and that “to realize fully the benefits of technology in our education system and provide authentic learning experiences, educators need to use technology effectively in their practice.”<sup>23</sup> New Jersey policymakers must navigate our current digital architecture and build and execute upon a bigger vision for a 21<sup>st</sup>-century educator workforce. This is one reason why Part One of this Educator Workforce Series called for the creation of coalition to define an agile school system. Many ideas for this vision emerged during interviews with national and state leaders, who emphasized that a 21<sup>st</sup>-century educator workforce should:

- Encourage and promote diverse teachers and school leaders;
- Utilize greater flexibility to bring in industry experts to work with students in innovative ways;
- Embrace out-of-state and even international teachers as schools continue to further leverage online education;
- Prioritize models that have more opportunity to create on-ramps for paraprofessionals and substitutes to become fully certified teachers or utilize these professionals to build a demand-driven pipeline of diverse educators; and
- Include a state microcredential for teacher leaders who can share expertise across districts or the state (e.g., technical and remote instruction, parent communications, rapport building).

These are just some of the ideas surfaced, but what is clear is the strong appetite for reimagining the workforce of the future. State policymakers are well-poised to lead this visioning exercise in collaboration with educators, business leaders and other stakeholders. As we consider ways to position New Jersey as a leader among states in advancing an agile 21<sup>st</sup>-century education system, state leaders should be thinking about the questions for our teacher workforce across the following major categories:



### **Strengthening the Teacher Pipeline: Preparation and Certification**



### **Providing Ongoing Support and Professional Development**



### **Supporting Nimble Budget and Labor Policies and Improving Data**

Essential questions across these categories are presented below, along with JerseyCAN’s findings about the topics and policy recommendations for addressing these important issues.



## **STRENGTHENING THE TEACHER PIPELINE: PREPARATION AND CERTIFICATION**

Prior to the global pandemic, New Jersey was already facing teacher shortage and diversity concerns, which are only growing worse in the current environment. We also have new problems to solve around online competencies and staffing issues.

Regardless of whether school closures continue in the upcoming year, growing trends toward online learning suggest that we must prepare all up-and-coming educators to utilize virtual platforms in tailored ways. New Jersey would benefit from having a clear competency-based system of preparing and assessing edu-



### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

- ***Do we need to adopt teaching competencies for brick and mortar and virtual settings to meet evolving student needs?***
- ***How are we ensuring the supply of an ample and diverse workforce?***
- ***What can the state do to incentivize local innovation around instruction?***
- ***How are we addressing financial challenges for our aspiring teachers?***
- ***What guidance might the state give around managing vacancies and the need for substitutes?***

caters, which requires teachers to demonstrate they have the specific knowledge and skills needed to be effective in the classroom. This is true of brick and mortar schools as much as it is for educators teaching students online. While there is some overlap, many experts agreed that competencies are different for these different environments. Competencies define how strong someone is in a particular skill area. For example: in-person communication skills can be defined across levels of competency from novice to expert with nuances along the way that demonstrate mastery. Some educator preparation programs have started to integrate teaching competencies that are aligned with online instruction, but many have not. The NJDOE's reopening guidance included a link to the National Standards for Quality Online Teaching, which were also referenced in many discussions with experts and leaders.<sup>24</sup> It is time to consider whether New Jersey should integrate these competencies, or components of them, into our long-term vision for quality instruction and then ensure the pathway is designed to achieve that vision.

What's more, in interviews the preparation program leaders consistently expressed concerns about the teacher pipeline, which has seen a steady decline in supply in recent years and risks being further disrupted due to economic and health conditions. A recent survey by the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education on the impact of COVID-19 on programs indicated: "23% of respondents expect a decline in continuing education student enrollment of more than 10%, and 40% expect such a decline among new students."<sup>25</sup> If forecasts like these are fully realized, they will have dire consequences on some of our educator preparation programs, and thus the teacher candidate pipeline, for subsequent years. This comes on top of pre-existing forecasts around teacher shortages nationally.

Further, educator preparation providers and local leaders are worried that New Jersey will lose progress in preparing a diverse teacher workforce because of COVID-19. JerseyCAN's [Part One report](#) emphasized the need for our educators to better reflect the student population in New Jersey, pointing out that:

- Our student population is currently 43% White, compared to 84% for our teachers;
- As recently as four years ago, one in five New Jersey schools employed no teachers of color; and
- Four of our ten largest districts have fewer than 25% non-White teachers.<sup>26</sup>

While trends have been slowly moving in the right direction – in 2017-18, we saw greater diversity in our novice teacher workforce than across teachers with five or more years of experience<sup>27</sup> – we must continue to focus on this important need. Interviewees suggested that the front-loaded fees, access to tests and other complicating factors are creating even greater inequities during the pandemic than before. This includes costs associated with the required CORE, Praxis and edTPA certification exams, from which the state offered some relief this past spring.<sup>28</sup> In [Part One](#) of this Educator Workforce series, JerseyCAN identified one short-term solution as subsidizing the cost of certification tests for shortage areas. State leaders should consider ways to support candidates that demonstrate financial need and districts should leverage federal Title II dollars to offset mentoring costs, which will be even more critical this school year.<sup>29</sup>

The state must also ensure there is a supply of staff that can cover positions during teacher absences or vacancies. Leaders emphasized the need for tools that will better support educators and families when

students interface with substitutes or other unfamiliar teachers. A recent [Ed Week Research Center Report](#) shows school and district leaders nationally reporting that increasingly, teacher vacancies are being filled by substitutes.<sup>30</sup> In anticipation of even more vacancies and absences in the face of COVID-19, we must be smart about our state approach to ensure substitutes are well prepared to transition to full-time roles, where appropriate.

Finally, if New Jersey is to create the most nimble and responsive educator workforce, our policymakers must consider whether the existing preparation pathway models are sufficient and whether restrictive requirements, like state residency, are truly in the best interest of our teachers and students. Interviews with national and local leaders explored ways in which many schools are hiring experts from around the country and globe to teach certain classes. Other industries have leveraged apprenticeship programs that stack or build on credentials while providing critical professional experience. Education is ripe for the apprenticeship model to ensure deeper learning and multiple on-ramps for increased access to the profession that prioritizes a competency-based approach to training and compensation while learning. New Jersey must use this opportunity to innovate in how we both prepare our educators and teach our students.

### **RECOMMENDATION 1:**

#### **Offer a Competitive Grant Program for Innovative Preparation and Teaching**

In order to achieve better success aligning local visions with the state’s vision of a 21<sup>st</sup>-century workforce, leaders should consider what types of grants or funded pilots to promote. Opportunities like the [K12 Re-think Education Models Grant](#) were rapidly deployed this summer at the federal level to spur student-centered innovation as a result of COVID-19. In order to ensure districts, schools and teachers have the flexibility to ensure students’ needs are met from the earliest stages of education through post-secondary, the state would benefit from studying some of the more innovative approaches to teaching during COVID-19. A competitive grant opportunity for educators who are pursuing such approaches could boost the expansion of innovations including:

- A shift from seat time to competency-based learning, which prioritizes mastering skills over hourly requirements;
- Piloting standards based grading<sup>31</sup> rather than grade point averages across lower grades;
- Leveraging industry experts to provide real world connections to coursework; and
- Varied roles for staff that can pivot between in-person or virtual instruction.

### **RECOMMENDATION 2:**

#### **Retain and Grow the Diversity in our Workforce**

This pandemic has disproportionately hurt New Jersey’s communities of color and further highlighted the inequities across our school systems.<sup>32</sup> As we know from [Part One](#) of this series, our teacher workforce is 16% non-White and our administrator workforce is 22% non-White, as compared to 57% of our student population, and all students benefit from a more diverse teacher pool. Research shows that one of the key components of retaining diverse teachers is through leadership. EdTrust reported in 2017, “All students need and deserve access to effective educators who are highly skilled, well prepared, and diverse. Simultaneously, building diverse schools and inclusive school cultures is a pillar of the push for greater integration. Policies that improve teacher and school leader diversity are an opportunity to advance both of these critical needs.”<sup>33</sup> Therefore, current non-White teachers should be incentivized for enrolling in and completing leadership programming to become a supervisor or administrator in New Jersey. This could include:

- Requiring service agreements for one or more years in return for the coverage of programming costs; and
- Rewarding districts for increasing the diversity of their personnel and developing stronger pipelines with our educator preparation programs.

### **RECOMMENDATION 3: Provide Multiple On-Ramps for Educators**

There are two pathways to prepare educators in New Jersey, through a traditional four-year program or through an alternate route program where aspiring educators learn as they teach. These two options have been the only choices for prospective educators for 35 years. For some, these pathways have created challenges in pursuing the profession. New Jersey should establish an apprenticeship program as an on-ramp for future teachers to earn as they learn and for current non-certified staff such as paraprofessionals to join a path to teaching. An apprenticeship pathway would enable districts and preparation programs to utilize creative staffing models and Federal Perkins V funds. This would build upon successful “grow your own” models that increase the diversity of our workforce by tapping into high school students and paraprofessionals as a pipeline for districts facing inconsistent staffing challenges and decreased budgets due to COVID-19. This pathway should aim to:

- Offer paid on-the-job training with classroom instruction to prepare program participants for highly-skilled careers in education; and
- Use stackable credentials, starting from School Resident (Step 1) to Teacher Resident I (Step 2) to Teacher Resident II (Step 3). Program participants would earn a standard license and a starting salary commensurate with experience, endorsement area and performance.

### **RECOMMENDATION 4: Expand Inter-State Teacher Reciprocity**

Currently, New Jersey allows reciprocity for teacher certification across states for traditional route candidates; however, during a time of unpredictable staffing needs, more flexibility is required. New Jersey should extend reciprocity to include any out-of-state teacher who has an equivalent license, has successfully taught for one year and has passed a performance assessment.

### **RECOMMENDATION 5: Remove the State Residency Requirement**

An agile system must be able to attract and retain staff for both virtual and in-person instruction. Currently, The New Jersey First Act requires all state employees, including teachers, to reside in state within their first year of employment. This residency requirement limits New Jersey schools’ ability to hire instructors who may be most qualified for online or other instruction models for the longer term, a challenge that Jersey-CAN has been following and confronting for many years.<sup>34</sup> Now is the time to remove the state residency requirement, especially for teachers, as it restricts districts’ abilities to ensure they have access to the best possible staff for any teaching circumstance.



### **PROVIDING ONGOING SUPPORT AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

As virtual learning options are increasingly integrated with brick and mortar models, state policymakers need to consider the most thoughtful ways to support the next generation of educators – educators being trained to teach in a dramatically changed landscape. One theme echoed throughout interviews was that this support looked drastically different this spring than in the past and districts and teachers in many ways were unprepared for the shift to a fully virtual environment. Our educators jumped into action, learning new tools and soliciting support on digital platforms, all while juggling their own connectivity issues. Moving forward, it is a moral imperative to ensure all students and teachers have adequate connectivity, devices and abilities to leverage new technology. Governor Murphy’s July 2020 plan<sup>35</sup> to close the digital divide outlines a three-pronged approach to leverage philanthropic support, federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief,



and Economic Security (CARES) Act Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds and utilizing Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF) resources in a targeted way.”<sup>36</sup> We must ensure this plan is implemented effectively and continue to support connectivity and devices for students and teachers.

Educator preparation program and district leaders also shared that with the shift to remote instruction, teachers were forced to build even more diverse professional networks – turning to online communities comprised of educators across district, state and even international borders. They relied on these educators for help with the shift to online instruction – sharing resources, comparing lesson plans, communicating with parents and more. Specifically, one leader shared that his staff reflected on how important their culturally responsive training had been to their success during remote instruction. Looking forward, state policymakers should seek opportunities to provide guidance and facilitate teachers maintaining more diverse networks and continuing their professional growth on a regular basis.

The need for teachers to establish clear and open lines of communication between school and home has also never been more important. The most recent family engagement research from the national nonprofit Learning Heroes shows that parents are more committed than ever to sharing what they know about their children’s academic progress following this time learning at home.<sup>37</sup> The NJDOE’s reopening guidance also emphasizes the need for strong school-family communications, with recommendations including:<sup>38</sup>

- Surveys assessing family needs for reopening;
- Including families as part of local planning teams;
- Clear communication of school plans with families in relevant languages in multiple formats and on multiple platforms;
- Partnerships with community groups such as nonprofits, religious and cultural groups and others that touch families in other ways; and
- Leveraging “virtual home visits” to help teachers connect with families and better understand their students’ environments and needs.

While district leaders indicated some teachers did well with these critical interactions this past spring, many did not, and we must think about the best ways to further this type of individualized support as we look forward. As students increasingly leverage online options for instruction and such options are embedded within the curriculum at school, it will be important for teachers and families to better coordinate so that everyone has a clear sense of a student’s progress building the competencies and skills needed for success after high school.

Further, local leaders expressed a series of questions and concerns about teacher supports and accountability in the COVID-19 era and how those could change depending on shifting circumstances. These leaders indicated that it would be helpful for the state to compile instructional resources that teachers could turn to



#### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

- *How can we best support teachers with technology and new online roles?*
- *How can we support teachers with building more diverse professional networks?*
- *How can we support better teacher-family communications?*
- *What can the state do to encourage ongoing observation and feedback cycles?*
- *What can the state do to ensure sound evaluation policies despite disruptions?*

throughout the year, depending on local needs and conditions. Educator preparation officials in particular said some states are doing this better than others and encouraged New Jersey to invest more time in building this library in-state. National and local leaders also expressed the importance of ensuring ongoing evaluation and feedback for educators. Interviewees highlighted the impact of relaxed evaluation requirements resulting in scant observation and feedback this spring, indicating that the state should consider guidance and professional development on observing teachers in online settings. While the NJDOE has issued updates on evaluation requirements for the 2019-20 school year and provided some guidance on evaluations for 2020-21, it is unclear how observations will be formalized if remote settings are required and whether any assessment data will factor into evaluations.<sup>39</sup> Feedback cycles should be two-way, as the state must also gather regular input from teachers and students to inform ongoing supports.

## **RECOMMENDATION 6:**

### **Improve Access and Strengthen Skills with Technology**

Building on Governor Murphy's July 2020 plan<sup>40</sup> to address the state's digital divide, we must increase support for families in settings where there are shared cable modem connections and prioritize the distribution of mobile hotspots for our most vulnerable students, such as those who are experiencing homelessness, transient or suffering from the extremes of poverty. We must also ensure our teachers have the support they need to best use the digital tools at their fingertips. To do this, we should:

- Incentivize internet providers to increase the number of cell towers in rural and urban areas;
- Expand funding to the newly established Digital Schools Program, a partnership between the New Jersey School Boards Association, Sustainability Institute at The College of New Jersey and NJDOE supporting schools to leverage technology in sustainable ways; and<sup>41</sup>
- Subsidize high-speed internet similarly to school lunch programs to support access to learning.

## **RECOMMENDATION 7:**

### **Support the Professional Development and Evaluation of Staff**

Now more than ever, it is critical to support the growth and development of our staff through professional learning and the statewide educator evaluation system. During the Spring 2020 COVID-19 shutdown, the administration relieved districts of the responsibility of evaluating staff to ease the burden of transitioning to a distance learning model and because the evaluation rating system had been designed for in-person instruction. We should encourage the use of recommendations from the Danielson Group, the most commonly used evaluation tool in New Jersey, for support so there is continuity between in-person and distance learning. This guide is helpful for local professional learning communities to inform the success of hybrid and virtual instruction and share best practices. State leaders should require districts to observe and coach their teachers throughout the year in brick and mortar or virtual environments and the NJDOE should provide guidance on how to use the evaluation system to support the professional growth of all personnel. Specifically:

- We should leverage highly effective staff identified as exemplary educators to build out the state's resource library with content and tutorials they have vetted; and
- In the anticipated absence of state assessment data, we should provide districts and schools with more robust guidance on goal setting and using school-based assessments to help drive student instruction.<sup>42</sup>

## RECOMMENDATION 8: Consistently Solicit Educator and Student Input

As we approach an uncertain school year with new plans and schedules being generated daily, New Jersey must hear from teachers and students frequently and consistently. This could be done through a monthly survey that is sent directly from the NJDOE to teachers and students with the same set of questions throughout the school year. Quarterly, the Department should share an analysis of the trends from the responses with the legislature. These questions initially could cover topics like:

- Conditions for Learning;
- Leadership and Planning; and
- Policy and Standards.



### SUPPORTING NIMBLE BUDGET AND LABOR POLICIES AND IMPROVING DATA

Looming financial uncertainty presents a major challenge for education budgeting. State and local leaders will be concerned about the financial impact of this crisis on budgets and related labor policies for years to come. District school boards in many ways are now budgeting blindfolded, as they lack specific information on state and federal allocations for the coming year. In June, New Jersey passed a temporary three-month spending plan to allow more time before finalizing the annual state budget this fall<sup>43</sup> and districts are facing reduced funding given that Governor Murphy has already cut \$335M from the proposed 2020-21 budget.<sup>44</sup>

The national association of school superintendents, AASA, estimates that on average, American school districts will incur an extra \$1.7M in expenditures next school year in confronting COVID-19. Some leaders expressed concerns over how to prepare for possible layoffs due to financial constraints without having the standard measures associated with accountability. In addition, New Jersey state law indicates dismissals of staff under tenure on account of reduction “shall be made on the basis of seniority according to standards to be established by the commissioner with the approval of the state board.”<sup>45</sup> In practice this is known as a requirement for districts to follow a “last in, first out (LIFO)” approach when undertaking reductions in force. This creates another limitation for district leaders who would like to consider multiple factors when making layoff decisions, including educator effectiveness as well as seniority.

National and district leaders also reflected on the need to address the health and safety of the teacher labor force in the current context. In New Jersey, 20% of our teachers and 26% of our principals are 55 or older, and thus considered higher risk for COVID-19 complications.<sup>46</sup> Recent guidance from the American Association of School Personnel Administrators (AASPA) shared how the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) was



### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- ***What flexibilities could be provided to district leaders during emergency situations to allow for adjustments to the budget and the labor force that serve the best interest of students?***
- ***How should district leaders support staff and balance mandatory attendance with the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) in the context of COVID-19?***
- ***Can we remove existing barriers that prevent the most agile staffing options?***
- ***How can we proactively prepare for and respond to the impact of COVID-19 on district and state teacher shortage areas?***

expanded through the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA).<sup>47</sup> The FFCRA created two emergency leave provisions that apply to schools and districts. There are several provisions for both paid and unpaid leave based on the conditions of the leave. This is particularly important as districts are preparing for an uncertain budget environment that may last for years to come. Leaders must leverage all available options to both retain and support staff that may be vulnerable to seniority policies and to protect the health and safety of all educators.

Additionally, local leaders are eager to understand what flexibilities the state may offer to enable responsive approaches to changing financial conditions and the availability of digital tools. Some of these flexibilities could include leveraging student teachers as both a substitute pool and supplemental instructors or co-teachers. One area of repeated discussion during interviews was around creating more forward-thinking staffing models for schools. One district leader shared that he had previously struggled to justify a few high-level, less in-demand classes due to low enrollment – but after this spring, he is now exploring the option of approaching groups of schools or neighboring districts about offering these classes virtually across school or district lines. Leaders also discussed the idea of hiring industry experts as part-time virtual educators who are able to remain in their professional settings and do not require all of the benefits that come along with a full-time salaried educator, yet offer valuable industry insight. These are just a couple of the ideas that surfaced, but they illustrate the opportunity to guide districts toward more modern and sustainable staffing options aided by virtual tools.

Our existing school calendar may also create barriers for the most agile system of the future. Under current law, New Jersey students must attend school for 180 days in order for districts to receive state aid. Recent events have made it clear that the agrarian September to June calendar is an outdated model. Rather, staggering instructional time across the year would help diminish summer learning loss, provide time to accelerate students through learning gaps and offer opportunities for extension as we recover from the pandemic. More practically, this type of calendar also provides opportunities for professional learning, facility maintenance and cleaning.

Finally, given the unprecedented conditions caused by COVID-19, interviews suggested the need for a longer-term study that follows current teachers over the next decade. The results from this study would inform how we think about future events like COVID-19 and also provide a record of the impact from this crisis. As described at length in JerseyCAN's Part One report, our state suffers from a significant lack of data and robust analyses around our current educator workforce. With remote and/or hybrid learning, these problems are only exacerbated and attention to improving our state data systems must be prioritized. This is why Part One called for the state to require the annual reporting of local demand data and to transparently share education workforce projections.<sup>48</sup> A combination of comprehensive workforce projections and a study on this economic and health crisis could be transformative to the educator workforce of the future.

## **RECOMMENDATION 9:**

### **Allow Greater Flexibility for Addressing Staffing Issues**

With the pandemic creating unprecedented budget and health and safety concerns, it is imperative to think outside the box to ensure the most agile and flexible staffing responses. To do this, we should:

- Allow for regional master classes that share staffing for high-level, low enrollment coursework, which might include:
  - College professors or industry professionals partnering with high school teachers to deliver content;
  - Extending temporary certification for current teachers who want to add another endorsement to staff a course; and
  - Exploring virtual teacher certification for instructors to reach students across district and potentially state lines.
- Modify state policy regarding the criteria used for educator layoffs.

## **RECOMMENDATION 10: Reimagine the School Calendar**

State leaders should establish a pilot program to allow districts the flexibility to create their own model calendar by spreading the 180-day requirement across 12 months. This could include:

- Responding to evolving health and safety conditions during the school year by modifying schedules and supporting the academic needs of students and staff;
- Encouraging partnerships with community organizations to support acceleration or enrichment activities, especially for families that need childcare, and utilizing school breaks for common planning and professional development for staff; and
- The expansion of community partnerships, starting in middle school, where students can have periodic internships, externships or part-time work during school breaks.

## **RECOMMENDATION 11: Study the Effects of COVID-19 on the Teacher Workforce in New Jersey**

Given the profound impact of this pandemic on teachers, students and communities, the state should commission a robust study to ensure we have the data we need to drive future decisions. The goal of such a study would be to see how these events have changed trajectories within the educator workforce as well as the impact on students. Some specific topics of the study could include:

- How teacher recruitment and retention compare with cohorts of educators historically;
- Advances in innovative teacher competencies that promote remote and/or individualized learning;
- The long-term emotional health and well-being of this cohort of educators; and
- Student growth outcomes over the long-term with both novice and experienced teachers.

## **Looking Ahead**

The global pandemic has created unprecedented conditions for New Jersey, the United States and the world. This unique time demands that we answer some hard questions for reopening schools. It also creates a fresh opportunity to reimagine our educator workforce so that it is aligned with a more modern view of the Pk-12 system. In this way, **COVID-19 has provided a lens into the potential challenges and opportunities of a 21<sup>st</sup>-century education system and workforce as well as a canvas on which our state can paint a bold new picture for the future.** We take pride in New Jersey's position as a national leader for public education. To keep this position, we must work together to meet this challenge.

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## About JerseyCAN

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