

A TIME TO ACT: A FRAMEWORK TO ACCELERATE LEARNING

! EDUCATOR SUPPORT AND INNOVATIVE STAFFING

In April 2021, JerseyCAN released [A Framework to Accelerate Learning](#) through and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. This document focuses on one element of the Framework – Educator Support and Innovative Staffing – and highlights New Jersey schools and districts who exemplify promising practices in action.



The Opportunity: Elevating Educators

Support from and for educators is essential to every element of the education system. New Jersey districts and schools are receiving significant new funding for evidence-based programs and strategies that recognize the critical role teachers play in classrooms, schools and communities. **JerseyCAN’s [Framework to Accelerate Learning](#) outlines many of these strategies and examples of initiatives in practice, as well as New Jersey-specific policy recommendations, which can help to inform local funding plans.**

New Jersey Districts Leading the Way

The following New Jersey districts and schools promote educator leadership and reimagine traditional roles and staffing models to best serve students, families and educators themselves.

Building a Pipeline of Quality Educators: [Great Oaks Legacy Charter School](#)

The Great Oaks Legacy Charter School in Newark has leveraged in-school tutoring since its inception in 2011. This model uses AmeriCorps funding to subsidize the cost of tutor fellows who support classroom teachers and their students throughout a full school year. The fellows are embraced by staff and the school community and receive robust training and on-the-job coaching as they work with classroom instructors. During the pandemic, fellows became a direct resource to families, providing support to students and sharing the responsibilities of regular communication. The fellowship was able to fully operate by leveraging virtual platforms for both tutor training and student and family outreach. Understanding the challenges of remote learning, leaders employed strategic scheduling to allow virtual check-ins with fellows and scholars outside the school day. The Great Oaks Legacy team intentionally designed evaluation feedback cycles to focus on meaningful student-fellow relationships to cultivate a culture of reflection and growth. Thanks to this program, Great Oaks Legacy has a diverse pipeline of teachers who have already learned and worked in their school and community.

★ View our [video](#) to learn more about this inspirational work! ★

“As educators, we must ground ourselves in our ‘why’ – if we don’t show up for students, who will? Teachers are the unsung heroes of the world -- we are educating the future. We must ground ourselves in knowing that students should be at the forefront of everything we do.”

Destiny McFarlane, Corps Manager

“Just as teachers do check-ins with their students, administrators do check-ins with their staff. We, too, have new things we are learning, and our administrators frequently stop to ask how we are doing and what we need. This extends into our PLCs, which allow teachers to collaborate on an ongoing basis week to week to discuss common needs and, ultimately, help us to help students as a team.”

Lenore Furman, Kindergarten Teacher

Leveraging Technology for Teacher Collaboration and Support: [Newark Public Schools](#)

Leaders in Newark Public Schools see the silver linings of an increased reliance on technology through the pandemic. During remote learning, leaders piloted an approach where an Advanced Placement Biology teacher instructed students from multiple high schools simultaneously through a virtual platform. Without this innovation, a group of students would have lacked access to this rigorous course offering. Based on lessons learned about the importance of careful scheduling and clear communication about grading and ad-

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ditional teacher support, Newark leaders are gathering more educator input to refine this approach for the future. District leaders have also increased their capacity to support staff through virtual professional learning communities (PLCs). While it is physically impossible for an individual to travel to multiple PLCs happening across the city of Newark on one day, the virtual platform allowed leaders to join these sessions from one place, gaining more perspective on the diverse successes and needs of teachers across schools. Newark has also continued an emphasis on building and diversifying its teacher and principal pipeline. Through a pre-pandemic grant from the Wallace Foundation and a partnership with Montclair University, Newark is continuing to develop a high-quality pipeline of school leaders, knowing principals are second only to teachers in their impact on student achievement. ★ View our [video](#) to see this work in action and see our brief on [Data for Understanding Student Learning](#) to learn more. ★

Supporting Educators' SEL and Mental Health: [Collingswood Public Schools](#)

Leaders in Collingswood have designed a tiered system of supports and curriculum of social and emotional learning (SEL) to benefit staff and students alike. Instead of piling more responsibilities on existing staff to support this work, leaders brought in clinical social work and school psychologist interns from area university preparation programs and utilized special instructors to immerse SEL into physical education, art and music. This supplemental staffing began prior to the pandemic and became critical to the success of the past school year. Since each teacher consistently collects a daily check-in of how students are feeling using "Zones of Regulation," they were able to identify students in need of additional support. The interns managed tiered intervention groups to focus on concrete SEL skills. The team of staff and interns benefits the entire school community and helps to ensure educators have the services they need to help students. For example, simple but effective staff wellness efforts such as "Feel Good Fridays" keep educators grounded and encourage a sense of well-being.

★ To learn more about this SEL work, view our brief on [Student and Family Engagement](#). ★

“It was imperative to start building relationships through SEL and mental health awareness with staff, so we could eventually extend the philosophy to kids. Because we agreed to commit to each other from the jump, we all got behind SEL, as we saw its benefits in our own lives. When the pandemic hit, we had to redouble our efforts as it pertained to the kids and community. Luckily, we considered ourselves way ahead of the game, so implementing the work of the SEL team was seamless.”

Brian Kulak, Tatem Elementary Administrator

Flexible Options for Educators Providing Extra Services: [College Achieve Paterson](#)

“We made sure to offer flexibility to meet student and staff needs through the pandemic. By giving a 2-hour break between the end of the school day and start of our late afternoon tutoring sessions, staff had the option to remain in the classroom or go home. This mental break was important for all to regroup and reset.”

Gemar Mills, Executive Director

In response to increased student learning needs this year, College Achieve Paterson leaders initiated specialized tutoring by teachers after school and on Saturdays. The ability to adapt the schedule was key; leaders shifted the traditional school day to begin and end earlier, with instruction running from 8-2. All staff and families that were attending school in-person were able to travel home before logging back on. Virtual literacy and math tutoring sessions were offered to students in need from 4-6 on weekdays and from 9-1 on Saturdays. This design also accommodated students and families who remained virtual and provided staff the ability to teach in one modality in the afternoon. These sessions were supported by two teachers in each subject per grade level who received additional compensation for these extended roles. Teachers appreciated the ability to leverage virtual instruction to

work from home during these longer hours. ★ To learn more, view our briefs on [Effective Resource Allocation for Equitable Systems](#) and [High Quality, Inclusive Curriculum, Instruction and Training](#). ★

JerseyCAN applauds these leaders across the state for showing how this work can, and must, be done. Looking ahead, JerseyCAN will support policy and programmatic solutions that will expand these efforts.