

NEW JERSEY SCHOOLS

A FRAMEWORK FOR

EXCELLENCE

2014

A 2014 JERSEYCAN REPORT

NEW JERSEY SCHOOLS: A FRAMEWORK FOR EXCELLENCE

This report was published
in December 2013 by JerseyCAN:
The New Jersey Campaign for
Achievement Now.

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Introduction

In the movement for great New Jersey schools, we talk often about where the education system stands (our starting point) and where it should be (our destination). We know our kids deserve better than the status quo, which is failing to prepare many of our young minds for the world after 12th grade and often leaves behind the neediest students.

In fact, our kids deserve more than “better.” Our kids deserve the best.

Thanks to volumes of research and a sharpening focus on the critical role that education plays in the success of communities small and large, we even know how the “best” can look: engaged kids, involved families, effective teachers, strong school leaders, vibrant and innovative classrooms, high standards, preschool and more.

But how do we get there?

This publication, *New Jersey Schools: A Framework for Excellence*, provides a seven-to-10-year perspective on improving schools, and outlines changes in education policy that are critically needed to boost student achievement, narrow the state’s disturbing achievement gaps and raise the bar for all kids. The shorter companion to this document, *New Jersey Schools: A Framework for Excellence—Short-Term Goals*, focuses on goals that we can achieve in the span of one to three years. All of these reforms are intended to benefit students across the state, but in some cases are most sorely needed in persistently struggling districts and schools.

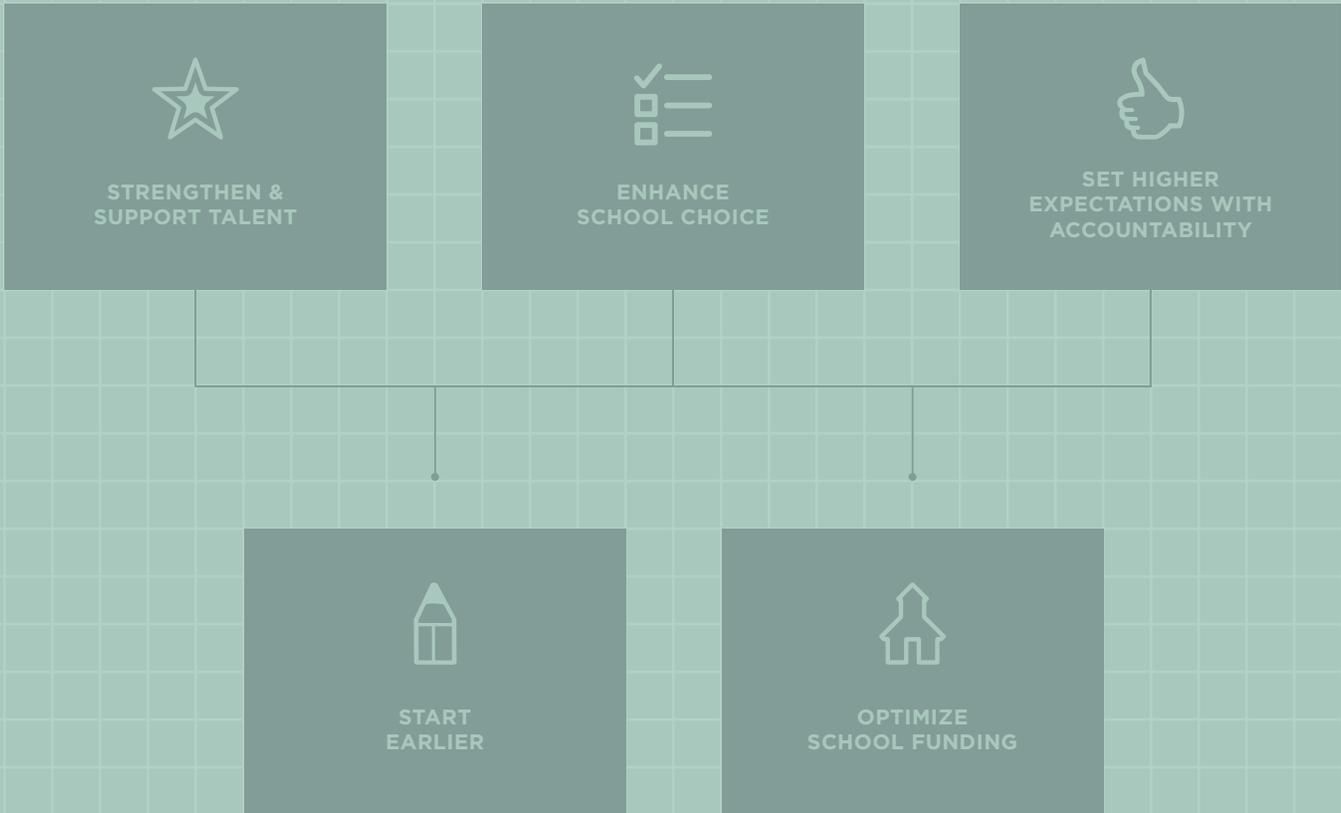
Think of these complementary documents as a map toward real, sustainable and positive change.

In the long-term *Framework* you will find key policy recommendations in the following areas: 1) Start earlier, 2) Strengthen and support talent, 3) Enhance school choice, 4) Set higher expectations with accountability and 5) Optimize school funding.

The short companion document does not include recommendations on preschool or optimal school funding. That’s because the complexity of these issues—and the realities of New Jersey’s political climate—make short-term change unlikely. However, when the opportunity arises to tackle these issues sooner, we will seize it.

Our *Framework* marks the culmination of more than 70 interviews that JerseyCAN conducted in 2013 throughout New Jersey. We met with state and local officials, state policymakers, school leaders, education advocacy organizations, teachers, students and families. We

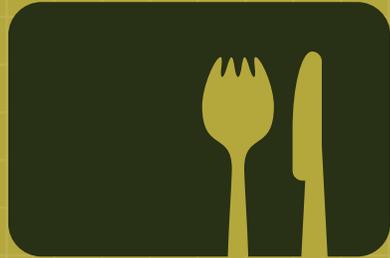
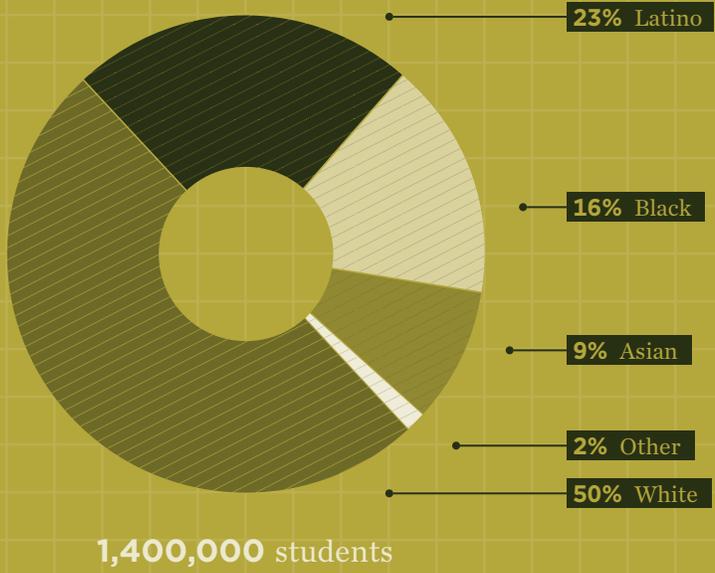
All policy areas addressed by *New Jersey Schools: A Framework for Excellence*



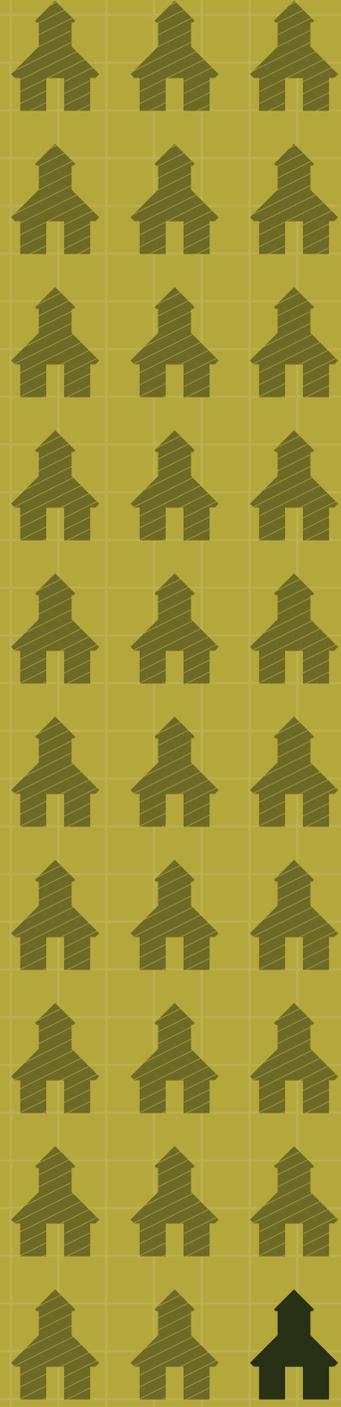
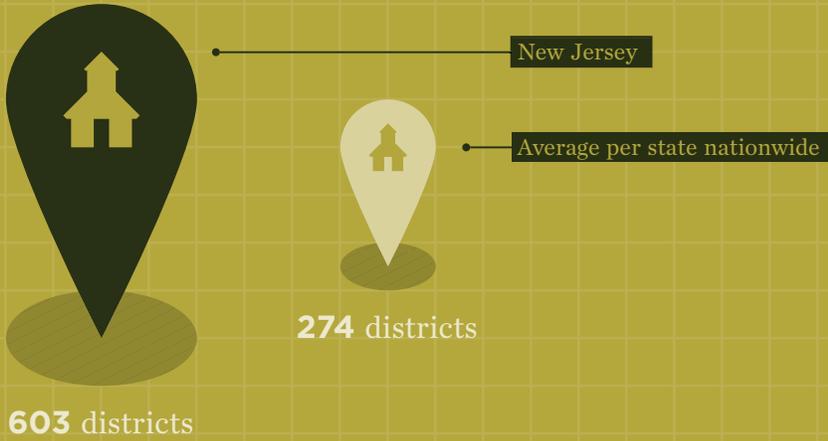
listened closely. We identified common themes. We gave deep thought to everyone's concerns.

What follows is our best thinking on how to get from where we stand to where our schools need to be. It's not enough to dream. We need a plan if we're serious about making great schools a reality for all New Jersey kids.

New Jersey's schools & students



More than **380,000** children participated in the free and reduced lunch program in 2012.



2,492 public schools;
87 are charter schools

Regional comparison of average per-pupil spending, 2009–2010



New Jersey today

2

Broad trends in New Jersey suggest that failure to provide children with a great education will have a negative impact on our state's economic viability and the overall well-being of our citizens.

Providing all New Jersey kids with a high-quality education will translate into enormous benefits, such as increased individual earning power, greater employability and a workforce that meets the demand of a globalized economy. Right now the median wage of a New Jersey resident with a bachelor's degree is \$26,000 more than someone who only graduated from high school, and the unemployment rate of individuals with bachelor's degrees is four percentage points lower than that of high school graduates.¹ Nationally, between 1998 and 2008, more than 10 million jobs were created for those with a college degree, while 600,000 were lost for those that did not require a high school diploma.²

Experts report that by 2018, 64 percent of jobs in New Jersey will require a postsecondary education.³ Unfortunately, New Jersey is not on track to meet these employment demands. While New Jersey's college attainment rate is above the national average, this number is growing slowly.⁴ At this time, less than 50 percent of students in New Jersey graduated within four years.⁵ We must ensure that New Jersey produces enough college graduates to meet the needs of employers in order to guarantee the economic vitality of our state and its residents.

New Jersey's NAEP ranking, 2013 (average scale scores)

| Subject area | Fourth grade | Eighth grade |
|--|-----------------|-----------------|
|  READING | 2 nd | 1 st |
|  MATH | 4 th | 2 nd |

Yet we don't just need more college graduates—we need individuals with skills that match the needs of New Jersey's economy. This means, among other things, a greater emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics. Research indicates that there are 1.4 jobs in STEM for every unemployed New Jerseyan.⁶ To sustain and grow New Jersey's economy, we must equip our next generation of workers with 21st-century skills.

To some extent, New Jersey has already recognized the importance of supporting education. Each year we invest about \$25 billion in our public school system, and New Jersey has the third highest per-pupil spending rate in the country.⁷ On average, New Jersey spent \$16,841 per pupil during the 2009–2010 school year, compared to the national average of \$10,615.⁸ That rate of spending is even higher when we take into account the investment the state makes in teachers' pensions and benefits; including these costs, the New Jersey Department of Education estimates that state per-pupil spending is closer to \$18,000.⁹

In certain respects, this investment has paid off. Take student academic achievement, for example. New Jersey has some of the highest average test scores in the country, having earned top marks on the 2013 National Assessment of Academic Progress. Since 2003, New Jersey has

seen a 16-percentage point increase in eighth-grade math proficiency, one of the highest proficiency gains in the country.¹⁰ Our fourth-grade students now rank second in the nation in reading performance, and fourth in math performance. Eighth-graders rank second for math and first for reading.¹¹

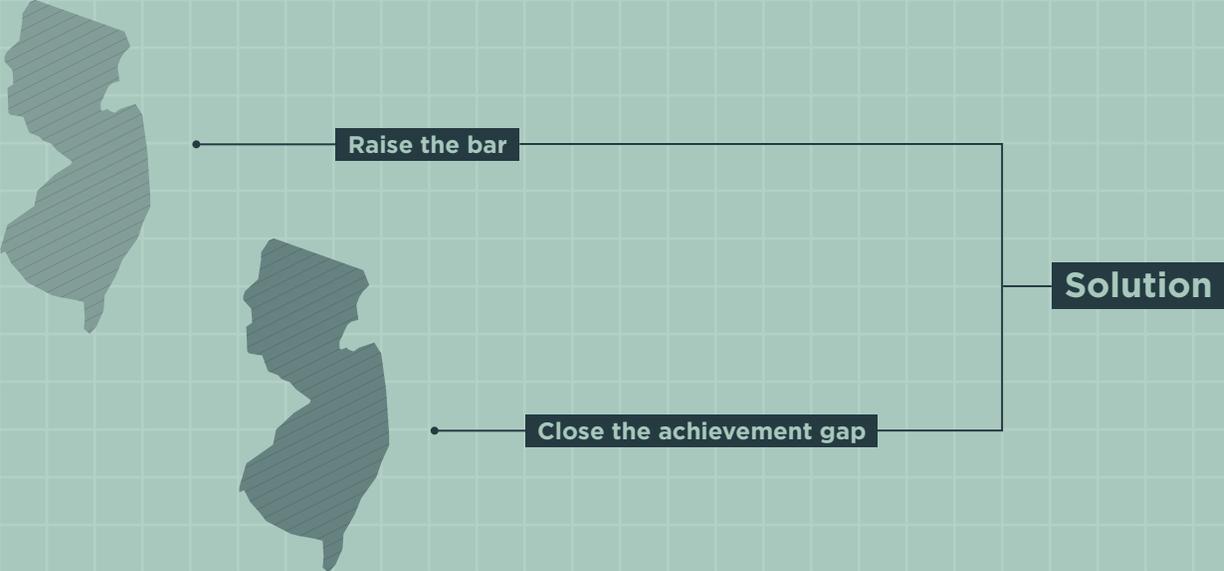
Other measures tell a similarly positive story. New Jersey ranks second in the country for providing 3-year-olds with access to early childhood programs.¹² New Jersey has also garnered national recognition for its high school graduation rates: 86 percent of our students graduated on time in 2012.¹³ Additionally, 73 percent of students in New Jersey who took at least one Advanced Placement exam in the 2012–2013 school year scored a three or higher.¹⁴ Yet those accolades mask a more troubling story.

Here in New Jersey, we have two simultaneous and pressing challenges to address: we must raise the bar so that all students across the state are fully prepared to compete in the global economy, and we must meet the needs of students with the greatest challenges so that a child's race or ZIP code will no longer stand as the best predictor of his or her success. To get there, JerseyCAN proposes a two-pronged approach.

Underneath the impressive statistics about our overall student performance, there are disturbing achievement gaps in New Jersey that have persisted for some time. Here's a snapshot: black, Latino and low-income students trail behind their white and more affluent peers in both reading and math proficiency levels.¹⁵ In the most recent data available from the 2013 NAEP, New Jersey's achievement gaps continue to persist. In fourth-grade math, the percentage of black students who scored at a level of proficient or above is 37 percentage points behind their white peers. Latino students lag 31 percentage points behind white students. And on the eighth-grade reading assessment, black students are 30 percentage points behind their white peers while low-income students trail 34 percentage points behind their non-low-income peers. While there was notable progress at closing the gap for Latino students at the eighth-grade level, this progress was not consistently seen across other groups or at the fourth-grade level.¹⁶

We can see these inequities in other metrics, as well. While New Jersey's overall high school graduation rates are considered strong—with 86 percent of students graduating on time—a deeper analysis reveals large gaps: 93 percent of white students graduated on time in New Jersey, compared with only 75 percent of black students, 77 percent of Latino students and 75 percent of economically disadvantaged students.¹⁷

A two-pronged solution for education challenges in New Jersey

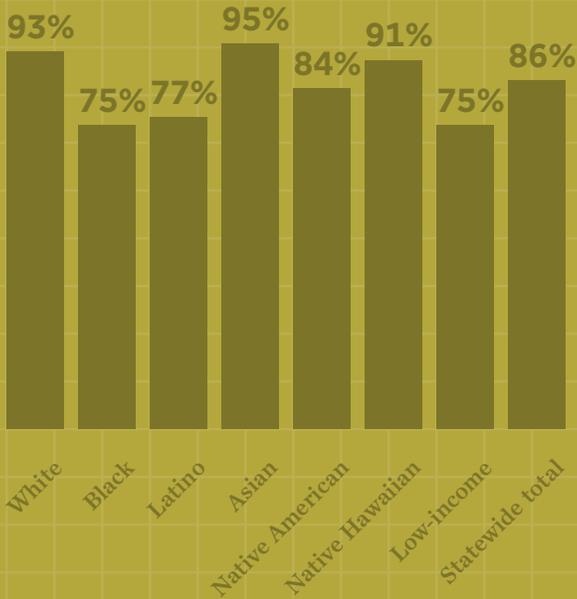


NAEP proficiency gaps (in percentage points)

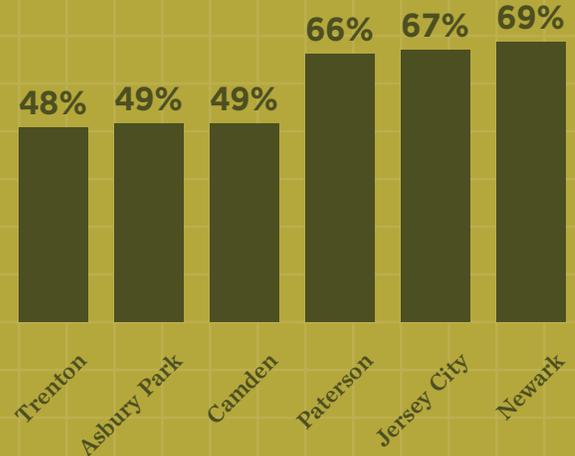
| Subject area | Grade | Black/white gap | Latino/white gap | Low-income/ non-low-income gap |
|--------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|-----------------------------------|
| READING | 4 th | 30 | 31 | 34 |
| | 8 th | 29 | 24 | 31 |
| MATH | 4 th | 37 | 31 | 37 |
| | 8 th | 34 | 24 | 32 |

New Jersey high school graduation rates, 2012

Student



District



When we look beneath state trends in some urban areas, we find even more evidence of disconcerting inequities. On-time high school graduation rates in our most challenged school districts are alarming. In Asbury Park, Trenton and Camden, fewer than 50 percent of students graduated on time in 2012. In Jersey City, Paterson and Newark, fewer than 70 percent of students made it to graduation in four years.¹⁸

Not only are New Jersey schools failing to educate wide swaths of low-income students, students of color and students in urban districts, we are failing in general to set the bar high enough to ensure that all students graduate from high school prepared for college and the workforce. We cannot remain complacent about this level of mediocrity.

Overall, *more than half* of New Jersey students are considered unprepared for success in college and the workforce based on NAEP benchmarks. On the exam, only 38 percent of New Jersey's 12th-grade students were considered college- and career-ready.¹⁹ Based on SAT scores, students in some New Jersey cities face truly dire circumstances.

SAT college and career benchmark (student performance nationwide)

43% achieved

SAT benchmark

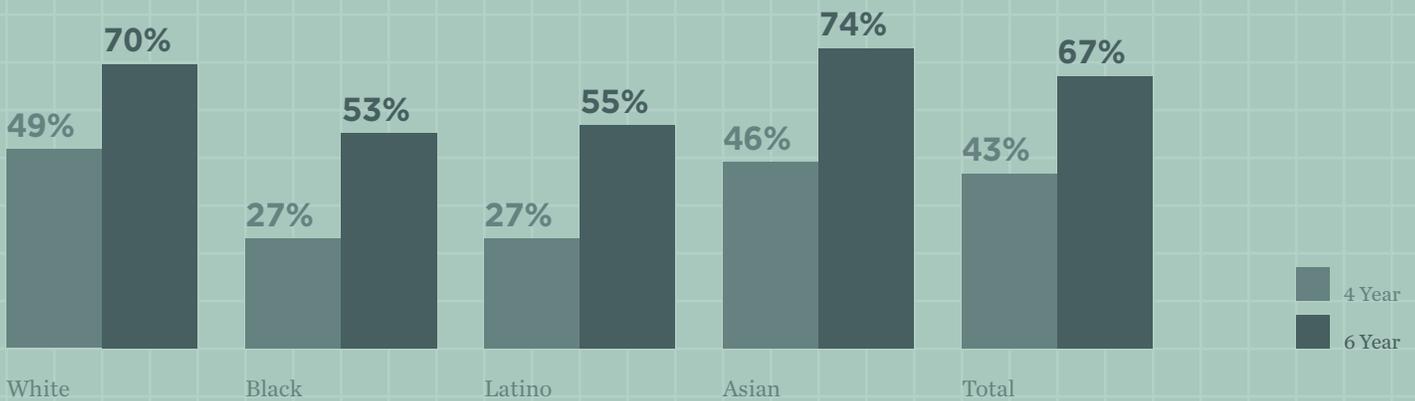
57% did not achieve

Fewer than 10 percent of Newark's SAT test-takers met the college readiness benchmark. In Camden, just 1.4 percent of students met the benchmark, and in Asbury Park no one did.²⁰

These percentages fall well below the already unsettling national average for SAT performance: in 2012, only 43 percent of students met the appropriate target.²¹

College remediation rates serve to reinforce the gravity of this issue. At Rutgers University, for instance, one in three students require remediation.²² At Bergen and Essex County Community Colleges, 90 percent of the students required remediation in as many as three areas: reading, writing, and math.²³ Students must successfully complete remediation coursework before they can take courses that count towards graduation. Thus, remediation increases the overall cost of a college education. This carries significant financial consequences for both students and families.²⁴ And only one in four students who takes remedial courses graduates in eight years.²⁵

New Jersey public college and university graduation rates



Inequities also persist in overall college completion rates. Only 27 percent of black and Latino students graduate within four years. Even when we look at six-year graduation rates, Latino and black students lag significantly behind their white peers.²⁶

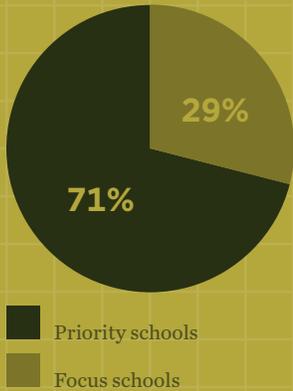
Yet another indicator of the challenges we face is the number of schools the New Jersey Department of Education has flagged for dramatic improvement. Currently, there are 249 Priority and Focus schools statewide. Priority schools are the state's bottom 5 percent in terms of student learning, while Focus schools are home to notably wide achievement gaps. Collectively these struggling schools serve more than 170,000 students.²⁷ We cannot accept those numbers. We must address the issues that prevail at these schools.

When our kids leave high school unprepared for college and career success, they're dramatically less likely to succeed in the global economy and, as a result, our country is far more likely to continue its international backslide. We are lagging already.

While average student performance levels are often used to measure and compare how well countries across the world are preparing their citizens through public education, we must also consider the rate at which student performance is improving in each country. Twenty-four countries surpass the United States' rate of improvement in

Priority and Focus schools

249
Priority and Focus
schools



109 of those schools are concentrated in the urban areas noted below. These Priority and Focus schools serve nearly **67,000** students.

| District | Number of Priority & Focus schools | Number of students in Priority & Focus schools | Total number of students in the district |
|-------------|------------------------------------|--|--|
| Newark | 29 | 16,160 | 36,430 |
| Paterson | 24 | 15,310 | 24,570 |
| Camden | 22 | 11,510 | 12,610 |
| Trenton | 18 | 10,050 | 12,130 |
| Jersey City | 16 | 13,920 | 27,030 |

student performance. If this pattern continues, a recent study projects, our country will never catch up to the “leaders of the industrialized world.”²⁸ Additionally, on the Programme for International Student Assessment, which assesses critical thinking in math, literacy and science, the United States falls in the middle of the pack.²⁹

Our kids deserve better. Each and every one of our kids deserves access to schools that set high expectations, meet their personal learning needs and prepare them for lifelong success.

Fortunately, there’s hope. By overhauling our existing education system and establishing a series of research-backed policies that better suit the needs of our kids, our families and our educators, we believe that New Jersey has the power to create an environment for excellent schools to thrive.

Graphic: In 2010, Governor Christie stated there were 104,000 students in chronically failing schools. Based on the new categories created in the New Jersey State Department of Education waiver and publically available enrollment data, we established there are 170,000 students in Priority and Focus schools across the state. Figures are rounded.

New Jersey Schools: *A Framework for Excellence*

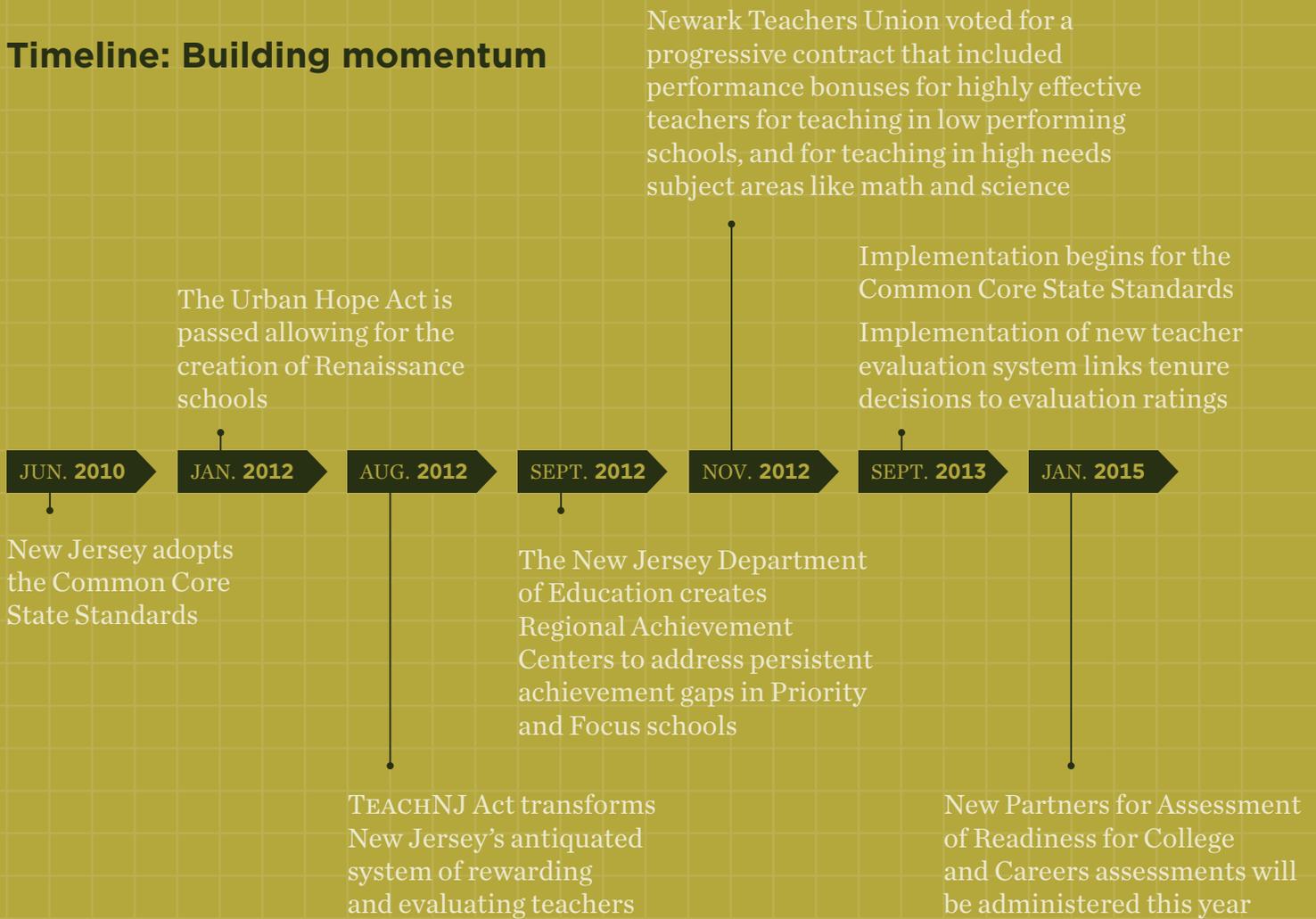
In some ways the New Jersey Department of Education, legislative leaders and policymakers have already begun to develop the environment in which these policy changes can come to fruition. In fact, the recommendations contained in our *Framework* align with the New Jersey Department of Education's new philosophy for improving public schools, as articulated in both the state's 2011 No Child Left Behind waiver application and the education department's, "Education Transformation Task Force Final Report."³⁰

The new approach means that New Jersey will focus on setting the "highest expectations" for students across the state and ensuring that all districts and schools are reaching for the same high targets. These targets are aligned from preschool through high school, and they enable a child to progress sequentially and deliberately toward college and career readiness.

The state is also working to empower educators to do what's needed to achieve these targets by providing them with additional instructional support and autonomy.

Accountability with a differentiated approach is another area the state is working to improve. As described in the task force report, "School and district success should result in a light touch from Trenton; failure should lead to differentiated and meaningful interventions."³¹ We support this approach and believe it's consistent with our emphasis on setting a high bar for all students and providing communities in need of greater intervention with support that will advance real progress.

Timeline: Building momentum



Overview of long-term policy goals

4

As we noted above, our long-term vision for great schools addresses five major policy areas: 1) Start earlier, 2) Strengthen and support talent, 3) Enhance school choice, 4) Set higher expectations with accountability and 5) Optimize school funding. We designed this comprehensive document to guide policymakers, community leaders and other partners over the next seven to 10 years as we work to give all our kids what they deserve: a true shot at success in excellent schools. Within each policy

area, we provide important background information and a unique New Jersey context. Each section outlines our successes and the crucial areas for improvement.

Our recommendations build upon the momentum of education reforms that New Jersey has enacted in the last five years. These include New Jersey’s adoption of the Common Core State Standards, the passage of the TEACHNJ Act in August 2012 and the creation of Renaissance schools.

Below is a summary of our key policy recommendations. The recommendations in bold are those that are highlighted in *New Jersey Schools: A Framework for Excellence—Short-Term Goals*.

START EARLIER

To build on the success of New Jersey’s early childhood programs and ensure that all low- and moderate-income young children enjoy a strong start to their education, we recommend the following:

1. *Expand access to high-quality preschool to low- and moderate-income 3- and 4-year-olds.*
2. *Implement a quality preschool rating system.*
3. *Make full-day kindergarten available to all students.*

STRENGTHEN AND SUPPORT TALENT

Once a child steps foot inside a school, no factor will have a bigger impact on his or her learning than his teacher. Research has proven time and again that great teachers matter, but many of New Jersey’s existing policies need to be updated to reflect this fact.³² We must build a profession that empowers educators by doing the following:

1. *Repeal the residency requirement.*
2. *Increase the rigor of traditional teacher preparation programs and support teachers throughout their careers.*
3. *End seniority-based layoffs.*
4. *Reward the best teachers.*
5. *Cultivate and support education leaders.*
6. *Fully implement the teacher evaluation system.*

ENHANCE SCHOOL CHOICE

Investments in high-quality early childhood education and a robust talent pipeline alone will not enable us to reach our vision of great schools for all. By expanding the number of high-quality educational choices for students, we can provide more immediate relief for fami-

lies struggling with poor-performing schools and create the innovation and competition needed to spark district reform. Below are the major ways we can foster that kind of system:

1. *Overhaul the charter school law.*
2. *Create a new statewide district to serve as an Achievement School District.*
3. *Identify new ways to help families cover the costs of education, with a focus on low-income families in persistently struggling districts.*

SET HIGHER EXPECTATIONS WITH ACCOUNTABILITY

We must set clear, high expectations for what students should be learning at each grade level, and hold superintendents, principals, school leaders, administrators, teachers and school board members accountable for meeting those expectations:

1. *Set higher standards to raise the bar.*
2. *Integrate technology smartly to improve educational outcomes.*
3. *Expand the use of data-driven instruction to improve student success.*
4. *Incorporate best practices from other regions for school closure.*

OPTIMIZE SCHOOL FUNDING

New Jersey already invests a considerable amount of money in its public schools. Now we must ensure that districts are using those dollars as wisely and efficiently as possible:

1. *Collect and report on the relationship between spending and student achievement.*
2. *Consolidate and share district services.*
3. *Phase out adjustment aid for districts that no longer qualify.*

The table on the next page differentiates our short- and long-term goals in each policy area.

Summary of short- and longer-term policy recommendations

| | Short-term | Longer-term |
|--|--|---|
| 1 Start earlier | | <p>Expand access to high-quality preschool to low- and moderate-income 3- and 4-year-olds</p> <hr/> <p>Create a preschool quality rating system</p> <hr/> <p>Expand access to full-day kindergarten</p> |
| 2 Strengthen and support talent | <p>Repeal the residency requirement</p> <hr/> <p>Strengthen teacher preparation and professional development</p> <hr/> <p>Reform layoff criteria</p> <hr/> <p>Reward the best teachers</p> | <p>Cultivate, train and support education leaders</p> <hr/> <p>Fully implement the teacher evaluation system</p> |
| 3 Enhance school choice | <p>Overhaul the charter school law</p> | <p>Create an Achievement School District</p> <hr/> <p>Help families cover the costs of education</p> |
| 4 Set higher expectations with accountability | <p>Raise the bar with the Common Core State Standards and related assessments</p> | <p>Use technology to improve educational outcomes, including use of data-driven instruction</p> <hr/> <p>Adopt best practices for school closure</p> |
| 5 Optimize school funding | | <p>Report publicly on relationship between spending and performance</p> <hr/> <p>Consolidate and share district services</p> <hr/> <p>Phase out adjustment aid under SFRA as planned</p> |

Policy recommendations

5

Start earlier

Why it matters

Decades of research shows that high-quality preschool can put a child on the path to lifelong success by increasing that child's chances of graduating from high school, earning higher wages and staying out of prison.³³ Kindergarten is also critically important. Children who attend high-quality kindergarten with effective teachers and small classes are more likely to enroll in college and earn higher salaries in adult life.³⁴

Here in New Jersey, the National Institute of Early Education Research confirms that preschool has a substantial impact. Following children in 15 low-income districts, researchers found that by fifth grade, those who had attended two years of the Abbott Preschool program were, on average, three-quarters of a year ahead in math and two-thirds of a year ahead in language arts. For low-income students, those gains are roughly equal to 20 to 40 percent of the achievement gap.³⁵

Society reaps the benefits of high-quality preschool as well. The Perry Preschool Project showed that for every \$1 invested in early education, communities receive a \$7 return in the form of higher wages (and therefore a larger tax base), less crime and less dependence on public assistance.³⁶

Where New Jersey stands now

Fortunately, New Jersey has already laid a solid foundation for early childhood education. The state ranks second in the nation for providing preschool access to 3-year-olds, and 16th for providing access to 4-year-olds.³⁷ The state-funded Abbott preschool program, which serves more than 43,000 children, is used as a model nationwide.³⁸ And we continue to lead the nation in per-pupil spending for preschool, investing nearly \$650 million in the Abbott preschool program.³⁹ Furthermore, the state has undertaken some efforts to ensure alignment of curriculum from preschool through third grade so students are reading on grade level by the end of third grade—a well-established marker for continued academic success.⁴⁰ However, this requires ongoing attention to ensure there is full alignment.

Although we know that preschool changes lives, there are still barriers to access for families across New Jersey. More than 83,000 children lack access to preschool, and of those who are attending preschool in private settings, little is definitively known about the quality of those

Attending a quality pre-K program increases a child's chances of graduating from high school, earning higher wages and staying out of prison.

programs.⁴¹ Moreover, even the families that can afford to send their children to preschool lack the tools they need to browse existing programs in a user-friendly way to select the best program available.

This needs to change. Achievement gaps begin early in a child's life. If we're serious about closing the gaps, we must start early.

The recommendations

1 *Expand access to high-quality preschool to low- and moderate-income 3- and 4-year-olds.* While the Abbott preschool programs specifically target students in largely low-income, urban areas, they only enroll children from their districts. As of 2007, 49 percent of low-income students in New Jersey lived outside of the Abbott districts.⁴² New Jersey must ensure all students, not just those living in Abbott districts, can access high-quality early childhood programs.

We can start by building upon the initial steps New Jersey has already taken toward establishing preschool access for all low-income children across the state. Since 2008, four districts—Fairfield, Little Egg Harbor, Red Bank and Woodbine, all of which have high concentrations of low-income children— have received money under the School Funding Reform Act to provide 3- and 4-year-olds with preschool. The results are promising. Before preschool was implemented in Woodbine, 70 percent of incoming kindergartners needed intensive phonics interventions. After only one year of implementing preschool, that number dropped to 35 percent.⁴³

Preschool expansion has also reduced the number of children who need special education services in kindergarten. A preschool intervention and referral team is now able to identify and support students much sooner. In Red Bank, the kindergarten referral rate for special education dropped from 11 percent in 2008 to 3 percent in 2011–2012, allowing for better service delivery for students and significant savings on special education services.⁴⁴

Making high-quality preschool accessible to all of the state's low-income 3- and 4-year-olds would entail a big investment, but it's a worthwhile one that would pay high dividends. Research indicates some preschool programs are associated with reduced delinquency and crime in childhood and adulthood.⁴⁵ It would cost roughly \$10 million to provide 1,500 kids with full-day preschool, a fraction of the roughly \$82 million it currently costs to maintain the same number of inmates for a year.⁴⁶ As the evidence has shown in both Woodbine and Red Bank in recent years, an upfront investment in preschool not only leads to

better outcomes for students but also can save districts money on later interventions they would otherwise need to provide.

2 ***Implement a quality preschool rating system.*** Not all preschool programs are equal; only high-quality programs have the dramatic, lifelong benefits cited earlier. Yet it can be difficult for families to differentiate between effective and ineffective options. That's why New Jersey needs a quality rating system.

To date, 26 states have either implemented or begun to develop statewide Quality Rating and Improvement Systems for early childhood education providers.⁴⁷ Recognizing the need for this type of system in New Jersey, Children's Futures and the William Penn Foundation provided financial support to pilot a QRIS in Trenton and Camden in May 2007. The Advocates for Children of New Jersey served as the project facilitator and the Schumann Fund for New Jersey provided support for ACNJ's early learning advocacy.⁴⁸ Another pilot effort with volunteers from across the state is scheduled to begin in fall 2013 to further test the system in 50 to 60 center-based preschools and childcare centers.⁴⁹ These test efforts will offer results and information that policymakers can use to craft a statewide system that will enable all families to effectively find a program that best suits their preschoolers' needs.

3 ***Make full-day kindergarten available to all students.*** Research shows that full-day kindergarten boosts student learning, reduces the achievement gap, increases social and emotional development and decreases grade retention.⁵⁰

Technically, New Jersey is one of only six states nationwide that does not require districts to offer kindergarten, yet most districts do offer it in some form. However a substantial portion of districts—22 percent—do not offer *full-day* kindergarten.⁵¹

To build upon on the skills that children develop in preschool, we must implement universal, full-day kindergarten for all students in New Jersey.

For full-day kindergarten to have the greatest impact, we must first identify the communities in greatest need: those with high concentrations of low- and middle-income families that do not already have access to quality kindergarten programs. Prioritizing communities with the greatest need and gradually phasing-in the program over the next seven to 10 years will mitigate the cost of expansion.

In May 2013, the State Assembly drafted a bill to create a task force to review the research on full-day kindergarten and to investigate the additional costs of implementing full-day programs throughout the

To date, 26 states have either implemented or begun to develop statewide Quality Rating and Improvement Systems for early childhood education providers.

state, including staffing needs and facilities. The task force will also look at the differences in curriculum between half-day and full-day kindergarten programs. If the Senate and the governor approve this, the task force will report its findings within a year of its formation.⁵² These findings will be critical to determine how to make universal, full-day kindergarten viable in New Jersey.

Strengthen and support talent

Why it matters

New Jersey has amazing teachers who are passionate about education and care deeply about the communities and students they serve. We must harness the passion of these phenomenal educators and provide them with the resources they need to be successful—not only in the classroom, but when it comes to pursuing their long-term professional goals. New Jersey teachers deserve a sustainable career option with opportunities for professional growth and development.

Research indicates that having an excellent teacher in front of the classroom has a tremendous impact on student success.⁵³ But the need for top-notch talent doesn't stop there. We also need great principals, business administrators, superintendents, board members and trustee members to lead our schools. We can't expect teachers alone to achieve the classroom outcomes our students deserve without guidance from excellent leadership. To optimize teacher impact, there must be excellent training and professional development at all stages of this talent pipeline.

Where New Jersey stands now

New Jersey received a C- from the National Council on Teacher Quality during a recent study of teacher preparation programs. However, the study placed Kean University, Rutgers University-Camden and Seton Hall University on the Honor Roll, an impressive feat considering only 14 percent of secondary programs nationally qualified for that status.⁵⁴

Despite the strength of these three teacher programs, the majority of New Jersey's teacher preparation programs leave teachers under-prepared to deal with the challenges they will face in the classroom. Currently, teacher prep programs do not collect performance data on graduates or set minimum performance standards with consequences for not meeting those standards. It also lags in program admission requirements: only 17 percent of elementary and secondary programs in New Jersey limit admissions to college students in the top half of their classes, compared to 28 percent nationwide.⁵⁵

There are other constraints limiting the talent pool for education in New Jersey. Under the New Jersey First Act, all New Jersey public officers and employees must live in the state.⁵⁶ The law was intended to help maintain New Jersey's economic health during the recession by ensuring state dollars and resources remained within the state. Yet it has made attracting the highest caliber talent to teach in New Jersey's most challenged areas even more difficult.

While these constraints are real and need to be addressed, it is also important to recognize progress made in this area in recent years. The 2012 passage of TEACHNJ marked a step in the right direction toward effective teacher evaluation and retention. Under TEACHNJ, tenure is no longer a lifetime guarantee; it is earned and kept based on classroom effectiveness. The new law establishes higher standards for achieving tenure by connecting it to student achievement. TEACHNJ also changed the way we evaluate teachers. Under the new system there are four different rating categories: "highly effective," "effective," "partially effective" and "ineffective." Ratings will be based on multiple measures including year-by-year growth on New Jersey state assessments, classroom observation and student growth objectives.⁵⁷ But more work remains to ensure that all levels of teaching and leadership are providing the best educational environment possible for our students.

Under TEACHNJ, tenure is no longer a lifetime guarantee; it is earned and kept based on classroom effectiveness.

The recommendations

1 ***Repeal the residency requirement.*** Under New Jersey's residency requirement, teachers must establish New Jersey residency within three years of starting their position: an unnecessary burden on teachers and the districts in which they teach. Where a teacher lives has little to do with his or her classroom qualifications, and only exacerbates the lack of flexibility that schools and educators currently face.

The 2013 amendment to the Urban Hope Act offers some relief by extending the window to establish residency to five years, but this only applies to schools established within a Renaissance school project or charter school located within a Renaissance school district in Camden, Newark or Trenton.⁵⁸ Other areas across the state, including urban centers that could draw talent from surrounding states and cities, also need this flexibility. District leadership in Camden, Newark and Trenton need the greater flexibility afforded by the Urban Hope Act to apply to non-teaching district personnel as well. Repealing the residency requirement would yield widespread benefits for both district and charter schools.

2 *Increase the rigor of traditional teacher preparation programs and support teachers throughout their careers.* New

Jersey teachers deserve top-of-the-line training so they can begin their careers prepared to succeed with our kids. However, there is work to be done to ensure such training is available; as noted above, New Jersey recently received a C- from the National Council on Teacher Quality in their review of teacher preparation programs in the state.⁵⁹

We strongly support the following policy recommendations that NCTQ made for New Jersey to improve the quality of its teacher preparation programs:

- Raise admission standards for teacher preparation programs
- Align teacher preparation with the Common Core State Standards
- Improve clinical preparation
- Raise licensing requirements
- Raise the bar for special education teachers
- Hold teacher preparation programs accountable⁶⁰

First, teacher preparation programs should require candidates to boast strong academic records. New Jersey has already made steps toward improving teacher quality by proposing to raise the minimum GPA requirement for novice teachers.⁶¹ This is an important first step, but we must strive for higher standards before teaching candidates even graduate from college.

Getting top-of-the-line training also means having the information one needs to choose the best education school. The New Jersey State Board of Education revealed recently that the state is developing an Educator Preparation Provider Annual Report. Data from the report will include information on teaching candidates' academic qualifications, gender, race, ethnicity, scores on licensure assessments and evidence of effectiveness in the classroom.⁶² We encourage the state to release this aggregated data publicly so aspiring teachers can make informed decisions about which program to attend, and so principals and superintendents can see which applicants for open teaching positions have received the best training.

When it comes to the preparation itself, we must provide our candidates with a rigorous course of study that emphasizes clinical experience. Improvements to traditional teacher preparation programs would strengthen the talent pool for *all* schools across the state including both traditional public schools and charter schools.

Lastly, improvements to teacher preparation programs will have a limited impact unless we can also provide teachers with ongoing high-

New Jersey recently received a C- from the National Council on Teacher Quality in their review of teacher preparation programs in the state.

quality professional development. Teachers must have opportunities to work with their colleagues, in their schools and across the state, to drive improvements to their own instruction. Technology should also be used to provide resources for teachers such as documented best practices, videos of exemplar lessons and assistance with instruction.

3 ***End seniority-based layoffs.*** To build on the teacher evaluation system and tenure reforms that New Jersey lawmakers passed in 2012, we must finally end seniority-based layoffs. Too often, New Jersey school districts face the tough reality of having to cut back on educators due to financial hardship. In 2010, 3,000 teachers were laid off across the state.⁶³ In the 2010–2011 school year, Newark Public Schools reduced its teaching force by 177 teachers.⁶⁴

These layoff decisions were made with seniority as the only criterion, so the last teacher hired was the first out the door.⁶⁵ Unfortunately, in an average district, more than 80 percent of seniority-based layoffs result in effective teachers leaving the classroom—with less effective teachers remaining. Research indicates that “only 13 to 16 percent of the teachers laid off in a seniority-based system would have also been cut under an effectiveness-based system.”⁶⁶

New Jersey is one of only 10 states that make seniority the top criterion for layoff decisions.⁶⁷ Our students and teachers will benefit if New Jersey models its staffing policy on laws like those in Colorado, Florida or Indiana, where classroom performance and student outcomes are the most important factors.⁶⁸

4 ***Reward the best teachers.*** New Jersey should also look at innovative approaches to reward our most effective teachers. Currently, New Jersey’s teachers are compensated based on pay scales that differ by district and tend to reward years in the classroom and advanced degrees. Yet research confirms that years of experience and additional credentials don’t always amount to better instruction.⁶⁹

Differentiated compensation

New Jersey should move away from “step and lane” models for compensating teachers. Models to consider include those used in Florida, Indiana and District of Columbia Public Schools, which directly tie teacher compensation to teacher evaluation results.⁷⁰ For example, DCPS’s model uses two methods for rewarding highly effective teachers. Teachers are eligible for an annual bonus based on student growth, and teachers with highly effective ratings qualify for an increase in salary base.⁷¹ New Jersey should further study these models and use

In an average district, more than 80 percent of seniority-based layoffs result in effective teachers leaving the classroom.

our own teacher evaluation system to identify and reward the most effective teachers.

Career ladders

Another approach to consider is a teacher career ladder that establishes multiple levels of teaching duties and differentiates pay as teachers take on more responsibility. This will serve to develop top teaching talent, increase the impact of highly effective teachers and help develop a pipeline for teachers interested in becoming school leaders. Arizona's Career Ladder Program operates in 28 districts across the state and 40 percent of teachers in the state are employed in Career Ladder districts.⁷² Participating school districts cited improvements in student achievement, and teacher surveys revealed that there were overall improvements to the schools' instructional programs.⁷³

5 *Cultivate and support education leaders.* In partnership with school districts, the New Jersey Department of Education should use the data from the statewide teacher evaluation system to identify highly effective teachers early in their careers and provide targeted professional development to retain and cultivate these teachers as future leaders. We recognize that not all teachers want to take on additional responsibilities that would limit their time in the classroom. But for those that do, assistance should be available.

Research indicates that school leadership ranks second only to classroom instruction when it comes to in-school factors that impact student achievement.⁷⁴ Recognizing the importance of leadership, Newark Public Schools has implemented a principal training and preparation program to support school leaders. In Newark, Superintendent Cami Anderson has focused on using the Principal Leadership Institute to provide principals with the tools necessary to support and coach their teachers to be effective classroom leaders. PLI training includes job-embedded professional development, which involves closely working with assistant superintendents to improve teacher evaluation practices and instruction. Principals also participate in cohort meetings where fellow school leaders can share best practices and solutions to common problems. Improvements to Newark's principal training have been reflected in improved principal evaluations. However, while we should laud the improvements made to principal training and preparation in Newark, it's unclear to what extent school leaders across the rest of the state are receiving similar support throughout their careers.

School districts across the country are exploring ways to address leadership and training gaps. Six districts in particular have partnered

with the Wallace Foundation to invest \$75 million dollars in developing strong principal pipelines.⁷⁵ During the process, they identified four essential elements to attracting, hiring and retaining strong school leaders:

- Developing principal standards
- Providing high-quality training
- Selective hiring
- On-the-job support and performance evaluations⁷⁶

New Jersey already has principal evaluations in place, but districts must develop additional strategies to successfully implement the other three pieces of this approach.

Not only do principals need more support and training throughout their careers, but New Jersey’s business administrators, superintendents, school boards and trustee members need support as well. These leaders play a pivotal role in school finance and maintaining campus infrastructure, and are responsible for myriad other daily tasks that prove crucial to a school’s success. We recommend that districts work collaboratively to determine mutual areas for improvement and pool their resources to establish support systems for school leaders.

6 Fully implement the teacher evaluation system. Some advocates are calling for New Jersey to delay by one year the full implementation of its new teacher evaluation system, postponing consequences for teachers who received poor ratings.⁷⁷ Yet these delays will weaken other components of the law. Delays are unnecessary given the wide support of TEACHNJ in the legislature and the groundwork that has been laid in recent years. To successfully implement an effective teacher evaluation system, the New Jersey Department of Education must assess what additional resources teachers need to thrive, such as targeted high-quality professional development and resources for school leaders as they navigate the new evaluation system. This can be done concurrently with full implementation.

State leaders should also resist pressure to weaken the link between student performance data and a teacher’s overall evaluation score. The Gates Foundation’s recent *Measures of Effective Teaching* study found that basing between 33 and 50 percent of a teacher’s evaluation on state assessment results would provide the most reliable and consistent results, and would offer a better predictor of student learning in the future.⁷⁸

Not only do principals need more support and training throughout their careers, but New Jersey’s business administrators, superintendents, school boards and trustee members need support as well.

Right now, student growth measures count for just 30 percent of a New Jersey teacher’s overall evaluation—scaled back in 2013 from 35 percent. While that may have been necessary to keep implementation on track, we cannot afford to cut back any further. We will have to continue to monitor this measure during both the short term and over the longer term to prevent any further reductions.

Enhance school choice

Why it matters

Many New Jersey students are limited to just one educational option: their neighborhood school. If that school serves them well, there’s no problem. Yet our state’s large achievement gaps show that too many schools are failing to meet the needs of all kids. Our families deserve more and better options.

Charter schools are certainly not the only way to offer parents and families more high-quality choices, but they are a critical part of the solution. When charters were first created—at the national level and right here in New Jersey—their primary goal was to serve as laboratories of innovation. The idea was to exchange greater accountability for greater freedom from the restrictive rules of district school systems so that charter programs could demonstrate through increased flexibility the power of great leaders and teachers to create the cultures and environments in which at-risk students succeed.

New Jersey’s high-quality charter schools are making a tremendous impact on student achievement, particularly for low-income students and students of color. On average, for each year of schooling, charter students gain an additional two months of reading and three months of math over their district school counterparts.⁷⁹ In Newark charter schools, these gains are even larger. Students in charters gain 7.5 additional months in reading and nine additional months in math.⁸⁰

Families want their children to make these kinds of leaps in the classroom, but neighborhood schools do not always offer the learning environments that makes those leaps possible for all kids.

Where New Jersey stands now

There are currently 87 charter schools throughout New Jersey serving more than 30,000 students.⁸¹ Yet more than 20,000 students remain on waiting lists to get in.⁸² Despite this level of demand, New Jersey’s charter law, passed in 1995, severely impedes charter school growth and autonomy. It is therefore unsurprising that the state’s charter law ranks 29th out of 43 charter laws according to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools’ annual analysis of charter school laws.⁸³

On average, for each year of schooling, charter students gain an additional two months of reading and three months of math over their district school counterparts.

The recommendations

1 **Overhaul the charter school law.** New Jersey parents want to send their kids to high-quality schools, and students want to be challenged to reach their full potential. Therefore we must reform New Jersey’s charter school law when it comes to charter school authorizing, facilities funding, general operating funding and regulatory requirements. The right changes to these laws will help our high-performing schools thrive, and will help New Jersey attract even more outstanding charter school operators—both independent charters and charter management organizations—to meet the growing demand for high-quality educational options. Additionally, traditional district schools and charter schools can collaborate and share best practices to drive overall improvements in student outcomes.

Authorizing

New Jersey needs a second charter school authorizer. Right now, only the New Jersey Department of Education may award a charter, which means the pace and nature of authorizing decisions depend on both the capacity of the department and the education agenda of the administration in power.

To supplement the New Jersey Department of Education, we recommend instituting an independent charter board. The National Association of Charter School Authorizers identifies an independent board as the ideal alternative statewide authorizer.⁸⁴ NACSA also found that independent charter boards are more likely to have policies that encourage strong charter schools to replicate.⁸⁵ Right now, 14 states have independent charter boards.⁸⁶

An independent charter board can authorize charter schools in any community. We envision an independent charter board composed of members selected by the governor and legislative leadership, with the commissioner of education serving as a member of the board. This will allow for diverse viewpoints at every level of the charter application and accountability process.

Autonomy

Charter schools typically receive greater autonomy than traditional district schools in exchange for stricter measures of accountability. We applaud the recent changes made to improve charter accountability, notably the creation of the charter performance contract and the closure of low-performing charter schools. We support continued efforts along these lines. However, we strongly believe that charters

need even more flexibility. As accountability increases, schools need the freedom to reach these higher expectations. Increased accountability without additional autonomy to meet the diverse needs of students will result in schools failing to reach the bar. Autonomy can come in the form of policies that provide the state or new authorizers with the ability to waive some certification requirements for charter school staff and/or exempt charter schools from other laws that govern traditional school districts. Granting charter schools in New Jersey the same autonomy they receive in other places, such as New York, the District of Columbia, Louisiana, California and Illinois, will provide them the flexibility they need to create their own school cultures and curricula that best meet their students' needs.⁸⁷ As further measures are explored to give greater autonomy to charter schools, policymakers should consider whether there are also areas where traditional public schools would be better served with more autonomy.

Funding

Funding presents a challenge for New Jersey's charter schools. High-quality charter schools cannot expand and reach more of the children who need them most without equitable funding. The New Jersey Charter Schools Association reported that charters were receiving, on average, \$12,908 per pupil, compared with traditional public schools that received \$19,782 per pupil for those same students—a 35-percent difference.⁸⁸ One issue is that under current law, charter schools do not receive state adjustment aid, even though their home districts do. As a result, charter schools in districts with substantial adjustment aid are expected to provide the same level of service that their traditional school neighbors provide, without having the financial resources to do so.⁸⁹ To close this funding gap, we must provide charter schools equal access to state adjustment aid.

Better access to facilities

Although they are public schools, charter schools do not have access to the same resources as other public schools, particularly when it comes to facilities. Because they don't have access to facilities funding, charter schools must often raise money on their own to purchase or lease buildings to operate. This burden makes it very difficult to expand and meet the demands of families on charter school waiting lists.

The high cost of facilities is often a major impediment to charter school growth and diverts funds away from instruction, where they are most critically needed. A recent study of charter facilities in New Jersey found that 82 percent of surveyed charter schools planned to expand

their enrollment by 70 percent between 2012 and 2016. However, more than 54 percent of those surveyed do not have adequate space to support that growth.⁹⁰

We must ensure that charter schools have at least one of the following three options at their disposal: 1) right of first refusal for under-utilized district buildings at no or nominal rents, 2) receipt of additional per-pupil funding for facilities, or 3) access to a state grant or loan program for facilities.

Exploring more creative financing options for facilities is yet another area where there may be lessons to learn for districts. As we consider a loan program and continue to look at other novel financing options, such as the use of federal bond programs for charter facilities, we ought to examine if there is any flexibility to extend these options to district schools as well.

Preference for neighborhood students or neediest students

Lastly, charter schools should be given the option to prioritize serving students from their local neighborhood, or the most at-risk students. Many families, students and charter school leaders want charters to serve as neighborhood or community schools, but New Jersey law is unclear about the extent to which charters may give preference in their lotteries to students who live in the area. A provision that expressly allows this geographic preference has proven successful in Denver and New Orleans, and should be permitted under New Jersey statute as well. Charter schools should also be permitted the option to give preference to low-income students and special need students so they can serve the children most in need.

2 *Create a new statewide district to serve as an Achievement School District.* States like Louisiana and Tennessee have begun to implement a promising new strategy for turning around their lowest-performing schools: placing those schools into a completely new “recovery” or “achievement” school district focused on making tremendous improvements. While there is still work to be done in these districts, it is important to note the improvements in student achievement. In Louisiana’s RSD, from 2008 to 2013, proficiency rates rose from 28 percent to 57 percent.⁹¹ In 2013, while reading scores went down slightly, ASD’s math gains were just shy of the state’s overall average growth of 3.5 percentage points.⁹² And the ASD’s proficiency gains in science were triple the state average.⁹³

A statewide district allows for the simultaneous transformation of many failing schools. Tennessee’s ASD is modeled very closely after

Louisiana’s RSD. To lay the groundwork for this model, and as part of Tennessee’s Race to the Top plans, the state enacted legislation to give the commissioner of education the authority to create a special school district focused on turning the bottom 5 percent of schools into high achievers (in the top 25 percent) within five years. The ASD serves as both a school operator and an authorizer of high-quality charter schools.

Schools in the RSD and ASD receive more autonomy than other schools across the state. This includes the ability to make decisions on budget, curriculum, school management and staffing.⁹⁴ With more autonomy, school leaders and teachers have more opportunities to innovate and meet the needs of their students. Reducing the levels of red tape necessary to create lasting change in schools allows educators to focus on the task at hand, improving student outcomes.

Creating a similar statewide district in New Jersey would help transform multiple struggling schools at once and create more high-quality options for students. Policymakers would have to consider the following changes to make this type of district work in New Jersey:

- Create a statewide district allowed to run as an independent entity.
- Designate student performance and school finance thresholds for schools to enter and exit the statewide district.
- Create mechanisms to cover the costs associated with developing and maintaining a statewide district.
- Develop a stronger accountability system, including mechanisms for strong charter authorizing. This aligns with our recommendation regarding charter authorizing in overhauling the charter statute.

It is critically important for New Jersey students that we establish mechanisms to address failing schools. Students in these schools deserve a shot at academic success, and policy leaders must consider all options to make this a reality for New Jersey’s students.

3 *Identify new ways to help families cover the costs of education, with a focus on low-income families in persistently struggling districts.* In extreme cases, all options should be on the table to assist families who have few educational choices. To this end, we need to identify new ways to help families cover the costs of education.

The District of Columbia, Ohio and Wisconsin, are just a few of the states that have adopted scholarship programs and voucher programs to meet the diverse needs of their students and families.⁹⁵ The adoption of these programs was part of a comprehensive set of reform strategies focused on improving school choice options for families and students.⁹⁶

The results of these scholarship and voucher programs are still being evaluated, but there are some promising early results. For example, an evaluation of Cleveland’s Scholarship and Tutoring Program found that sixth-grade scholarship students who participated in the program since kindergarten outperformed public school comparison groups in language arts, science and social studies.⁹⁷ A three-year impact report on the DC Opportunity Scholarship Program revealed that students who were offered vouchers to attend private schools had 3.1 months of additional learning in reading over three school years.⁹⁸ And during the 2010–2011 school year, students who participated in Milwaukee’s Parental Choice Program demonstrated greater growth in reading than their public school peers.⁹⁹

A recent study of the impact of vouchers in New York City also found that using a voucher to attend a private school increased the overall college enrollment rate among black students by 24 percent.¹⁰⁰

In communities with few high-performing schools, a pilot Opportunity Scholarship Program could be a viable option for families to help improve the long-term educational outcomes for students.

Previous attempts at instituting an Opportunity Scholarship Program in New Jersey have been stalled in the legislature. However, Governor Christie continues to push for a pilot program. As recently as 2013, Christie has said that passing the long debated, long stalled opportunity scholarship bill is No. 1 on his education agenda.¹⁰¹ If implemented in a pilot program and focused on families most in need, the results and impact of this approach could be relatively quickly assessed to determine whether further expansion is recommended.

We should also consider adopting policies that help families save for additional education expenses. The expense of enrichment supports and college tuition are well documented, and they affect families across a wide income range, from very poor to working class.¹⁰² For students who attend schools in communities with few high-quality choices, and for whom moving to a better school district is not an option, we must provide alternative resources and tools to fill student gaps. The development of an education savings program would allow parents the flexibility to pay for tutoring, technology, college entrance exams, tuition and services for students who have disabilities. Unused funds could go toward postsecondary education.

One idea that has begun to percolate in New Jersey regarding such savings accounts is whether the state could provide some resources to match families’ savings. For the lowest-income families, the state could match some portion of their savings and spending or create a beneficial tax structure through which corporations or individuals could do

the same. For working class families, the state could consider tax incentives that would maximize their ability to save and spend on these same items.

Set higher expectations with accountability

Why it matters

In New Jersey today, a high school diploma is not a measure of readiness to thrive in college or a career.

As previously noted, fewer than half of New Jersey's students met the benchmark for career and college readiness on the 12th grade NAEP reading assessment. The situation is even more severe for graduates who enter the workforce immediately after high school. Nationally, between 1998 and 2008, more than 10 million jobs were created for those with a college degree, while 600,000 were lost for those that did not require a high school diploma. Only half of New Jersey's high school graduates can pass eighth-grade math aptitude tests, a gateway to many entry-level jobs.¹⁰³ As a result, businesses are forced to spend considerable time and money training entry-level high school graduates.¹⁰⁴

A high school diploma should be more than a piece of paper. It should signal to colleges and employers alike that its recipient has the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed. Unfortunately, that's not the case today in New Jersey. If high school diplomas in New Jersey are to mean anything, we must set higher standards and hold adults accountable for improved results.

Where New Jersey stands now

New Jersey has already taken significant steps to set higher standards for its students. In 2010, New Jersey adopted the Common Core State Standards, which are on track to be fully implemented by the 2013–2014 school year.¹⁰⁵ These new standards set clearer, more rigorous benchmarks than New Jersey's previous standards. For example, a student who achieves proficiency under these new standards will be deemed college- and career-ready.¹⁰⁶

The next step is to implement the assessments that correspond with the new standards.

In 2011, the New Jersey Department of Education announced its new College and Career Readiness Task Force, made up of K-12 leaders, higher education practitioners and business representatives from the local community. In their final report, the task force recommended moving away from the current end-of-high-school tests, which have been criticized for the slow speed at which test scores are returned, the

One out of three students at Rutgers University requires remediation.

limited ability to use student performance as a diagnostic tool, and the difficulty of addressing the full range of state standards. Students' consistently high performance on these tests also makes peer group comparisons and statewide rankings less meaningful because current tests do not always fully assess which students have mastered the skills necessary for college and career readiness.¹⁰⁷

New Jersey took the task force's recommendation to move away from the current standardized tests, and is set to adopt exams developed by the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers in the 2014–2015 school year. The PARCC assessments will more accurately measure critical thinking skills, writing, language, speaking and listening and incorporate the use of media and technology.

Because the new exams will give parents, educators and other leaders critical information about whether students are meeting the new, higher bar we have set with the Common Core, it is crucial to keep their implementation on track.

The recommendations

1 ***Set higher standards to raise the bar.*** We must focus intently on holding schools, school personnel, state policymakers and families accountable for students' outcomes to ensure that all kids are fully prepared for college and their careers. That means, among other approaches, that we must provide parents and community members with user-friendly information about school performance so they can make the best decisions for themselves and their kids.

Although the movement to uphold the highest possible standards begins at the local level, we must also hold state and school leaders accountable for implementing the CCSS and the aligned PARCC assessments. By comparing performance across all schools in the state and many across the nation, we can identify which schools are in the greatest need of support and which are models of success.

Raising the bar through the implementation of the CCSS is critical not only for improving overall student outcomes, but also for ensuring that our students will be competitive in a global economy. The CCSS will bring New Jersey standards more in line with the standards used in the international community.¹⁰⁸ In the process, we must ensure that parents understand changes to our school standards so they can play a part in promoting accountability.

2 *Integrate technology smartly to improve educational outcomes.* Increasing the number of iPads and smart boards is not going to move the needle for kids unless technology and curriculum are integrated in a meaningful way.

Blended learning, a model where students receive a blend of face-to-face instruction with a teacher and some instruction through online programming, is a model New Jersey should also consider for its most at-risk students. Two national models of blended learning, Rocketship Education in California and KIPP Empower Academy in Los Angeles, which both serve low-income students, have shown promising results. Rocketship schools scored on par with students from the most affluent school districts and KIPP demonstrated that more than 90 percent of their students scored at or above the national average on national norm-referenced exams.¹⁰⁹

Some of the initial forays into blended learning in New Jersey are showing promising results. Merit Prep, a charter school in Newark, integrates blended learning techniques, high-quality teaching and individualized instruction to improve outcomes for students. Based on their first year results in 2013, students demonstrated two years of growth in reading and 1.25 years of growth in science.¹¹⁰

This approach to learning engages students, allows teachers to address achievement gaps and provides continuous data and feedback for both the teacher and the student to gauge areas of strength and weakness. The smart integration of technology and curriculum has the opportunity to individualize learning and significantly improve student outcomes if carried out successfully.

New Jersey must identify the barriers for integrating technology and curriculum, and implement policies to eliminate those barriers.

3 *Expand the use of data-driven instruction to improve student success.* The advent of technology and student-level data present an enormous opportunity for educators to use data to adjust their instruction in real time to fit the needs of their individual students. But in order for teachers to effectively use data to guide their lesson plans, they need proper training and tools.

Furthermore, to successfully implement a system of data-driven instruction, teachers, school leaders and superintendents must be on the same page and have a shared vision for how data will drive student outcomes. Research from the Institute of Education Sciences suggests schools and districts tackle the following areas to create data-driven schools and districts:

- Make data part of an ongoing cycle of instructional improvement.
- Teach students to examine their own data and set learning goals.
- Establish a clear vision for school wide data use.
- Provide supports that foster a data-driven culture within the school.
- Maintain a district-wide data system.¹¹¹

In thinking about these recommendations and how to provide teachers with training and tools, state policymakers should look to local and national leaders like Paul Bambrick-Santoyo, the managing director of North Star Academy schools in Newark. North Star uses aligned assessments and benchmarks to establish a student’s starting point, identify gaps and determine progress. The school also trains teachers to analyze student data, which in turn allows them to improve their lesson plans, adjust the pace of those lessons and provide students with timely feedback.

There are many other schools and educators who are using data-driven instruction to improve learning. North Star, however, is an outstanding example which visitors from across the country and even internationally have come to study. It is up to policymakers to make sure the best practices of North Star and other leaders in data-driven instruction are shared with educators statewide.¹¹²

4 ***Incorporate best practices from other regions for school closure.*** New Jersey needs strong accountability systems to identify 1) which schools are chronically low-performing, and 2) which high-performing schools have the capacity to take on more students if schools are forced to close.

Districts also must communicate better with families about which new schools their students will attend. In recent school closures in New Jersey, many parents have been skeptical that another school would be an improvement over the closing school. In Trenton, parents fought against the 2012 closure of the low-performing Emily Fisher Charter School because it required parents to either find new schools for their children or place them back into the Trenton Public School system.

School closures will always be extremely difficult since schools are the center of many local communities. However, to mitigate this, we must put into place clear mechanisms and smooth transition plans to ensure that schools with the worst track records are closed and that students at those schools receive priority for high-quality alternatives.

Schools in Oakland, California grapple with under-enrollment and funding shortages, which has prompted the closure of several schools.

The district has developed a thorough checklist for closing charter schools to ensure that all necessary measures have been taken to notify families, place children in alternative schools quickly, support staff in searching for new employment and maintain transparency through continual check-ins with the district.¹¹³ New Jersey should look at this model to make sure that school closures run smoothly, that closing schools are held accountable and that their students are fast-tracked to alternative schools.

Optimize school funding

Why it matters

Allotting additional funding for schools alone will not close New Jersey's achievement gap. New Jersey has spent billions of dollars over the last four decades that, with the exception of a few districts, have not resulted in consistent and significant improvements in student outcomes. During the 2011–2012 school year, Camden spent \$23,709 per student, Newark spent \$23,160 per student, and Asbury Park spent \$30,502 per student.¹¹⁴ The state's average per-pupil spending during this time was \$18,047.¹¹⁵ As previously stated, increased investments have not always translated to student success. In Camden and Asbury Park, fewer than 50 percent of students graduated on time in 2012. In Newark, fewer than 70 percent of students made it to graduation in four years.¹¹⁶ More money allows school districts to invest in a variety of areas, including high-quality professional development for teachers, state of the art equipment for classrooms and a wealth of extracurricular activities for students. But if resources are not properly allocated, the impact of these investments is minimal.

Where New Jersey stands now

New Jersey's historic *Cahill v. Robinson* and *Abbott v. Burke* rulings called for greater state investments in 31 designated "Abbott districts" to make those districts' spending on par with the wealthiest districts in New Jersey and give them resources to meet their supplemental needs. Over time, however, this led to extremely high spending in the Abbott districts: in some cases nearly \$10,000 more per student than the state's per-pupil average.¹¹⁷ About 60 percent of total state aid goes to these 31 districts.¹¹⁸ Yet despite these spending increases, notable achievement gaps persist.

MORE DETAILS ON *ABBOTT VS. BURKE*

Case study: Abbott vs. Burke

Abbott vs. Burke found that New Jersey’s method for funding education was unconstitutional because it led to significant financial disparities between poor urban districts and wealthy suburban school districts. This left poorer urban districts unable to meet the needs of their students.

The court’s ruling directed the New Jersey Legislature to enact new laws to provide adequate funding for poor urban districts.¹¹⁹ Thirty-one urban areas were designated as “Abbott districts” by a series of state Supreme Court rulings.

- Over a series of Abbott cases, the Court ruled that the Abbott districts were entitled to parity funding with the wealthiest school districts across the state, as well as supplemental funding to meet the needs of their students.¹²⁰
- In later cases, the Court also ruled that all 3- and 4-year olds must have access to high-quality preschool.¹²¹
- The Court also ruled that school facilities had to be improved to assure that low-income children had an equal education to those in wealthier communities. The Court required that the state cover the costs of addressing school facilities needs for the Abbott districts.¹²²

Overall, the Abbott rulings have served to improve funding mechanisms for some of New Jersey’s lowest-income communities. However, they have not yielded consistent academic improvements, and a large percentage of New Jersey’s low-income residents no longer reside in Abbott districts.

To adjust for these issues, the School Funding Reform Act was passed in 2008. SFRA’s formula provides more funding for students from low-income families, those who have limited English proficiency and those who attend high-poverty schools. As the concentration of at-risk students in a district increases, the per-pupil weight for at-risk students also increases to reflect the added academic challenges of educating children in districts with high concentrations of poverty. SFRA also called for full state funding for all at-risk 3- and 4-year olds to attend full-day preschool programs in every district. Both this preschool expansion and the overall funding formula, however, have not been fully funded.¹²³

The recommendations

1 *Collect and report on the relationship between spending and student achievement.* Transparency is essential to improving accountability and ensuring we spend taxpayer dollars wisely. The state should improve the financial data it collects and link school district spending to academic achievement. This would identify which school districts are the most efficient, provide parents an opportunity to understand how effectively resources are spent and allow districts to compare their performance to others. This data will also help the New Jersey Department of Education determine which districts are efficient and which will need financial support and possible restructuring.

2 *Consolidate and share district services.* The current district structure makes coordinating and implementing new changes both inefficient and laborious. Each of New Jersey's 603 school districts and 87 charter schools are staffed with central administrators and a school board or board of trustees.¹²⁴ Some districts only serve a limited number of grade levels. This fragmented system drives up administrative costs and may be inhibiting the sharing of best practices and innovation across districts.

In Maryland, on average, each district serves more than 34,000 students, while in New Jersey each district serves an average of only 2,000 students.¹²⁵ Additionally, in 2012, New Jersey had 13 non-operating school districts.¹²⁶ Because these districts do not have schools, they send their students and per-pupil funding to neighboring districts. Across the state there is a disconcerting trend of multiple school districts residing within a single municipality. This means that at the most localized unit of government there are multiple school districts.¹²⁷ This inefficiency causes a replication of efforts, increases costs of services, and drives up property taxes throughout the state.

Consolidating districts, and in some cases, municipalities, is a way of streamlining services and improving efficiency. It facilitates coordination of curriculum, equalizes educational resources provided to students and offers cost savings. District consolidation would also help to mitigate the costs that lead to high property taxes in New Jersey. Each year citizens cry foul over excessive property taxes, but the reality is that New Jersey is almost completely reliant on these taxes to fund local schools and government.¹²⁸ The efficiencies gained through consolidation would help mitigate the cost drivers that lead to ever-increasing property taxes.

In New Jersey, a 2013 merger of Princeton Borough and Princeton Township became the state's first municipal consolidation in 15 years. The two municipalities already shared a school district and planning board, and now share all services. Princeton's consolidation commission estimates that the town will save \$2.3 million this year.¹²⁹ In Hunterdon County, three small districts voted to create a unified district, effective for the fall of 2014. The new school district will have one administration and one school board.¹³⁰ Some education leaders are hopeful that Princeton's merger and the creation of the new Hunterdon school district will lead the way to more municipal consolidations, and that the logic of consolidation will extend into more school districts to ease cost burdens and increase productivity.

District consolidation would also help remedy another pressing issue in New Jersey: school segregation. A recent report found that 26 percent of black students and 13 percent of Latino students are attending schools with 99 to 100 percent enrollment of students of color. These types of highly segregated schools increased between 1989 and 2010, from 4.8 percent to 8 percent.¹³¹ The authors of the report suggest that due to the large number of municipalities and the distinct difference in the demographics of these municipalities, a large proportion of the uneven racial composition in schools results from differences between school districts.¹³² District consolidation could not only help New Jersey provide additional school programs through savings, it could also serve the even greater purpose of creating more racially diverse schools, which all communities would benefit from.

3 *Phase out adjustment aid for districts that no longer qualify.* One of the provisions of the School Funding Reform Act, "adjustment aid" ensures that no district receives less funding than it did before SFRA was passed, unless a district experiences significant drops in enrollment after transitioning to the SFRA formula.¹³³ However, this aspect of the statute has not been implemented; state adjustment aid has not been reduced for districts with enrollment drops, leading to districts that are overfunded given the number of students they serve.

We must gradually reduce adjustment aid to the districts that no longer qualify and reinvest those funds back into the formula. This will ensure that districts that need funding increases can receive them, thus improving funding equity across the state. For districts that are spending beyond their adequacy budgets, we recommend phasing out, over five years, adjustment aid by 50 percent. This is consistent with the recommendations Commissioner Cerf made in his 2012 report on adjustments to the SFRA and with the current statute.¹³⁴

Measuring success

How do we measure the success of bringing this vision to life? The ultimate metric is whether students are learning more: whether we're increasing overall student performance, closing achievement gaps, improving college and career readiness and bolstering our international competitiveness. We will look to track data in these three areas at the state level and take a deeper look at target districts with the greatest student performance challenges.

Still, it will take years for any policy change to translate into dramatic, measurable shifts in outcomes. That's why New Jersey must set incremental indicators to assess progress and reevaluate plans as needed. For example, we would expect an overhaul of the charter school law to lead to the growth of the number of high-quality charter school seats available across the state. For our recommendations on strengthening and supporting talent, we would anticipate improvements in overall teacher quality measured by the current teacher evaluation system.

To some extent, our ability to track these indicators will be based on the extent to which the state will be able to make this data publicly available and the extent to which partner organizations, including key researchers like the National Council on Teacher Quality, revisit some of their rankings and research on teacher preparation programs and similar inputs.

Moving forward we plan to measure our success based on our ability to codify the recommendations outlined in this document and monitor how well the policies contribute to the desired results: better student outcomes.

Policy recommendation

Interim indicators to measure impact

Start earlier

1 Expand access to high-quality preschool to low- and moderate-income 3- and 4-year-olds.

The number of low- and moderate-income students enrolled in high-quality, state-funded preschool will increase.

The number of new school districts that offer high-quality preschool, using a mixed delivery system of both districts and community providers, will also increase.

2 Implement a quality preschool rating system.

Track the implementation of the quality rating system in pilot districts and the pace of its expansion into other districts.

3 Make full-day kindergarten available to all students.

The number of districts that are able to implement full-day kindergarten will increase.

Strengthen and support talent

1 Repeal the residency requirement.

Schools will be able to hire educators and staff from a wider pool of applicants and meet their needs with the highest quality talent.

Teachers who want to work in New Jersey schools will have the flexibility to live outside of the state.

2 Increase the rigor of traditional teacher preparation programs and support teachers throughout their careers.

Highly effective teacher prep programs will be easily identifiable to potential students and school leaders looking to hire new teachers.

We will monitor the National Council on Teacher Quality's data to look at improvements to our teacher preparation programs.

Driven by demand and information, the number of highly effective teacher preparation programs will rise, thus increasing the number of graduates from these programs.

3 End seniority-based layoffs.

Districts that need to downsize will be able to do so using performance as a primary factor. As a result, we expect to see a reduction in the number of teachers without placements. For example, in Newark, we would expect to see a reduction in educators without placement sites.¹³⁵

Policy recommendation

Interim indicators to measure impact

Strengthen and support talent (continued)

4 Reward the best teachers.

There will be improvement in student outcomes in places where career ladders and differentiated pay are implemented.

There will be a decline over time in the turnover rates of highly effective teachers in districts where this policy is implemented.

5 Cultivate and support education leaders.

The number of pipeline programs created to identify, train, and support education leaders will increase, as will the number of participants in these programs.

6 Fully implement the teacher evaluation system.

Monitor the extent to which policy and regulatory changes are made to the new teacher evaluation system.

Enhance school choice

1 Overhaul the charter school law.

New high-quality charter management organizations and high-quality independent schools will be attracted to open and expand in New Jersey.

As a result of increased accountability measures, the number of high-quality charter schools will increase and underperforming charter schools will be closed. Over time, there will be an increase in the number of high-quality charter seats.

Charter schools will be able to devote more of their funding towards instruction rather than facilities.

2 Create a new statewide district to serve as an Achievement School District.

Develop a solid recommendation to pursue legislative change, if deemed necessary.

3 Identify new ways to help families cover the costs of education, with a focus on low-income families in persistently struggling districts.

Track the number of children participating in the pilot.

Analyze achievement data associated with participating students and schools.

Policy recommendation

Interim indicators to measure impact

Set higher expectations with accountability

1 Set higher standards to raise the bar.

The Common Core State Standards and related assessments will be implemented on schedule. Because raising performance takes time, we will assess trends over the course of five years to measure overall impact.

All schools and students will be held to the same high standards.

2 Integrate technology smartly to improve educational outcomes.

Look statewide to see if innovative models have spread across New Jersey.

3 Expand the use of data-driven instruction to improve student success.

Survey the landscape to determine the extent to which data-driven instruction is used in school districts.

4 Fully implement the teacher evaluation system.

Develop and use a New Jersey checklist for school closure.

Optimize school funding

1 Collect and report on the relationship between spending and student achievement.

Create a transparent, user-friendly report or state database that captures this information.

2 Consolidate and share district services.

Monitor the number of new consolidated districts and new shared service arrangements.

3 Phase-out adjustment aid for districts that no longer qualify.

Monitor changes in state aid levels for decreased aid in districts that should slowly start to see a decrease in adjustment aid under SFRA, and increased aid for districts with increasing enrollment and/or decreasing wealth.

In order to measure changes in student achievement, we must set a meaningful baseline. JerseyCAN will consult two key resources to do so: the goals New Jersey set out in its 2011 application to the U.S. Department of Education to waive the No Child Left Behind requirements for priority and focus schools, and measures of college and career readiness for New Jersey students.

In its application, the New Jersey Department of Education said that it would improve student proficiency in the state's bottom 5 percent of schools, as well as address the schools with the widest achievement gaps with direct support from Regional Achievement Centers. To reach this goal, the department works toward annual proficiency targets for each of these schools. The proficiency targets increase over time in order to reach the 2017 goal of reducing by half the percentage of students scoring non-proficient in each school.

JerseyCAN will track the state's progress toward meeting these goals, and suggest additional support where needed.

JerseyCAN will also monitor New Jersey's overall progress on the SAT and the 12th grade NAEP reading assessment to ensure improvements in curriculum and standards are having their intended impact on overall student achievement.

12th grade NAEP reading (average proficiency percentages)



Longer-term measures of academic success in New Jersey

School-level measures

(based on proficiency rates)

The number of Priority and Focus schools meeting their annual proficiency targets will increase over time.

Statewide trends

(based on measures of preparedness for college or careers)

The average SAT scores statewide will increase.

The 12th grade NAEP scores will increase (if New Jersey continues to participate in the pilot and the data is available).

Conclusion

The changes that JerseyCAN has proposed in our *Framework* will require hard work. The complex problems and inequities that afflict our public schools did not appear overnight. Neither will the solutions. While these commonsense reforms will be challenging to enact, great schools are possible. Most importantly, great schools are crucial to promote a brighter future for our kids and our state. Our plan spans a decade, because sustainable change will only emerge from an enduring drumbeat.

While some of the recommendations entail additional investments by the state, several do not. We are very mindful of the constraints on the state budget and the significant investments already being made in education at both the state and local levels. In several areas, we recommend areas where we can optimize funding and do more with less, and we have also called for a phased-in approach for any initiative that would require a new investment. Recognizing the political reality that any recommendation that requires a new investment is extremely difficult to pass in this environment, we will continue to look for ways to offset such calls for new investments. For policies that require new investments, we can't ignore the conversation; we must think outside the box about what reductions can be made to offset new costs and where further efficiencies can be identified.

Furthermore, the solutions will require more than engaging with lawmakers and decision-makers. To realize a long-term vision for great schools, New Jersey must engage and empower the people directly affected by education policies: parents, students, teachers and school leaders.

Parents must be the key drivers of change in the movement to reform our schools. They need clear information and the tools to understand how schools are serving their children and how they can support and advocate for commonsense reforms.

Students can serve as vital advocates for change as well. Advocates must also incorporate the voices of teachers and school leaders at every step of the reform process. Teachers and school leaders serve on the front lines of the education reform movement every day and they can help policymakers gauge the potential pitfall reforms may face. Their feedback and ideas are essential and can help us overcome barriers as we move forward.

Giving every child in New Jersey an excellent education will change everything in our state: our communities, our economy, our democracy and our future. With *New Jersey Schools: A Framework for Excellence*,

we provide both short- and longer-term policy recommendations to achieve positive change.

Please join JerseyCAN as we work to move New Jersey from good to great. We pledge to accept nothing less than great schools for all kids.

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Acknowledgements

We are deeply grateful to everyone who took the time to meet with us and give us feedback and ideas about the Framework.

We would like to thank all of the New Jersey educators, advocates, policymakers, parents, and community and state leaders who shared their vision for New Jersey's public schools with us. We also thank the national leaders and innovators outside of New Jersey for providing examples and best practices our state can use as it works to create a system in which all children can thrive.

So thank you for invaluable input, and your commitment to New Jersey's students. This project would not have been possible without you.

The views expressed herein are solely those of JerseyCAN.

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About JerseyCAN

JerseyCAN: The New Jersey Campaign for Achievement Now launched in the spring of 2013 as an education research and advocacy organization that brings together education leaders from across the state and arms them with top-notch education research and policy analysis to enact smart education policy. We believe every New Jersey child should have access to a great public school, because great schools change everything. We are a branch of 50CAN: The 50-State Campaign for Achievement Now, a growing national network of state-based education reform advocacy groups with campaigns in Maryland, Minnesota, North Carolina, New York, Pennsylvania and Rhode Island based on the groundbreaking model developed by ConnCAN in Connecticut.

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