Tonight, I would like to focus the majority of my report on the progress we’ve made toward the goals of NJSBA’s Strategic Plan in recent months.
The plan addressed four goal areas: student achievement; leadership/advocacy; training and direct services; and finance.

While “student achievement” represents a single goal area, it appropriately forms the foundation for the entire plan.
NJSBA accomplished a major goal in March, with the release of the Final Report of the Task Force on Student Achievement. This project involved the work of a 20-member committee, which met and deliberated for many months. The final product is 107 pages long, contains 83 recommendations and, significantly, is a resource for best practices, policies and activities that will enable boards of education to advance the learning of all students.

The report’s 12 chapters address subjects ranging from early childhood education and social-emotional learning to the impact
of poverty and the juvenile justice system. Of particular importance is the role that the local school board plays in advancing student achievement. And the report includes an excellent summary of research in this area.
The Strategic Plan also calls for our training programs to emphasize the board’s role in student achievement. One indicator of our progress has been including information about the Iowa Lighthouse Inquiry and related research in our Governance programs.

And let me point out two other important efforts:

As you know, one of my goals for this school year was to visit all 21 county school boards associations. This year, my “stump
speech” for the counties focuses on a topic integral to the mission of NJSBA and our Strategic Plan— that is, research on how school boards positively affect academic achievement through policy, practice and attitude.

Another one of our goals is to hold a conference on student achievement. And on May 30, we will conduct a full-day training program, called “Student Achievement through Multiple Lenses,” at Mercer County College. The conference will focus on many of the subjects addressed in the Student Achievement Task Force report, with presentations by nationally recognized experts. And they are an impressive group:

- Dr. Maurice Elias, director of the Rutgers Social and Emotional Learning Laboratory who, by the way, will also be the keynote speaker at Workshop.
- Dr. Steven Barnett, director of the National Institute for Early Education Research.
- Dr. Saul Rubinstein, director of the Center for the Study of Collaboration in Work and Society. Dr. Rubinstein is also
NJSBA’s partner in the Labor-Management Collaboration pilot project. This is a study, involving 17 New Jersey school districts, which will identify the positive impact of cooperation between labor and management on student achievement.

- And Dr. Robert Jarvis, director of Equity Leadership at the University of Pennsylvania.
Closing achievement gaps, and advancing learning for all, are in the interest of the entire community. That’s why NJSBA’s Strategic Plan stresses the importance of collaboration and partnership. This chart includes many—but not all—of the partnerships we have built.

These relationships help us to advocate effectively. They promote joint research to advance effective school board governance. And they result in initiatives that help our members to save money, and direct limited resources to the classroom.
As you can see, I’ve highlighted the National Aeronautic and Space Administration, or NASA. We work collaboratively with the agency, which provides training and resources for school district leadership in New Jersey.

On April 28th, 78 board members and administrators joined us for NJSBA’s fourth annual I-STEAM Field Trip to the Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Maryland. Immediate Past President John joined us on the trip.

Evaluations from this year’s attendees were impressive.

One of our staff members, who was assigned to the program, sent me the following email message after we returned from the program:

“Numerous times I heard, ‘This is the best event I’ve been to so far’; ‘I’m definitely returning next year’; ‘I’m letting my board know what a great trip this was.’ One attendee
planned to bring his wife and children for a tour over the weekend. Even as they were departing from the bus, they were still so enthusiastic with their appreciation to the Association.”

Thank you to John Henry, our STEAM and Sustainable Schools specialist, for coordinating the trip and establishing our partnership with NASA.
Our partnerships have enabled NJSBA to create initiatives that are unique among state school boards associations in our country.

- NJSBA is the only state school boards association that has entered into a partnership with the U.S. Army to advance STEAM education. For over a year now, the Army has funded the placement of a STEAM education fellow on our staff to assist with training and consultation. Some of you have met Sergeant George Johnson, who was instrumental in our STEAM Tank Challenge for public school students. That
program has grown exponentially, and this month we have conducted regional competitions for 90 public school teams, with the finalists invited to Workshop.

- Sergeant Johnson is retiring from the U.S. Army. Yesterday, we had a cake for him at headquarters. He made “farewell” remarks, which left no doubt about his belief in public education, the importance of STEAM education, and the opportunities available through the military. In his place, the Army has assigned Sergeant First Class Joshua Simpson, a very impressive and bright young man, whose work will undoubtedly benefit NJSBA.

- NJSBA is also the only state school boards association with staff dedicated to training and consultation in sustainable practices. Our collaboration with The College of New Jersey helped build the Sustainable Jersey for Schools program. Membership in that program has grown to more than 45 percent of the state’s operating school districts. The benefit for our school boards and for the Association—our Return on
Investment, if you will—goes far beyond the membership numbers. School districts receive free professional development from Sustainable Jersey and its corporate partners; many receive alternative revenue through grants. As a result of this partnership, we have attracted a greater number of Workshop vendors who market sustainability products. Our relationship has also opened a new market for our training programs, with more facility directors attending Workshop and other events.

- Our relationship with the state Department of Education and the New Jersey Institute of Technology has produced Future Ready Schools – New Jersey. This new initiative will be modeled on Sustainable Jersey, but will focus on digital learning. It will recognize best practices through a certification program, and provide training and grant opportunities. I am pleased to report that Dr. Joel Bloom, the president of NJIT, has made a commitment to fund this program through its first year. As I’ve mentioned previously, the Department of Education provided a $200,000 grant as seed money to help
make this partnership a success.

- Earlier this month, President Don, Kevin Ciak, NSBA president, and I hosted a meeting here at NJSBA headquarters with Tom Gentzel, national executive director, and Sara White Hall, vice president of the Alliance for Excellent Education. The Alliance is a partner with the U.S. Department of Education on the national Future Ready Schools initiative. They were extremely impressed with the program we are setting up in New Jersey. They said that Future Ready Schools – New Jersey stands apart from programs in other states, primarily due to the certification element. Discussion occurred that day so that what New Jersey is doing could be replicated in other states.

- As I mentioned earlier, we are involved in a partnership with Dr. Saul Rubinstein of the Rutgers School of Management and Labor Relations. It involves the positive impact of labor-management collaboration on teaching and learning. NJSBA is leading a pilot project in 17 school districts. The project,
supported by a $150,000 grant from the Federal Conciliation and Mediation Board, is studying the positive impact of labor-management collaboration on student achievement. The program has the support of the NJEA, the Principals and Supervisors Association, NJASA, and several other education organizations. We believe our involvement is unique in the country.
Our Strategic Plan also calls for NJSBA to become a major resource in the development of educational policy. Over the past year, we have met that objective through research and advocacy. In our January update, we reported on the favorable action concerning the superintendent salary cap, and two new laws that emanated from NJSBA’s school security and special education reports.

Tonight, I want to mention another achievement related to student health and wellness.
On May 11, the Governor signed legislation expanding the number of schools eligible to receive reimbursement for lead testing. In effect, the new law provides financial relief to school districts that performed lead testing prior to July 2016, when state funds first became available. NJSBA successfully lobbied for the legislation—just as we had advocated for inclusion of the $10 million reimbursement fund in the current state budget.
Successful advocacy requires strong relationships with the people who make decisions that affect our schools and students. Our Governmental Relations team and our county associations have been very effective in conveying the voices of local school boards to decision-makers in Trenton.

By our early estimates, county school boards association meetings this year attracted over 4,100 attendees. This figure does not include attendance at the very successful student recognition programs. It does, however, include the county
legislative meetings. And participation by state lawmakers has been impressive.

As an example of NJSBA’s success in conveying our members’ concerns was a meeting that took place in February. When several legislators in the economically diverse County of Essex wanted to hear the viewpoints of local school officials on school funding, they turned to the New Jersey School Boards Association. And we arranged a special meeting where they were able to hear our members’ concerns.

As I said in a “Reflections” column that I wrote this week, advocacy should not be a once-a-year event.
So, let me take a commercial break.

Next Thursday, we will offer another opportunity for dialogue with state leaders, at our annual Legislative Day, which is co-sponsored with the New Jersey PTA (another partnership that has been very productive). The program will include a keynote speech by Senate President Steve Sweeney, a discussion of school funding with two prominent superintendents, a panel of key legislators, and an update on issues before the state Board of Education provided by Mark Biedron, board president.
Registration is free and includes breakfast and lunch. We also offer free parking adjacent to the meeting site. It’s always an informative and valuable program, and I urge you to attend. You can register our website at www.njsba.org.
As I’ve often said, training is the heart of NJSBA while student achievement is its soul.

The Strategic Plan calls for relevancy and accessibility to training.

• We’ve moved toward those objectives through the implementation of new online training for the Governance I, II and III programs.
• New leadership training attracted 250 enthusiastic school
board presidents and vice presidents to three locations on a Saturday in February. And next school year, we will expand that focus with a leadership track at Workshop, and a new weekend program designed for board presidents and vice-presidents—and those wishing to be one.

- Our Field Services, Labor Relations and STEAM/Sustainability teams also delivered individualized onsite programming on relevant topics, such as declining enrollment.

- In addition, we responded to a crisis facing our schools and communities with a professional development program on strategies to combat Opioid use and to promote healthy choices by our students.
The Strategic Plan focuses on the growth of non-dues revenue and the use of public-private partnerships to provide savings and expand services.

In March, you approved the Association’s 2017-2018 budget, which calls for no increase in member dues for the eighth consecutive year. Next year, non-dues revenue will make up more than one-third of the total—the highest proportion in our history.
The increase in non-dues income results from sound financial planning, including the growth of Workshop sponsorships and NJSBA’s Corporate Member program, which now has 44 participants. We have also seen a substantial increase in income from our BoardDocs, paperless board meeting services. We will learn more about BoardDocs later this evening during a brief presentation by Lou Schimenti.

The Educational Leadership Foundation of New Jersey—our non-profit fund-raising arm—has secured grant funding that enables us to provide county-level training, as well as the weekend orientations, and other training opportunities—all at no cost to school boards. This past year, ELFNJ provided over $200,000 for training, including $100,000 to support county school boards association meetings.

I’d also like to take note of two programs that provide equipment and services to our members:

- The Grants Support Program is the only one of its kind among
school boards associations. It gives all of New Jersey’s boards of education, as well as their education foundations, automatic access to a database of 3,200 active grant opportunities.

- The NJSBA TEC (which stands for Technology for Education and Career) enables schools to purchase discounted technology including cloud and disaster recovery services. In light of recent events involving hacking, I can’t overemphasize how critically important these services can be.

- This week, we introduced a new partnership with CrosStar Network Solutions, which will provide our members with no-cost technology audits.
To illustrate the value of NJSBA membership, this spring a staff task force revised a report that places a monetary value on dues-based and member services.

A prime example of the benefit of NJSBA membership is our energy-purchasing program, the Alliance for Competitive Energy Services. Since 2009, ACES has saved school boards statewide over $202 million.

Next year, the savings will continue through ACES’ new
electricity agreement, issued in April. It will save participating school districts over $25 million through 2018.
As we look forward, I am confident that next year will bring more progress.

- We will recognize the first schools certified through Future Ready Schools New Jersey during Workshop 2017.
- Workshop will offer an additional day of training, on Monday October 23.
- We will establish a new weekend leadership training program, as previously mentioned.
- Another valuable dues-based service, our online
superintendent evaluation, has been retooled and will be available to all school boards.

• And finally, we will begin work on a new Strategic Plan that will carry us to the year 2020.
Thank you for your support and all that you do for children.

[You will introduce John Faford, who will make a presentation on the need to replace the chiller. According to the agenda, after John speaks, Lou Schimenti will make his BoardDocs presentation. Then, Mike Vrancik will provide the advocacy update.]