

Chapter 1

THE CHALLENGE AHEAD

The Mission of the New Jersey School Boards Association

The New Jersey School Boards Association, a federation of boards of education, provides training, advocacy and support to advance public education and promote the achievement of all students through effective governance.

– Adopted November 2012
NJSBA Board of Directors

The Charge to the NJSBA Task Force on Student Achievement

The Task Force will recommend best practices to advance the academic performance of economically challenged students. The Task Force will consider current literature on the subject and consult with the NJSBA Urban Boards Committee, as well as experts in the field. It will consider factors, such as NJQSAC (the New Jersey Quality Single Accountability Continuum), the state's monitoring and evaluation system, and its indicators of student success; limited access to technology (the "digital divide"), and the impact of high rates of incarceration on youth.

Research and Activities

The Task Force on Student Achievement was created by the New Jersey School Boards Association to identify strategies and resources that are available to local boards of education and which can enable them advance the academic achievement of all students. The Task Force consisted of current school board members, including representatives of the NJSBA Urban Boards Committee, NJSBA staff members, and resource persons. Avery Grant, a member of the Long Branch Board of Education, served as chairman. Peter Calvo, president of the Glassboro Board of Education, was co-chairman. During its deliberations, the Task Force heard presentations by the following individuals:

- **Peter Calvo**, President, Glassboro Board of Education, "The Role of the Board of Education, including Policy-Setting, in Facilitating Student Achievement" and "The Impact of Student Achievement on Employment, including the Workforce Investment Act";
- **Leslie Morris**, Director of Community Relations, New Jersey Primary Care Association, Inc., "The Educational Challenges for Economically Challenged Students in the 21st Century";
- **Dr. Saul Rubinstein**, Director, Program on Collaborative School Reform, School of Management and Labor Relations, Rutgers University, "The Impact of Collaboration between Boards of Education and Unions on Educational Issues and the Positive Effect on Student Achievement";

- **Nekia Lewis**, Founder, First Steps for Life, and Parent, South Orange-Maplewood, “Student Achievement in Suburban and Rural Districts”;
- **Jonathan Hodges**, Member, Paterson Board of Education, and **Tafari Anderson**, Member, Clifton Board of Education, “Parents/Family Impact on Student Achievement”;
- **Marie Blistan**, Vice-President, New Jersey Education Association, and **Joyce Albrecht**, Member, Magnolia Board of Education, “Early Childhood Education”;
- **Willa Spicer**, former Assistant Commissioner of Education, and **Penelope Lattimer**, Director, New Jersey School Development Council, Rutgers University Graduate School of Education, “The Role of the School Board in Student Achievement and Closing the Achievement Gap”;
- **Dr. Bari Erlichson**, Assistant Commissioner and Chief Performance Officer, New Jersey Department of Education, “PARCC Data Reports”; and
- **Dr. Michael Salvatore**, Superintendent, Long Branch Public Schools, “Student Data Assessment Program and Staff Professional Development.”

The Task Force reviewed research and interviewed local school district staff members and local school board members. In the process, it affirmed the belief that advancing student achievement is the central purpose of schools and the major responsibility of those who govern, manage, care for, offer guidance and teach in those schools. While schools have successful methods of ensuring achievement by many students, the overall goal—success for all students—still eludes the education establishment.

The local board of education is the watchdog of the system, and it should ensure that the attention of the school community is fully directed to the achievement of the children in its care. This report emphasizes the board of education’s role in enabling the schools to meet the goal of achievement for all. It addresses numerous themes and strategies, including the following:

- Major initiatives that impact school readiness and learning such as early childhood programs, data-based decision-making, accountability for all students, and other instructional topics.
- The social and emotional needs of students and why meeting these needs is critical to students’ academic success, health and well-being.
- The Iowa Lighthouse Inquiry, which reports a direct correlation between the characteristics of a school board and student achievement.
- School district organization, policies and management practices that emphasize success for all students.
- The value of collaboration that benefits student achievement and school climate, including partnerships with the municipality, families, the faith-based community, and local business, as well as formal collaboration between school district labor and management.
- Action by school boards and individual members to further the goals identified in this report.

Why the Emphasis on Children Who Have Difficulty Achieving?

School board members today find themselves in a “perfect storm.” They have an increasing responsibility to produce an entire population of college- and career-ready graduates with continually diminishing resources. Under these circumstances, it is tempting to downgrade the schools’ responsibility to struggling students by minimizing expectations. We cannot, however, look away with impunity.

The schools, first and foremost, ensure the continuation of the American dream, providing well-disciplined, thinking citizens who are prepared to contribute to their country. Graduates must have the tools to lead a personally satisfying life, make intelligent decisions about themselves and their families, appreciate and preserve the beauty of their planet, and forward their heritage from the arts.

The school system is, and has always been, the handmaiden of the economic system, charged with providing the workforce needed to ensure economic prosperity. Today, the schools must prepare young people to compete successfully in science and mathematics, who are able to pose and solve problems, and who understand the culture of the nation in which they live. And they must prepare all of our children, regardless of the circumstances of their birth or zip code, to contribute to all aspects of our society, including the economy.

The Correlation between Education and Employment

Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics show a correlation between education and employment; increased formal education provides some protection from unemployment.

Percentage of Unemployed Persons by Education Levels	
March 2015	
8.0%	Less than a high school diploma
5.4%	High school diploma
5.0%	Some college, no degree
3.8%	Associate’s degree
2.8%	Bachelor’s degree
2.4%	Master’s degree
1.7%	Doctoral degree
1.5%	Professional degree

U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. (March 15, 2016). “Earnings and unemployment rates by educational attainment 2015.” Accessed March 17, 2017 at http://www.bls.gov/emp/ep_chart_001.htm.

Additionally, economic studies affirm that higher math performance at the end of high school translates into a 12% increase in future earnings. The greater the level of skills, the better one's wages, which also leads to a more equitable distributions of income and substantial gains in economic productivity.

UNESCO. EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005, *Education for All: The Quality Imperative*, p. 40. Accessed March 17, 2017 at <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001373/137333e.pdf>.

Preparation Lacking

Nationwide surveys of college faculty and employers show dissatisfaction with the academic preparation of students. For example, a recent survey by Achieve, a nonprofit education reform organization, includes the following results:

College Faculty Dissatisfaction with Preparation of High School Students	
<i>Percentage Dissatisfied</i>	<i>Subject or Skill Area</i>
77%	Writing
59%	Mathematics
80%	Comprehension of Complicated Materials
82%	Critical Thinking
76%	Problem-solving
53%	Verbal Communication
62% of <i>employers</i> reported that public high schools are not adequately preparing student to meet the expectations of the workplace.	
Achieve. (2015). <i>Rising to the Challenges: Views on High School Graduates' Preparedness for College and Careers</i> . Accessed March 17, 2017 at http://www.achieve.org/employers-and-college-faculty-report-gaps-recent-graduates%E2%80%99-preparedness-new-national-survey and http://www.achieve.org/files/AchieveSurveyIIPowerPoint.pdf .	

Studies have shown that the majority of entering freshmen at New Jersey’s community colleges require remedial courses in at least one subject area and that a large percentage of students at the state’s public college and universities also need additional preparation. For example, a 2015 report by the Governor’s Council on Higher Education cites statistics showing that 40% of students at New Jersey’s public colleges and universities require remediation, while 70% of entering freshmen at the state’s community colleges must take remedial courses. The report describes the impact of this “serious and continuing problem both in New Jersey and the rest of the country.”

After enrolling, many students learn that they must take remedial courses which do not earn college credits. The result is that many students become frustrated with the need for remedial courses and drop out. Additionally, having to pay for those courses, which do not count toward graduation, significantly increases costs and causes many to withdraw.

Governor’s Council on Higher Education. (2015). “Strategic Priorities for New Jersey Higher Education.” 15. Accessed March 17, 2017 at <http://www.nj.gov/highereducation/documents/pdf/2015Report.pdf>.

The Economic Benefit of Closing the Achievement Gap

If our nation’s public education system does not prepare all students for entry into the workforce or for post-secondary education, our economy will weaken, and the quality of life for many Americans will not be as anticipated or desired.

Not only would closing the achievement gap increase educational and career opportunities, it would also have a significant, positive impact on the United States economy. Studies by groups such as the Washington Center for Educational Growth, a research organization that

addresses economic inequality, have pointed to the economic benefit of raising American student performance to globally competitive levels by closing the achievement gap.

“Shrinking the Education Gap Would Boost the Economy, Study Says,” *Time*, February 3, 2015. Accessed March 17, 2017 at <http://time.com/3693330/education-school-u-s-economy-washington-center-for-equitable-growth/>.

“Study Tallies Education Gap’s Effect on GDP,” *Wall Street Journal*, April 22, 2009. Accessed March 17, 2017 at <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB124040633530943487>.

Thus, for our nation’s economy and security, it is imperative that boards of education focus on making student achievement for all—regardless of birth circumstance or zip code—their priority. To fully prepare our students for post-secondary education and the workforce, school boards must approach their responsibilities with passion. Representing both the people of New Jersey and the locality in which they were elected, board members carry an important message about education and its future.