

## **The NJSBA Task Force on Student Achievement** **Summary of Recommendations**

### **Closing the Achievement Gap: Obstacles and Strategies** (Chapter 2)

#### *For Boards of Education:*

1. Be aware of, and change, practices that negatively impact the lives of children.
2. Require high-level curriculum that prepares students for global competitiveness.
3. Advocate for school-based counseling and mental health services that address the needs of students and their families.
4. Through collaborative efforts, ensure student access to healthcare through School-Based Health Centers, School-Linked Health Centers, and Coordinated School Health Programs.
5. Review the policies related to equal treatment of students. For example, review research reports, such as “Not Measuring Up: The State of School Discipline in Massachusetts.” Examine access to high-level courses, discipline procedures, and grading procedures, as well as other policies and procedures that inadvertently influence what happens to students based on race, ethnicity, and poverty.
6. Advocate not only before constituents, but also before state and federal representatives. Board members should develop professional relationships with elected officials to assist them in their representation of the district, the community, its students and employees.

#### *For School Districts*

7. Seek student input in curriculum design, teacher evaluation, and overall school evaluation. Surveys are an effective way to engage students in the school-reform process. The Task Force on Student Achievement believes that such an exercise would encourage students to take responsibility for educational outcomes.
8. At the end of every school year or semester, give students the opportunity to evaluate their learning experience in every class. Such information should prove useful to school leaders—especially, principals—in identifying professional development and other efforts to improve teacher effectiveness.
9. Ensure that all administrators and instructional staff understand the role of School Improvement Panels (SciPs) in data analysis and professional development recommendations to achieve school and district goals. The SciPs were created through the 2012 TEACHNJ Act and are part of the AchieveNJ educator evaluation system.
10. Develop and administer a survey at the beginning of each school year to assess the physical and mental health needs of the school population. School nurses and guidance counselors should be involved in developing the surveys, and also in conducting the surveys and making recommendations based on the outcome.

11. When determining the support a child needs to be successful, consider the whole child—not just his or her academic needs but also the social-emotional needs that should be addressed. Educators should know the social, emotional, health, and basic needs of their students and their families. District leaders should identify how the school community and the community at-large can address these needs.

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### **The Local School Board: A Positive Influence on Student Achievement** (Chapter 3)

#### *For Local Boards of Education:*

12. Ensure that every board decision considers the academic, social and health needs of students and that the community is aware of this belief. At all regular meetings, board members/trustees must affirm this priority. Every decision—from the adoption of curriculum to the colors of classroom walls—should be founded on the question: “*What is best for all children?*”
13. Participate in professional development individually and as a board team to develop a comprehensive understanding of the Iowa Lighthouse Inquiry, the Center for Public Education’s research on the *Eight Characteristics of Effective School Boards*, and the role of the board of education in student achievement.
14. Through training and board practice, ensure that all members understand existing data about student achievement and that all reports to the board regularly use data related to students and their academic progress.
15. Conduct a self-assessment to determine the status of the board’s governance practices including the use of data in respect to student achievement.
16. Conduct a thorough policy review that includes the potential impact of each specific policy on contributing towards student achievement for all in a safe, healthy climate. All school boards should review their policies *through the lens of student achievement* to ensure that they support, and do not discourage, achievement for all.

#### *For School Districts:*

17. Make certain that classrooms are engaging places for young people to spend their days and that high expectations characterize all staff interaction with students.
18. Implement an annual goal-setting process that is student-focused and includes measurable standards of achievement.
19. Keep all stakeholders updated on challenges and successes. The administration should develop a communications plan to inform the community of the challenges the district is facing and to engage citizens in helping meet those challenges.
20. Establish a procedure to be followed when introducing new programs or practices. The procedure should include expectations for struggling students and a process to evaluate

short-term and long-term progress. The evaluation process would help the administration and board determine if the program should continue.

*For Individual School Board Members:*

21. Seek leadership and support from those who believe that the board’s priority goal should be advancing the achievement of every student.
22. Be prepared to ask questions at every meeting about how policies and procedures influence the success of struggling students.
23. Participate in the Annual NJSBA Workshop, which places the achievement of all students as its highest priority.

*For the New Jersey School Boards Association:*

24. Through training and professional development, ensure that board members/trustees understand, and are able to communicate about, measures of student achievement including educational standards, summative and formative assessments, and local school district goal-setting.
25. Provide all boards of education and individual board members with comprehensive professional development on the key findings of the Iowa Lighthouse Inquiry concerning effective governance.
26. Through training and professional development, emphasize that the primary responsibility of board members/trustees is to ensure that the district provides a comprehensive program that prepares students to be ready to enter the workforce or pursue post-secondary education. By their actions, board members/trustees must communicate to their constituents that all board business has a focus on the achievement of all students regardless of zip code or economic circumstances.
27. Build public understanding of the nature and measures of student achievement, while correcting common misconceptions—for example, the idea that some students are incapable of learning difficult subjects.
28. Review all Association policies to assess their potential impact on contributing toward student achievement and safe and healthy school climate. (Recommended revisions and additions to the New Jersey School Boards Association’s *Manual of Policies and Positions on Education* are listed in Chapter 11 of this report.)

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## **Using Data to Recognize Success, Identify Challenges, and Drive Decisions** (Chapter 4)

*For Local Boards of Education and Individual Members:*

29. School board members/trustees should participate in professional development to understand the role and meaning of Student Growth Percentiles (SGPs) and Student Growth Objectives (SGO), including their use in analyzing student achievement and evaluating the performance of educators.

30. Board member/trustees should participate in professional development regarding data review and analysis. Being data savvy is as important as ensuring that the district is financially responsible.
31. Board member/trustees should be aware of all of the data points available for review, so that they can make informed decisions on educational program recommendations.

*For the New Jersey School Boards Association:*

32. NJSBA should establish a professional development track for board members, which includes basic, intermediate and advanced data training.
33. NJSBA should review its mandated training to ensure that an introduction to data is included.

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**The Impact of Employment on Student Achievement** (Chapter 5)

*For Job Training/Employment Programs:*

34. Make regular school attendance the priority when providing assistance through the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) to students subject to New Jersey's compulsory attendance laws ([N.J.S.A. 18A:38-25](#)). Efforts should focus on ensuring both attendance and tardy-to-school challenges.
35. Allocate WIOA funding to support public education's need to meet 21st Century Life and Careers through career exploration, including labor market information, and educational requirements. Such efforts should be provided in lieu of work experience during the school year.

*For the State and Federal Government:*

36. Support the development of alternative, evidence-based programs and other activities that enhance the choices available to disadvantaged youth. These programs should encourage disadvantaged youth to reenter and complete secondary education, enroll in post-secondary education and advanced training, progress through career pathways, and enter into unsubsidized employment that leads to economic self-sufficiency.

*For Local School Districts and Training/Employment Programs*

37. Enable all youth to participate fully in academic, co-curricular and athletic programs, with the goal of fostering a more robust cohort of students who seek continuous academic achievement that promotes college and career readiness.

*For Local School Districts, Training/Employment Programs and Families*

38. Limit leisure-time employment of high school students to no more than two hours per day, 15 hours per week during the school year. At the same time, encourage employment opportunities, during the school year and summer, that enable students to practice skills learned in the classroom.

### **Early Childhood Education** (Chapter 6)

*For Boards of Education:*

39. Review and analyze district data to determine the early childhood program needs of schools.
40. Explore means to fund early childhood education, as well as before- and after-school programs.
41. Ensure that early childhood education programs are of high-quality and staffed by highly trained, certificated teachers.
42. Consider low-cost before- and after- school programs to give parents security of mind and financial relief, adding to a more supportive view toward their children's education.

*For the New Jersey School Boards Association:*

43. Provide professional development for all board members/trustees about the benefits of early childhood education.
44. Continue to support funding for early childhood education for all students through advocacy before the state Legislature and federal government.

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### **Communication, Collaboration, Parental Involvement** (Chapter 7)

*For Boards of Education and School Districts:*

Communication

45. Develop a strategic communications plan that encompasses media relations, one-to-one communication, and creation of a common message to build support for efforts to advance student achievement.
46. Establish a key communicators program to ensure effective two-way communication between the school district and community at-large—including dissemination of accurate information from the school district to the community and provision of critical feedback from the community to the school district.
47. Develop discussion points for use by school officials and education advocates to make the community aware of the needs of all students, including those who are struggling, and to elicit support for district efforts to advance student achievement.
48. Secure a reverse-dial emergency notification system with phone, text, and email capabilities to announce emergency school closings, special events, and keep the community informed when there is a significant emergency. Ensure that parents and community members, including senior citizens, are able to select the mode(s) of communication (landline, cell, text, email, etc.) they prefer, based on the topics to be communicated (general information, special announcements, emergency information, etc.).

Collaboration

49. Establish a collaborative relationship with the municipal government through efforts such as regularly scheduled meetings between school and municipal officials and the appointment of liaisons between the school board and governing body. The goal of such collaboration should be to support programs that advance student achievement, healthy decision-making, and a safe and secure school environment.
50. Involve the municipal government, faith-based community, service organizations, local industry and small businesses, as well youth-service organizations, in a comprehensive plan to promote student achievement and healthy decision-making.
51. Work with the municipality to support efforts to diversify neighborhoods and school communities economically and racially/ethnically. Models can be drawn from Hope VI and Urban Homesteading housing programs.
52. Work with higher education to enhance instructional strategy and professional development. Consider membership in the [Rutgers Institute for Improving Student Achievement](#) and the [New Jersey School Development Council](#), both located at the Rutgers Graduate School of Education.

Community/Parental Involvement

53. Develop training programs for parents on how to guide the schoolwork of their children. Partner with universities and colleges to assist in family training.
54. Consider membership in the National Network of Partnership Schools (<http://nnps.jhucsos.com/>), which provides training to schools, networking opportunities, and guidance on parental involvement.
55. Conduct a needs assessment to provide information on the current status of community and neighborhood involvement. Seek the observations and advice of teachers, who are in continuous contact with students.
56. Seek government and private funding to implement initiatives involving parental/community involvement, housing policy, and education program improvements. NJSBA's Grants Support service (<https://www.njsba.org/services/grants-support/>) provides all New Jersey school districts with an online portal to more than 3,200 funding opportunities available through the federal government, the state, and foundations.

For the New Jersey School Boards Association:

57. Continue to advocate for legislation and state code that advances student achievement.
58. Continue to model effective collaboration by working with other advocates on all efforts to advance student achievement through effective local school district governance.

## **Schools and Juvenile Justice System** (Chapter 8)

### *For Boards of Education and School Districts:*

59. Review all consequences of disciplinary infractions in terms of equity and effectiveness, and consider alternatives to teach appropriate behaviors. The goal of assigning a consequence should be to modify behavior. Consequences should be differentiated to ensure effectiveness.
60. Establish a database that tracks student infractions (including consequences and student age, race and gender). Analyze the data to identify patterns, and use the information to develop methods to improve student behavioral choices.
61. Establish a database that tracks alternative school placements (including length of time in program, age, race, gender, success, and recidivism). Analyze the data to identify patterns, and use the information to develop methods to improve student behavioral choices.
62. Establish a database that tracks student involvement with the juvenile justice system (including charges against students, their disposition, and student age, race and gender). Analyze the data to identify patterns and use the information to develop methods to improve student behavioral choices.

### *For Boards of Education and Local Law Enforcement:*

63. Clarify the responsibilities of School Resource Officers. Boards of Education should compare their student discipline policies and practices with the Recommendations for School Districts, Administrators, Teachers, and Staff in the U.S. Departments of Education and Justice guidance, issued January 8, 2014.

### *For the Juvenile Justice System:*

64. Juvenile correctional education programs should provide a comprehensive range of options:
  - Literacy and functional skills programs for students with significant cognitive, behavioral, or learning problems;
  - Academic courses associated with Carnegie unit credits for students who are likely to return to public schools or to earn a diploma while incarcerated;
  - General Educational Development (GED) preparation for students not likely to return to public schools; and
  - Pre-vocational and vocational education related to student interests and meaningful employment opportunities in the community.

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## **Social-Emotional Learning** (Chapter 9)

### *For Local Boards of Education and School Districts:*

65. Review current activities that address the social-emotional learning needs of their students and staff and strive to ensure that an optimum climate is being nurtured throughout the district.
66. Ensure that the student performance data are disaggregated.

67. Commit to addressing achievement gaps within the district.
  68. Create policies that require monitoring of school climate and encourage higher teacher expectations of students.
  69. Provide teachers with professional development in the importance of social climate in schools.
  70. Review common social and community problems impacting disadvantaged students in district schools and design solutions that affect significant numbers of them.
  71. Commit to finding ways to personalize learning approaches for students.
  72. Pay special attention to middle school practices that fall short of supporting students' social and emotional needs.
  73. Augment district curriculum to enhance the importance of increased expectations from teachers, teacher-student relationships, school-to-student connectivity, and student-to-student relationships and respect.
  74. Review the social emotional learning models available through the organizations listed in the "SEL/Character Development: Resources and Models" section of this chapter to gain insight about various approaches to integrating social-emotional learning into the education program.
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### **Labor-Management Collaboration** (Chapter 10)

*For Local Boards of Education:*

75. Assess the status of labor-management relations and formal collaboration within the district.
76. Consider the positive impact that adopting formal labor-management collaboration practices could have on student achievement and school climate.

*For Boards of Education, District Administrators, Teaching Staff:*

77. Follow the progress of the New Jersey Public Schools Labor-Management Collaborative and discuss with one another its impact on student achievement.
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### **New Jersey School Boards Association Policy** (Chapter 11)

*For the New Jersey School Boards Association:*

78. Adopt the revised and additional policy language listed on pages 92-94, which is consistent with NJSBA's mission to advancement the achievement of all students and the findings and recommendations of the Task Force on Student Achievement.

**Conclusion: Our Work Is Incomplete** (Chapter 12)

*For Local School Board Members:*

79. Become familiar with the concept of “implicit bias” and its impact on decisions affecting students’ educational opportunities.

*For the New Jersey School Boards Association:*

80. Continue proactive efforts to identify and address the many factors that impact student learning.

81. Adopt new language for the *Manual of Policies and Positions on Education*, as recommended in Chapter 11 of this report, which reflects its mission to advance the achievement of all students.

82. Continue to partner with the New Jersey Department of Education, state-level education organizations and New Jersey colleges and universities to address all of the challenges of student achievement. Special attention should be directed to the obstacles of “equity and excellence” with the goal of providing the best educational opportunities to the children of New Jersey, regardless of family background or place of residence.

83. Refer *The Final Report of the Task Force on Student Achievement* to the Association’s standing Standards and Assessment Committee for its consideration as it addresses issues related to educational standards and the measurement of students’ academic progress.