



New Jersey School Boards Association

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Daniel T. Sinclair, President
Lawrence S. Feinsod, Ed.D., Executive Director

FROM: Donald Webster, Jr., Immediate Past President

SUBJECT: Final Report: Task Force on Educational Opportunities for the Non-College-Bound Learner

DATE: October 2, 2018

I am pleased to submit the Final Report of the New Jersey School Boards Association's Task Force on Educational Opportunities for the Non-College-Bound Learner. The document reflects seven months of study and deliberation by the 20-member Task Force, the active participation and valuable contributions of nine NJSBA staff members, and additional research, writing and editing by our consultant and staff.

The Task Force was comprised of school board members and administrators from local, regional, county vocational and county special services school districts. It included representatives of higher education, as well as business and industry. Its work is aligned with the objectives of NJSBA's 2018-2020 Strategic Plan in the area of Student Growth, Learning, Well-Being and Success: *"Every New Jersey student will have the tools to be successful in pursuit of their chosen life goals in a safe, healthy, caring climate."*

In developing its report, the Task Force made nine findings on the delivery, funding and breadth of programming for the career-focused student. Among the most prominent is the following:

New Jersey needs to rethink the best methods to deliver appropriate training to students, to increase the pool of career technology education (CTE) teachers, to align curriculum with necessary skill acquisition, and to test students to assure they have both the hard and the "soft" skills, such as punctuality and teamwork, that will serve them in their careers.

The Task Force believes that our schools must prepare students for an evolving job market, one influenced by technology, automation and artificial intelligence. That job market is increasingly populated by positions requiring middle-level skills—that is, those not acquired through a four-year college degree, but obtained through a variety of secondary and post-secondary educational and training experiences. To that end, it becomes the responsibility of families and educators to allow each student to find his or her best career path by considering not only the traditional four-year college route, but also the broad range of other post-secondary options.

To address these and other challenges, the Task Force makes 69 recommendations for the consideration of New Jersey's boards of education and school administrators, the labor and workforce community, the New Jersey Department of Education, the Legislature, the Governor, and NJSBA. The final report groups the Task Force's recommendations to improve opportunities for non-college-bound students into the following six categories:

- *Ascertain the skills required to meet the needs of business and industry, and change the attitude toward jobs that do not require a college education.*
- *Maintain stronger communication and collaboration among local school districts, county vocational-technical schools, community colleges, state agencies, business and industry, and other prospective partners.*
- *Revisit curricula and programs so that they reflect economic realities, expose all students to the full array of post-secondary opportunities and prepare them for careers.*
- *Revise preparation and certification requirements to resolve a shortage of teachers in the STEM/STEAM and Makerspace areas.*
- *Revise student assessment and graduation requirements.*
- *Address financial needs and concerns and explore alternative funding sources.*

Deliberation

Although the Task Force represented diverse sectors of the educational and business communities, common themes emerged during its discussions. The members drew from their personal experience, identifying specific concerns, weaknesses within the current system, and possible solutions that warrant further exploration.

The Task Force reviewed materials on the opportunities available through the military, which were produced through the U.S. Army-NJSBA collaborative to advance STEAM (science, technology, engineering, the arts, and mathematics) education. NJSBA staff members provided support and information on careers in STEAM education and environmental sustainability, as well as professional development, labor relations, proposed legislation, and existing statute and regulation related to curriculum, standards and assessment, and teacher certification.

During its deliberations, the Task Force heard speakers from the Vernon Township Public Schools, who discussed their high school's CTE (career and technical education) Pathways Program, and the Bergen County Workforce Development/Investment Board, who discussed successful collaborations that benefit students.

The majority of the final report is based on the work of five subcommittees, consisting of Task Force members and NJSBA staff, which took place over several months and focused on ways to expand educational opportunities through best practices and changes in state and federal policy.

It has been an honor to chair the Task Force on Educational Opportunities for the Non-College-Bound Learner. We hope that our Final Report will represent the start of a discussion among educational, governmental, labor and community leaders to reevaluate existing educational structures, assumptions and practices with the goal of expanding educational options for our career-focused learners.