

# Great Schools New Jersey – November 29, 2023

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## Great Schools New Jersey – The Association of High Need School Districts

Wednesday, November 29, 2023, via Zoom

### **I. Welcome: Kenyon Kummings, GSNJ President, Superintendent, Wildwood City School District**

Superintendent Kummings welcomed participants to the meeting and encouraged members to put questions in the chat. He then introduced the meeting presenters, Michael Sanchez and Max Kaplan from Circle Match. He said Circle Match connects students from low-income communities to the college application process through college advising.

### **II. Presentation: Michael Sanchez & Max Kaplan, Circle Match**

Mr. Sanchez thanked GSNJ for inviting him. He noted that he and Mr. Kaplan graduated from West New York High School.

Mr. Sanchez is the Executive Director of Circle Match, a nonprofit organization that partners with schools and students to provide them with college advising programs and peer guidance. It is based on a mutual exchange of knowledge among students and aims to address a problem that isn't easy to solve. He described it as a "high touch" program.

He said Circle Match is a self-sustaining program, meaning by the time the program is finished students have learned how to become advisors themselves and empowered leaders. The nonprofit utilizes a "Pay-It-Forward Model," in which college students volunteer their time in their communities and build a culture of college-going and lifelong commitment to students.

Mr. Kaplan provided some statistics and program demographics: Circle Match currently works with four high schools, 80% of students are first-generation college goers, and 90% are on free or reduced-price lunch. The average student in the program has an annual household income of \$44,000, and the majority of students are Hispanic or Latino.

Since Circle Match's inception, there have been 143 college acceptances; 74% of those acceptances have been to the top 25 universities in the country, and 40.7% of those students have been admitted to Ivy League colleges.

Research shows that two-thirds of students in the program pay it forward and donate an average of 80 hours of instruction. Program advisors volunteer 387 hours of their time on college advising activities.

Mr. Sanchez and Mr. Kaplan provided a general overview of the program's timeline: Student recruitment begins at the beginning of junior year of high school to connect students to leadership and internship opportunities. Students apply to the College Prep Scholars program and learn more about colleges and universities.

During senior year, scholars go on college visits and apply to the Questbridge Program. The program helps students create their resumes, craft their college application lists, and navigate college and financial options.

Circle Match is hoping to expand by partnering with more schools. One-on-one meetings with school administrators, grant writers, and guidance teams are a mandatory part of partnering.

The presenters thanked the group again for allowing them the opportunity to share information about their organization.

### **III. Legislative Update: Melanie Schulz, NJASA Director of Government Relations**

Melanie Schulz reported that Governor Murphy signed the bill to end the basic skills test for teachers. She also informed the group about several bills that NJASA is working on to address teacher and staff shortages and graduation requirements. One of the bills regarding the teacher shortage would allow paralegals to do their student teaching in the district where they've been working.

Ms. Schulz reported that she and Manville Superintendent Jamil Maroun testified in opposition to the FAFSA bill. She said it is not a good idea to have non-academic requirements to obtain a high school diploma. She is also talking to the Murphy Administration about the bill.

Ms. Schulz said the Senate Education Committee would be meeting on December 14. Senator Teresa Ruiz's bill requiring a reading intervention program for students in certain grades is expected to be discussed during the meeting.

Senator Ruiz is making SDA funding a priority and will probably be working on this in the new Legislature after lame duck.

Guttenberg Superintendent Michelle Rosenberg asked if there was any news about the next Commissioner of Education. Ms. Schulz said there are several names being floated, but she is unsure of what will happen.

### **IV. ELC Update: Sharon Kregel, Director of Strategic Partnerships, Policy, and Communications**

Sharon Kregel informed the group that ELC would be meeting with representatives from the Governor's office and the State Treasurer's office about the upcoming FY25 State Budget. She said ELC planned to talk about reaching full state aid under the SFRA in FY25, changes to the amended formula, and the required Educational Adequacy Report about the SFRA formula.

She also noted that ELC has been working with the lawyers in the Latino Action Network school desegregation case. She encouraged superintendents to reach out to ELC with comments, recommendations, or questions regarding possible remedies in the case.

### **V. Approval: October 24, 2023, Meeting Minutes**

The minutes were moved and approved.

Superintendent Kummings thanked everyone for joining the meeting and encouraged members to recommend speakers for future meetings. He reminded everyone that the next meeting will be on January 10 via Zoom.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:40 a.m.