New Jersey Department of Education High School Reform Initiative

Issues, Responses, and Recommendations

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New Jersey Association of School Administrators

Prepared by

Membership of the NJASA Curriculum and Instruction Committee

Executive Summary

Because they are of primary importance, recommendations and questions to be considered as the DOE/NJ High School Reform Committee proceeds appear first in this document, perspective on reform follows, and vignettes of what is working in NJ high schools are last.

This paper highlights high school reform initiative from the NJDOE perspective and from the practitioners' perspective. It argues that New Jersey high schools are not impervious to change. Increased graduation requirements, core content standards, testing, and individual district programs are among the efforts made by local districts to respond to the needs of students. It also supports a reform approach where rigor, relevance, and good instruction are linked and one that includes an integration of academics and career and technical education for the non college bound student. Further it argues that the drop out rate—which has been a driving force in ADP/ high school reform—is not a challenge faced by most New Jersey high schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Insure That Changes Are Targeted Where Needed

Avoid rushing to fix schools that are not broken. NJASA suggests that the NJDOE carefully examine NJ dropout data in light of national trends and identify specific NJ districts experiencing a high and increasing dropout rate. The department needs to work collaboratively with these districts in order to identify and resolve issues in a non-punitive manner. Emphasis should be placed upon improving teaching and curriculum—at the same time.

The National Education Summit on High Schools sponsored by Achieve, Inc., and the National Governor's Association, in An Action Agenda for Improving America's High Schools, recognizes that "not every high school needs to be redesigned." Their report further states, "The need for change is greatest in schools that are failing to educate most of their students up to even minimal standards. Schools in some communities are experiencing dropout rates of nearly 50%, and few of the students who manage to graduate are successful in colleges and careers. These are the schools in crisis, and state and local officials must make it a priority to intervene in and reorganize them." (National Education Summit, 2005) As the New Jersey High School Redesign Steering Committee moves forward they should heed this advice, look carefully at the data, and involve practitioners in crafting a plan.

Consider Implications And Unintended Consequences

Plans to increase the rigor of language arts, mathematics, and science courses must link rigor, relevance, and good instruction. NJASA membership believes an approach that limits choices for students, ignores the discipline specific skills and specific instruction required in mathematics and science, as well as an approach that focuses primarily on college preparation, is too narrow. NJASA cautions the NJDOE to slow down and look at reform from a broader lens.

How will it be ensured that non-college bound students will not be blocked from taking electives/work studies that are necessary for future plans? How will the DOE ensure students—particularly limited English, special education, and non-college bound—are not placed in academic jeopardy as the implementation of ADP unfolds? How will rigor, relevance, and good instruction be linked?

Building Capacity

In order for the NJDOE to implement the necessary actions required, plans to add a large number of math and science teachers will have to happen. Currently, there is a shortage of certified math and science teachers. If we don't have enough now, how will we recruit more? If, within the ADP plans of New Jersey, a commitment to offer

current staff the opportunity to take appropriate courses in their districts in order to become certified in these hard to find disciplines is available, success can be achieved. Will the state provide the funding for in-district certification courses?

Who will fund, and when will schools be able to offer the necessary professional development for all staff? Teacher contracts and school calendars do not currently permit the procedures and times to offer this necessary professional development during the regular school day. What steps will be taken to ensure "feeder"/"pre-requisite" coursework appropriately prepares students?

Facility Requirements

If the requirement to increase the number of courses in science is achieved—in addition to the difficulty of finding certified staff—there are insufficient science laboratories to schedule all of the classes needed. Will the state pay for the creation of more science labs? Additionally, if the additional science courses come to fruition, will students who wish to take a fourth year of science be forced to forgo that course due to the lack of available staff and facilities?

Assessment Issues

When will end-of-year tests be administered? How will timeframes be set so tests do not conflict with AP; with other coursework exams; or with end-of-year activities such as proms, awards programs etc.? Will they be scheduled so they do not send a signal the year/course is over in May?
Who will design the end-of-course exam? Who will grade end-of-course exams?
Will districts be able to conduct an item analysis of end-of-course exams? What feedback will teachers and students receive regarding performance on end-of-course exams? Will end-of-course exams impact upon AYP?
Will end-of-course exam grades be computed as part of the student's final grade?
Will high schools administer end-of-course state exams as well as final exams? If so, what will be done to ensure there is not loss of more instructional time due to testing?
How will teachers motivate students to do well on both the state and school end-of-year exams?

Implementation Questions

Who will determine what subject matter will constitute English 1, 2, 3, 4—particularly if end-of-year exams are implemented? What are the implementation timelines for ADP courses?
What steps will NJDOE take to ensure the implementation plan is practical/workable?
What long-term evidence is there that ADP works?

High School Redesign from a NJDOE Perspective

Currently there are two main reform initiative frameworks that NJ has begun to embrace. The first has been facilitated by the High School Redesign Steering Committee. The second is the Abbott Secondary Education Initiative. In a PowerPoint entitled "Ready for the Future", the New Jersey High School Redesign Steering Committee outlined an action agenda for improving America's high schools. Specifically, the aim of the American Diploma Project (ADP)—according to information presented in Achieve's website—is "to restore value to the American high school diploma." To help advance this agenda, Achieve, Inc.; The Education Trust; and the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation launched the American Diploma Project. The goal was to determine the English and mathematics skills that high school graduates need in order to be successful in college and the workplace and to help states incorporate those skills into their standards, assessments and high school graduation requirements." (Achieve.org, 2007) As a result, the focus of the American Diploma Project—and, in turn, the NJ High School Redesign Committee—is from a business and higher education perspective with emphasis being placed on preparing students for the workplace and the university.

The second framework comes from the work of the Secondary Education Initiative (SEI), which is an outgrowth of Abbott equity litigation. Specifically, the Abbott Secondary Education Initiative was designed to address gaps in student achievement and educational opportunity. Under NJ law, all grade 6-12 Abbott district students must have access to a college preparation curriculum, additional academic support, as well as smaller, more personalized learning communities by September 2008.

Toch, Jerald, and Dillon (Phi Deta Kappan, February 2007), summarized the intent of national reform efforts when they stated, "The high school reform movement resembles a sprawling 19th century Russian novel, with dozens of actors and innumerable initiatives. But reformers are focusing primarily on five strategies—improving school climate, strengthening curriculum and instruction, raising graduation requirements, helping freshmen get up to speed academically, and preventing students from dropping out." These same strategies are being embraced by New Jersey.

This document focuses specifically on the ADP as it is linked to the efforts of the NJ High School Reform Committee.

High School Redesign from a NJASA/Practitioners Perspective

An Overview of Educational Reform Initiatives in the United States

DuFour, DuFour, Eaker and Karhanek (Whatever It Takes: How Professional Learning Communities Respond When Kids Don't Learn, 2004) effectively summarize the history of educational reform initiatives in the United States over the last 50 years. The authors stated, "As the latest wave of educational reform washes upon the public schools of the United States in the form of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation, veteran educators are finding it difficult to avoid becoming cynical. The notion that the nation's system is broken and needs to be fixed is not new. Almost 50 years ago the Russian launching of Sputnik led reformers such as Hyman Rickover to claim the failure of the public schools had not only caused the United States to fall behind Russia in the space race, but also threatened our demise in the Cold War. When the Unites States went on to land men on the moon, establish clear supremacy in space, and win the Cold War, schools received none of the credit.

Twenty years ago the Nation at Risk initiative (1983) asserted it was the failure of public schools that had caused the United States economy to lose ground to other nations. The report made repeated references to 'decline,' 'deficiencies,' 'plight,' 'threats,' and 'risks' and sounded an alert that the dismal state of public education threatened our very survival as a nation:

> 'Our nation is at risk. Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world…. The educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and people. (p.5)

Of course, when the United States experienced unprecedented sustained economic growth in the 1990s while Asian economies languished, public schools received none of the credit. At some point, the following questions must be raised: How is it that the victims of an educational system that has been so deficient for half a century have continued to accomplish so much, and why is it that schools represent the fundamental problem in bad times but apparently contribute so little to the good?"

The NJASA respects the proposed high school reform initiatives while at the same recognizing that high schools—similar to all schools—have changed and continue to change in order to meet societal and economic needs.

ADP: High Schools Remain Impervious to Change

Though may reform groups—including the National Education Summit on High Schools sponsored by Achieve, Inc. (linked to ADP), and the National Governor's Association contend "that high schools have been largely untouched by the past two decades of

education reform." (National Education Summit on High Schools, 2005), this has not been the trend in New Jersey. A NJDOE required graduation test, the development of course proficiencies and, later, core content standards with cumulative progress indicators, as well as local district efforts have continued to influence our high schools. For example, the NJDOE prepared "Overview of Statewide Testing Program" highlights the implementation of the standards and standardized testing. In 1975 the Public School Education Act was passed to "'provide to all children in New Jersey, regardless of socioeconomic status or geographic location, the educational opportunity which will prepare them to function politically, economically and socially in a democratic society.' An amendment was signed in 1976 which established uniform standards of minimum achievement in basic communication and computation skills." In 1981-82, all 9th grade students had to pass a minimum basic skills test in reading and mathematics; in 1983, the grade 9 HSPT, which tested reading, mathematics, and writing, was administered and became the graduation requirement in 1985-86. In 1988 the New Jersey Legislators passed a law that moved the graduation test from grade 9 to grade 11. According to the NJDOE "Overview of Statewide Testing Program," "The Grade 11 High School Proficiency Test (HSPT 11) is a rigorous test of essential skills in Reading, Mathematics, and Writing. It served as a graduation requirement for all public school students in New Jersey who entered the ninth grade on or after September 1, 1991." Beginning in 2002, a more rigorous version of the HSPA Mathematics and Language Arts Literacy, which continues to be the current graduation requirement for student who entered the 11th grade for the first time on or after September 1, 2001 was put in place. It is clear that New Jersey's public high schools have not been impervious to change.

ADP: English + Mathematics + Science = Productive Adult Lives

Reformers, including the NJDOE, who embrace Achieve, Inc. and the American Diploma Project framework contend more rigorous language arts, mathematics and science courses will reduce the gap between what students learn and what they will need to know in order to be productive adults. The membership of NJASA supports rigorous subject matter content in the aforementioned areas while at the same time cautioning that a "one size fits all" approach; an approach that fails to link rigor, relevance, and good instruction; an approach that limits choices for students; and an approach that ignores the discipline specific and skills specific instruction required in mathematics and science, and an approach that focus primarily on college preparation is an approach that will be fraught with failure.

NJDOE has already announced plans to institute an end of year Biology 1 examination in the spring of 2008. More recently it has agreed to join the American Diploma Project Secondary Mathematics Partnership and to administer a voluntary common standards Algebra 2 examination beginning in May 2008. In a NJDOE press release (April 10, 2007) entitled "New Jersey Joins Nine-State Partnership to Administer New Algebra 2 Exam," it states, "Algebra 2 is one of several 'gatekeeper' courses in high school. Studies conducted by the United States Education Department indicate that the highest level of math taken in high school is the most powerful predictor of whether a student will ultimately earn a bachelors degree or secure a well-paying job."

NJASA cautions the NJDOE to slow down and to look at reform from a broader lens. *Are They Ready to Work? Employers' Perspectives on the Basic Knowledge and Applied Skills of New Entrants to the 21st Century US Workforce* (2006) as cited by Levine (2007) include—in rank order—the following skills: "1.critical thinking/problem solving, 2.information technology application, 3.teamwork/collaboration, 4. creativity/innovation." According to Levine knowledge domains, including world languages, mathematics, writing, reading, and science were ranked 12-16. Further, in "*What About Those Who Don't Go?"* (to college), Barton (2007) contended that comprehensive high school reform must focus on equipping ***all*** high school students for life and work—yet, according to Barton, the view has been myopic. He stated, "…the high school reform movement has made no attempt to look at job requirements that high school graduates must meet if they do not go on to college. In survey after survey, employers say they want employees with more than academic skills. The National Association of Manufacturers surveyed its members in 2001 and 2005, and found similar results both years. Seven out of 10 employers listed a lack of 'employability skills'—such as attendance, timeliness, and work ethic—as the top reasons for turning down young applicants. …My (Barton, 2006) analysis of 13 million job opening projected by the US Bureau of Labor Statistics through 2012 and the analyses of others (Murnane & Levy, 1996) have found that in addition to these 'soft' skills,' young job applicants need a basic 9th grade level of mathematics and reading skills to qualify for most jobs paying a middle-class wage. Employers also heavily weigh previous work experience—something a young person leaving high school may not have."

The NJASA encourages the NJDOE to include opportunities for internships, apprenticeships, and other related work experiences in high school reform efforts. In some districts cooperative education programs have been restricted due to potential job placement safety and insurance concerns. Further, NJASA suggests that successful reform for the high school student who is not college bound will come only through integration of academics in career and technical education.

ADP: Dropout Rates are High

The New Jersey High School Redesign Committee contends that too many New Jersey students are dropping out of the educational system. However, national data suggest the drop out problem is not prevalent in New Jersey. In "Locating the Dropout Crisis: Which High Schools Produce the Nation's Dropouts?" Belfanz and Legters, a Johns Hopkins University research team, reported that 2,000 high schools produce most of the dropouts. Balfanz of the Talent Development team suggested that the federal government take the initiative to "fix the 15 percent of American high schools that produce 50 percent of the nation's dropouts." The challenges facing these high schools are daunting: In many, the majority of entering freshmen arrive several grade levels behind and end up failing ninth grade. Stricter accountability is not the answer for these schools, according to Belfanz.

He further stated, "You're asking failing schools, many of which have already been targeted under state accountability systems, sitting on watch lists and reconstitution lists for more than a decade, to suddenly begin graduating nearly all freshmen with college-ready skills." He estimates that would take about $1.5 billion a year to help such schools adopt strategies that have shown to be effective in Talent Development and other models. (Jerald, 2006). Quint (2006) confirmed this when she reported, "High school reform has moved to the top of the education policy agenda, commanding the attention of the federal government, governors, urban school superintendents, philanthropists, and the general public. All are alarmed by stubbornly high dropout rates, by the low academic achievement of many high school students, and by the large numbers of high school graduates who are required to take remedial classes in college. These trends disproportionately affect urban and certain rural areas and minority groups: The most troubled high schools are concentrated in about 50 large cities and 15 primarily southern and southwestern states, and the majority of their students tend to be African-American or Hispanic."

NJASA suggests that the NJDOE carefully examine NJ drop-out data in light of national trends and identify specific NJ districts experiencing a high and increasing drop out rate. In turn, the NJDOE needs to work collaboratively with these districts in order to identify and resolve issues that are directly contributing to the drop out rate. Research conducted by the Talent Development Model (May, 2005) suggests improving teaching and curriculum—at the same time—while breaking down large high schools into smaller learning communities were contributors to success in New York City.

Jefferson Township High School, Morris County

Offering a comprehensive curriculum, Jefferson Township High School meets the needs of its students by preparing them for the work, postsecondary education, and college. Students may select from more than 140 course offerings that include advanced placement, core college preparation courses, and a variety of electives. Last year the district began to implement a collaborative process for long-range strategic planning entitled Jefferson Township 2015 (JT2015). The district wants to continue to create an even better school system for students in both the academic and social areas of the educational system. Working with all community stakeholders, students and staff, a task force conducted group sessions in order to identify the skills, attributes, and strategies that they believe will lead the Jefferson Township schools to a system of excellence. Through this process the district established 5 educational goals which will enable the administrators, board, and staff to focus energies and resources in order to provide programs and experiences that will make the students of Jefferson Township good citizens, good workers, and lifelong learners. A master plan driven by the goals is being developed during the 2007-2008 school year.

When questioned about the ADP and the NJ high school reform initiative, Dr. Kathaleen Fuchs, superintendent of schools, noted, "JT2015 is an example of an on-going effort for the district to facilitate systemic change that is student centered. Our schools—including the high school—continue to be responsive to the changes within society." She also expressed concern about the timing of end of course state tests. "AP examinations are always scheduled during May and often signal the end for the juniors and seniors who sit for them. As a result, it is sometimes very difficult for AP teachers to continue to sustain instruction through June. When New Jersey DOE implements the end of course biology test, it will be sending the same message to the sophomores or freshmen who are enrolled in Biology 1. Timing of the exam is important because if it is too early there will be issues with teaching the content and with students thinking the school year for that course has ended for them. A May exam may mean that districts will be testing students twice—once with the state test and once with a district final examination. Will all students make the effort to perform well on both tests? Will the results of the state tests be timely enough to be used in place of existing final examinations? How would this impact upon the awarding of a course grade? A lot of details need to be considered."

Vocational Technical Schools, Salem County

Academy programs in Salem County include biological and medical sciences, communications and information technology, creative and performing arts, culinary arts and hospitality, as well as graphic design in multimedia technology. These career academies allow students to specialize in a career cluster—bringing instructional relevance to the classroom. College, career and technical programs are integrated. Companies and industries are closely tied to the academies. Mentoring, internships, and

job shadowing are among the learning opportunities student pursue. Students also have the opportunity to enroll in community college courses while in high school. Students, according to Dr. William Adams the superintendent, often graduate as college juniors. Ultimately, the students graduate prepared for a job, postsecondary training or college.

When questioned about high school reform efforts in New Jersey, Dr. Adams stated, "I recognize our need to support high standards for all students. I am concerned that flexibility needs to be provided so that all students can benefit from high standards and rigorous courses. One of the concerns I have is that students participating in our career and technical programs could be limited from such participation if graduation course requirements are increased. One way to address this concern if to allow a portion of the ADP requirement for mathematics and science to be met through the related mathematics and science that is taught in our core technical curriculum."

Delran High School, Burlington County

During the past three years, Delran High School was selected as one of 30 high schools to send a team to the Re-inventing New Jersey's High Schools Summit. It was also 1 of 30 high schools selected to participate in the State's community service pilot program. Also, in October 2006, Delran High School was visited by representatives from Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence and was recognized as a Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence Lighthouse School in December 2006.

Programmatically, the school has developed and implemented a ninth grade Transition Project program as part of a freshman academy. In 2007-08, a required course in ninth grade, called Freshman Seminar is being offered. During the summer between eighth grade and ninth grade, every student is required to read the book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teenagers.* Discussions regarding the book's themes are integrated into the English/ language arts and health curricula.

A Senior Option program is offered to every 12th grade student, not a select few. Students enrolled in senior option take college courses, either on-campus (usually at Burlington County College) or through Educere. Educere is a brokerage house for purchasing seats in college courses. Many two- and four-year colleges in the United States participate in the program; several thousand courses are offered each semester. Students can enroll and participate in the Educere courses in a Delran High School computer lab, or at home.

When asked about high school reform, Superintendent George Sharp stated, "We have developed a strategic plan called Re-inventing Delran High School. We continue to follow the plan. Our high school principal presented at the Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence national conference this past year. I presented at the same conference the previous year. We are one of the few districts in the State of New Jersey using quality tools from the Baldridge process. Yes, we are very proud of our achievements. But, we also recognize that there are a number of high schools in New Jersey doing excellent things."

Rutherford High School, Bergen County

Over 90% of the students who attend Rutherford High School
elect to go on to college. The curriculum is geared towards college preparation by offering a variety of courses—many with honors and advanced placement levels. In addition, Rutherford offers courses in technology, television, family and consumer science, and business which help the students in choosing college majors and/or entering the workforce.

Ms. Leslie O'Keefe, superintendent, noted several successful high school programs that prepare students for college and work. An HSPA Readiness course is offered during a zero period program for eight weeks in the areas of language arts, science, and math for students at risk of failing
the mandated graduation test. At risk students also receive instruction during the school day in addition to regular English and math classes. Writing, mathematics, and technology are infused in activities across the curriculum. For example, computation and open ended problems involving math concepts as well as power point, spread sheets, data base, and word processing assignments are found in every subject area.
Many classes also include video technology.

Through the Fairleigh Dickinson University Middle College Program students earn college credits while completing courses at the high school. Credit can be earned through AP US History, AP Chemistry, AP French, AP Spanish, Honors Accounting, Great Books, and Humanities Seminar. In addition, students are placed with mentors as part of the Gifted and Talented Program. Students have worked with congressmen, doctors, accountants, teachers, journalists, and many other professionals.

Students who are career/vocational bound may elect a semester of classroom instruction followed by a semester of work experience. Students who participate in this program have worked in retail, small businesses, municipal departments, and other industries.

Prior to the ADP initiative Rutherford had planned the change in science and mathematics requirements at the high school. This change will ensure that all students take physics and Algebra 2.

Cranford High School, Union County

The High School University of Cranford is a four year "differentiated journey" for highly motivated students. These students begin their application process towards the end of eighth grade. There is an information meeting, where applications are distributed. If accepted, the students are grouped by academic interest and assigned an academic advisor. These students are required to take an advanced placement class each year, beginning with AP World History as a freshman. Additionally, they are exposed to a

variety of academic experiences based on their area of interest. The students partake in seminars, field trips and other forms of enrichment. Additionally, the school has formed partnerships with local colleges, which allow these students a variety of experiences beyond what is offered at CHS. Service-learning is also a large portion of The High School University of Cranford. The students' talents are used to connect what they have learned to the community.

According to Dr. Lawrence Feinsod, Cranford Superintendent of Schools, "The University program has raised the academic bar to new heights. Students are challenged and motivated in ways that focus on both the abstract and concrete."

Hopatcong High School, Sussex County

The High School faculty is currently engaged in a site based strategic planning process. This plan is based upon the needs that have been identified by the high school faculty and administration. It is a collaborative process based upon, *Breaking Ranks*, but customized for the high school.

Programmatically the high school offers diverse opportunities for students to meet their diverse needs:

Concurrent Enrollment Courses with Sussex County Community College

Freshman Composition and Literature
Sociology
Biology (fall 2007)

Bridges: a special education program (several grade levels), team taught, interdisciplinary thematic units of study

PLATO: individualized computer assisted instruction for Basic Skills remediation

Digital Arts: this course provides students with experiences using digital photography, video and graphic arts software for creative artistic projects as well as an opportunity to become familiar with how the graphic arts are being used in the world of work.

On Line Courses: students are able to take an elective course on line taught by the high school teachers as well as an SAT Prep course.

Science:

The district currently has a three year science requirement for graduation. In order to assist those students who are not pursuing a college career the course Chemistry in the Community was instituted. It is designed to help students realize the important role that chemistry will play in their personal and professional lives.
In addition hands-on, project based life, earth and physical science courses have been developed for students who are not pursuing science at the college level.

Mathematics

Consumer Mathematics: this course is designed to develop and reinforce the applications of mathematics in today's society including: money management, banking,

filing tax forms, budgeting expenses, cost comparisons, the cost of operating a vehicle, buying and renting a home.

Two of the programs to assist students who begin high school with substandard skills in mathematics or language arts literacy are:
Math Standards 1, 2 and 3.
These courses are based on the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards as are
Language Arts Literacy Standards 2 and 3

World Languages
Spanish A, B and C courses focus on Spanish for students who wish to learn conversational Spanish (these courses are designed to assist students in meeting the world language requirement for graduation and who do not have the requisite skills for the traditional Spanish I sequence.

Grade 12 Options:
Challenger Program, County College of Morris
Credit Bank Program (Sussex County Community College)
Educere (on line college courses)
Senior Year Apprenticeships
Community Service
Internships Job Shadowing
Other College courses

To assist students with personal and adjustment issues:
Transitions Project: Princeton Center for Leadership Training, a program for assisting ninth graders with the transition to high school using junior and senior students as mentors.
Peers Making Peace
Project Adventure: a physical outdoor challenge course used during physical education to build collaboration, communication and problem solving skills as well as developing student to student support skills.

Dr. Wayne Threlkeld, superintendent, stated, "We believe the NJDOE model will not benefit our students and will, in fact, hurt 20-25% of them. The same students for whom we have designed very specific courses in order to engage them, meet their needs, and assist them in successfully completing high school will not—along with the majority of our special education students—be able to pass the proposed exit exams."