

NEW JERSEY'S VISION: **World-Class Schools for a Global Economy**



**A Call to Action From the
New Jersey Association of School Administrators**

Statewide Task Force



New Jersey's Vision for World-Class Schools

A Message from the New Jersey Association of School Administrators (NJASA)

In recent years, various political and cultural forces have threatened our country's security and even our very quality of life. We as a nation are at serious risk of losing our economic and technological superiority. To advance our democratic principles, New Jersey's students now, perhaps more than ever before, need to be adequately prepared to assume strong leadership roles in a highly competitive global economy.

It is absolutely imperative, therefore, that everything possible be done to equip our state's young people with the knowledge, skills, and tools that they will need to serve as productive, contributing members of 21st Century society. As New Jersey's educational leaders, we believe that this can best be accomplished through the development of world-class schools that provide the highest quality learning opportunities for every child.

The purpose of this document is to spark a statewide conversation that will ultimately help to define exactly what such a world-class education includes and the resources required to support the best practices identified as necessary to this endeavor. Many individuals and groups influence what happens in our schools. Only when a common vision can be identified and our efforts uniformly focused in this direction will our hard work result in well-educated, well-informed, and competitive citizens of the world.

During the past two years, the New Jersey Association of School Administrators' Statewide Task Force has researched, discussed, deliberated, and advocated for effective strategies that will enable us to maintain our status as one of the highest performing educational systems in the world. In doing so, a number of factors have been considered and conclusions drawn.

As school district leaders, we acknowledge the complexities involved in educating today's children. We recognize that there are many different ways to teach, to learn, and to assess learning. We understand that students must have multiple opportunities and progressive paths available to them with which to demonstrate proficiency and competence. We know how important it is that we work with community groups and organizations to address physical, emotional, and social concerns that are obstacles to student learning and achievement.



We agree that world-class schools require world-class district leaders; leaders with the background, experience, and skills necessary to ensure superior teaching and learning and the implementation of highly effective strategies, programs, and best practices in every classroom. Additionally, our school districts' leaders must be given the autonomy with which to effectively utilize their expertise as education specialists without excessive regulation and/or micromanagement issues.

In order to create world-class schools, district leaders must have the necessary resources and support available to them. While we acknowledge that securing these resources continues to be our most significant challenge, we firmly believe that lowering education standards to reduce the cost of public education would be a short term solution with absolutely devastating long term results.

Our nation's success as a world leader has often been attributed to the manner in which we emphasize creative, divergent, and innovative thinking rather than compliance and rote learning as many other industrial nations do. The recent trend in the United States to measure student achievement using a "one size fits all" series of standardized assessments has greatly diminished our ability to nurture and develop the higher order thinking skills of analysis, evaluation, and creativity so important to who we are. If our country is to continue to serve as a leader among nations, we must once again educate students in environments that embrace the qualities that historically have made us such a significant force in world affairs.

To achieve our vision of world-class schools in New Jersey, we need to work together as educational leaders and to do whatever is necessary to enlist the support of the media, state legislators, business leaders, parents, and community members. We need to keep our priorities clear and stay the course for as long as necessary despite shifts in political power and changes in school and district leadership.

We hope that you, the reader, will join with us in the months ahead as we work to create world-class schools for New Jersey's world-class children.

New Jersey Association of School Administrators (NJASA)* Statewide Task Force 2007

Chairpersons: Dr. Raymond Bandlow - Hillside, Dr. Toni C. Mullins - Red Bank

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New Jersey's Vision World-Class Schools for a Global Economy

In creating world-class public schools in New Jersey, it is imperative that we coordinate the activities of all stakeholders...legislators, educators, parents, business people, and community members...to ensure that the best practices are known, shared, implemented, and supported state-wide. The world-class educational system that we propose embraces the following eight factors:



1. The RECOGNITION OF MANY DIFFERENT AND RIGOROUS PATHS TO ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT, ALL OF WHICH LEAD TO LIFE-LONG LEARNING AND CAREERS;



2. PREDICTABLE AND SUFFICIENT FUNDING TO ENSURE WORLD-CLASS PERFORMANCE;



3. ON-GOING AND CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT TO MAINTAIN THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ALL EDUCATORS;



4. MULTIPLE LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES AND ADDITIONAL LEARNING TIME TO ACCOMMODATE THE DIFFERENT LEARNING RATES AND LEARNING STYLES OF CHILDREN;



5. INVESTMENTS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION TO PREPARE CHILDREN FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS;



6. APPROPRIATELY DESIGNED AND ADEQUATELY MAINTAINED SCHOOL FACILITIES TO ACCOMMODATE AND SUPPORT POSITIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS AND ADVANCES IN TECHNOLOGY;



7. SERVICES THAT FOCUS ON HIGH EXPECTATIONS AND EMPHASIZE INDIVIDUALIZED OUTCOMES IN ORDER TO MAXIMIZE THE ACHIEVEMENT OF SPECIAL NEEDS YOUNGSTERS;



8. GOVERNANCE POLICIES AND PRACTICES THAT ENHANCE TRUST AND FOSTER COLLABORATION, COMMUNICATION, AND COORDINATION.



The Eight Factors For a World-Class Educational System

Factor One:

Recognition of Many Different and Rigorous Paths to Academic Achievement, All of Which Lead To Life-Long Learning and Careers.

Background:

In the past, society has had many venues of employment for those individuals with more general, less specialized academic skills. Today, technological advances and ever evolving job classifications require a work force prepared for the unconventional application of intellectual skills. In the future world of work, only those students who possess and routinely utilize higher order thinking skills will achieve the American dream. World-class schools must implement rigorous standards to maintain a viable and vibrant workforce. To prepare students for such a working environment, adequate preparation for post-secondary education is a minimum requirement.

Our Vision:

- Provide all students with quality instruction that is rigorous, relevant, meets individual academic needs, involves students actively in their schooling, prepares them for post-secondary education opportunities, and is effective and efficient.
- Prepare school systems to provide appropriate opportunities for higher-order skills acquisition so that all students can be successful in a college program or in a post-secondary technical/trade school setting.

Factor Two:

Predictable and Sufficient Funding to Ensure World-Class Performance

Background:

An investment in public education is essential if New Jersey is going to enhance the quality of life for its residents. New Jersey's educators and students need to have a well-developed funding formula in place that provides the necessary resources for all youngsters. The current system provides state aid figures too late for quality long-term planning. With over 60% of public school funding now provided through local property taxes, the state must realize its obligation to increase its contribution in order to reduce this reliance on property taxes as a primary source of funding for our schools.

Our Vision:

- Develop an approach to funding schools that is predictable and stable so that educators can achieve the benefits inherent in long-term planning.
- Define a sufficient level of funding to help New Jersey's schools equal the academic performance of other outstanding world-class school districts.
- Streamline time-intensive bureaucratic requirements and rules that are of minimal value to districts so that valuable time can be more appropriately dedicated to activities that truly support and enhance teaching and learning.



Factor Three:

On-Going and Continuous Professional Development Support to Maintain the Effectiveness of Educators.

Background:

The most important variable in maximizing student achievement is the quality of instruction provided by teachers. Another critical component in fostering and maintaining outstanding teaching and learning is the caliber of school and district leadership (McREL, 2002). With the anticipated retirement of many New Jersey educators and with an estimated one-half of all new teachers leaving the profession within their first five years on the job, the recruitment of superior candidates, the training of new staff, and continuous professional development opportunities for every educator are essential elements in the creation of world-class schools.

Our Vision:

- Actively pursue a highly visible, creative, media-supported campaign to improve teacher recruitment and retention in New Jersey. Special attention must be given to positions that are often difficult to fill including those in science, mathematics, special education, foreign language, and English language mastery.
- Garner support from legislators and the media for the work of public school staff and promote respect for educators and the work they do.
- Encourage candidates from underrepresented groups and/or diverse backgrounds to pursue teaching careers.
- Offer high quality, on-going, and job-embedded professional development for teachers and ensure that time is available for these activities.
- Encourage the formation of Professional Learning Communities in all schools.
- Increase standards for acquiring permanent teacher certification to include the achievement of a master's degree within five years of employment.
- Develop effective methods to raise the number and caliber of school/district leaders and support high quality, on-going professional development.

Factor Four:

Multiple Learning Opportunities and Additional Learning Time to Accommodate the Different Learning Rates and Learning Styles of Children.

Background:

Learning rates and learning styles vary for individuals and students often require multiple, diverse opportunities in order to master critical skills and proficiencies. Teachers need a plethora of divergent and differentiated strategies, methods, and timelines to succeed with different learners.

The current instructional day and academic year are based on the agrarian calendar and limit opportunities for all children to be successful. Before and/or after school instruction is necessary for some students to keep up academically, but this is not available to many that desperately need these services. Summer breaks additionally permit far too many youngsters to lose academic ground.

School experiences must be expanded to include an extended school day and school year for students who need this time. In the world's highest performing nations, students use summers and extended school days to better prepare for successful careers in today's global economy.

Our Vision:

- Provide students with additional learning time through extended learning blocks during the school day, as well as through before and after school sessions.
- Develop and implement quality summer learning opportunities for youngsters so that they don't lose ground and can continue to practice important academic skills.
- Increase the number of school days in the calendar year to remain competitive with international best practices.



Factor Five:

Investments in Early Childhood Education to Prepare Children for Academic Success.

Background:

Research continues to show that federal, state, and/or local investments in quality early childhood programs pay great dividends in later schooling. Quality early childhood education has been directly linked to better school readiness, higher academic achievement, lower special education costs, and lower crime rates.

Our Vision:

- Provide universal access to high quality pre-kindergarten programs for four-year-olds and full day kindergarten for five-year-olds.
- Align early childhood curricula and programs with K-12 classroom expectations.

Factor Six:

Appropriately Designed and Adequately Maintained School Facilities to Accommodate and Support Positive Learning Environments and Advances in Technology.

Background:

Currently, too many school districts have aging school facilities that were never designed to meet the educational needs of today's world. Inadequate instructional areas, as well as core facility areas such as those for physical education, art, music, library research, and drama, severely limit quality opportunities for students. As technology evolves, its constantly changing needs require funding and flexibility to best provide for our students.

Our Vision:

- Analyze current building needs to identify where major renovations are required and where best practices exist in school design.
- Continue data analyses on the structural and/or equipment impediments that are hindering the appropriate use of technology as a quality instructional strategy.
- Develop alternative funding sources to local property taxes so that school districts are not dependent on limited state funds for facility improvements.
- Establish incentives for businesses to invest in technology infrastructures for school districts.
- Investigate feasible strategies for businesses, municipalities, and school districts to voluntarily consolidate and share resources.



Factor Seven:

Services That Focus on High Expectations and Emphasize Individualized Outcomes in Order to Maximize the Achievement of Special Needs Youngsters.

Background:

Current practices to assist limited English and special needs students have, in many cases, mandated particular approaches to instruction rather than permitting the consideration of other, perhaps more effective, approaches to teaching and learning. This situation is further complicated by a bureaucratically controlled system that requires school districts to spend an excessive amount of time on paperwork and reports of limited value instead of on the investigation of individual outcomes that measure actual student progress and success. Standards of achievement should not be confused with the standardization of process. World-class schools are trusted and expected to use expertise and the proper resources to select the most appropriate ways in which to meet individual student needs.

Our Vision:

- Clearly identify the practical, realistic outcomes for students with special needs and then empower and expect schools to work toward the achievement of these goals.
- Research educational practices that have been successful with at-risk students and aggressively disseminate them throughout New Jersey.
- Coordinate regional or county professional development activities where identified staff can share successful activities and strategies.
- Mandate consistent and sufficient funding for at-risk students to address the diversity of student needs.
- Advocate for accountability to individual student measures of growth, rather than conformity to a fixed measure for all students.

Factor Eight:

Governance Policies and Practices Must Enhance Trust and Foster Collaboration, Communication, and Coordination.

Background:

In the past, school superintendents in New Jersey have been able to successfully work for many years in the same school districts. This provided for continuity and consistency in achieving a school system's vision for student learning and achievement. Today's statistics reveal that the average superintendent of schools remains for less than three years in one location. The removal of tenure for superintendents, despite the fact that superintendent tenure has been statistically proven to increase student achievement, has certainly contributed to this transience. Additionally, boards of education and others in the statewide community have become more involved in the daily decision-making of superintendents.

The current instability of leadership in New Jersey's school districts poses considerable challenges for the implementation of sustained, focused efforts to address student achievement. Due to this lack of stability and the major commitment of personal time necessary to successfully lead a district, it is understandable that the number of candidates for the superintendent position has dropped dramatically over the past few years.

Professional education practice needs to be left in the hands of professional, experienced, and skilled education practitioners, as is the case in other specialized fields including law, medicine, and engineering.

Our Vision:

- Require training of superintendents and boards of education on the roles, responsibilities, and processes involved in working collaboratively.
- Institute board-sponsored training on an on-going basis to acclimate new superintendents and new board members.
- Develop accountability mechanisms to address board members who impede a district's progress.
- Legislate incentives for supporting the work of good superintendents and boards.
- Mandate a five-year contract for superintendents so that an educational environment of sustainable leadership can be created.