

The Bridge

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A monthly newsletter for educators from the
New Jersey Department of Education



School Performance Issue

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In this Issue...

In this issue of *The Bridge* we discuss measures of school performance, which take many forms. Providing timely and useful data to districts is important so that schools can track their own progress both at a student and district level, but also so that districts can participate in shared goal setting for the future. Over the past two years, we have worked extensively to improve the type and timeliness of data to districts, much of which is discussed in this issue. To help provide clear information about New Jersey's schools, we have information about the new School Performance Reports which build upon and replace the previous annual School Report Cards. These new reports present a more complete picture of school performance, with the ultimate aim of helping schools and stakeholders engage in local goal setting and improvement.

We want all of our students to be college and career ready when they graduate from high school, but we also know that a one-size-fits-all approach to education does not work for every student. To fill this need, we are committed to providing a range of educational options for students, including both district and charter schools, and holding both accountable for results. Charter schools are public schools that are given flexibility in order to creatively problem solve and innovate, but they are held to strict standards throughout their life cycle. You will learn more about these standards, which are outlined in the Charter Performance Framework, in this issue. Those that do not meet these rigorous standards are closed, and

over the past three years we have closed eight underperforming charter schools.

To help facilitate goal setting and improvement on all levels, draft regulations for educator evaluation were proposed at the State Board of Education meeting on March 6. These proposed regulations support the TeachNJ Act and outline the requirements for the statewide implementation of the evaluation system, known as **AchieveNJ**, in 2013-14. These guidelines were shaped by the feedback from pilot districts and the state Evaluation Pilot Advisory Committee (EPAC). The evaluation team is currently holding informational meetings across the state to effectively communicate the details of **AchieveNJ** and the proposed regulations. Presentations will provide an opportunity for educators to not only learn more about the system, but also to provide feedback to the Department on how best to support local districts as they implement changes. For remaining regional presentations dates and locations – please register here: <http://www.nj.gov/education/AchieveNJ/resources/events.shtml>

All of this, along with our Common Core update, “Notes from the Road” providing insights from the New Jersey Teacher of the Year, our Education Spotlight series featuring an inspirational student from Perth Amboy, and our news and resources are included in this month's issue of *The Bridge*. Enjoy.



New Jersey
Department of Education

Notes from the Road

This month I witnessed the power of collaboration and the positive impact it can have on education. During conversations with different stakeholders, there was one overarching commonality – the desire for everyone to be on the same page and educated about new initiatives – specifically the Common Core State Standards.

At the end of February, Susan Toth, the Bergen County Teacher of the Year, invited me to the annual convention for the N.J. Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance. Susan is a dynamic teacher who is always looking for ways to motivate her students and staff to get active and stay healthy. While at the convention, I met and spoke with Health and Physical Education teachers throughout the state who were just as ambitious and dedicated.

During the workshops, teachers were learning and sharing ways to keep their students and colleagues active before, during and after school. They also discussed how they incorporate the core subjects (math and language arts) within their lessons. I was so excited to be a part of such an important conversation. The more invested the entire staff is to helping students master the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), the more students will achieve.

Last weekend, New Jersey Parent Teacher Association (NJPTA) President Charlotte Arr, invited me to attend the NJPTA Convention in Long Branch. I had a blast teaching parents brain-based strategies that will help their children learn and retain information. The parents were so energetic and motivated to help their children take ownership of their learning, and think critically. We spoke about the importance of creating strong partnerships between home and school.

When it came to discussion of the CCSS, the clear message was that everyone involved in educating students needed to be aware of the new requirements, and the depth of understanding that is now expected in order to be proficient. We are going to need collaboration on all levels in order to help our students achieve and succeed.

Lauren Marrocco, State Teacher of the Year

Graduation Rates

New Jersey's graduation rate increased from 83% in 2011 to 86% in 2012, the second year the state is using the new federally-mandated methodology for calculating the graduation rate. This more thorough method provides a more accurate and complete accounting of students who graduate by tracking the number of students in a four-year cohort. As the total number of graduates did not increase, the increase is likely due in part to better tracking and reporting of student-level data by districts.

Until now, the graduation rate for a given year was calculated by taking the number of students in a graduating class and dividing that number by the graduating class total plus the number of dropouts in the class over each of the four preceding years. This graduation rate methodology contained flaws that are widely considered to result in inflated rates, in large part because of some districts' under-reporting of dropout totals. Under this system, the 2010 statewide graduation rate was a reported 94.7%.

The 2012 graduation rate was calculated using a more thorough method of accounting that is being adopted as a national standard to account for all students who began high school four years earlier. Under the new system, districts are responsible for tracking student-level enrollment data using the statewide data system NJSMART. This data includes students who transfer out of the school and register in another New Jersey school or another state, students who emigrate out of the country, and any student deaths for the four years of each class of students, beginning in the 9th grade. If a district is able to provide documentation for one of these changes, these figures will be subtracted appropriately from the total size of the cohort as an entering 9th grade class. The size of the graduating class will then be divided by this figure.

This revised methodology was in place in 34 other states in 2012, and is currently being implemented in all 50. More information on the methodology change can be found here: <http://nj.gov/governor/news/news/552012/approved/20120430a.html>. A summary of the test results and graduation rates, as well as individual school and district results, are available at the following links: NJ ASK and HSPA: <http://www.nj.gov/education/schools/achievement/2013/>; Graduation Rates: <http://www.nj.gov/education/data/grate/2012/>

Charter Schools and the Performance Framework

Any teacher will tell you that every child is unique and learns in his or her own way. Therefore, a one-size-fits-all school approach does not work for every student. The Department recognizes this fact, and encourages a range of options to meet those needs so all students can be successful.

The New Jersey Legislature's authorization of charter schools in 1995 provided another way to create great schools in the state. Charter schools, although not part of the local district, are public schools, with public school students and public school teachers, funded with public dollars. Like district-run public schools, they are open to all students and, unlike many magnet and vocational schools, they are legally prohibited from using admissions criteria.

Charter schools receive additional autonomy from state and district regulations in exchange for a higher degree of accountability. This means they can be closed by the state at any time if they fail to get results for children or are poorly managed. A number of charter schools have found creative solutions for success, ranging from new ways to use time, incorporating technology, and addressing the "summer learning loss" that affects all students.

After a charter application is granted its initial approval, the Department conducts a "preparedness review" to evaluate whether a charter applicant has the academic and operational capacity in place to offer a strong educational program. Applicants are required to submit documentation of compliance with state regulations, and Department staff conduct a site visit of the school facility by June 30th of the application year. The Commissioner

and Department staff then review this information to determine which applicants will receive their final charter by July 15th to open in the fall.

The Performance Framework measures standards and metrics in three areas: whether the school is an academic success; whether the school is financially viable; and whether the school is equitable and organizationally sound. The Framework, which is used throughout the charter school's life cycle, sets clear expectations for schools and informs both the Department and individual school officials about school performance and accountability. By utilizing the Performance Framework in the charter approval and renewal process, NJDOE officials expand the rigorous standards and metrics by which each and every public charter school is evaluated.

The Framework defines charter school success and creates a comprehensive and systemic review process for all charter schools. Schools are assessed using multiple measures, such as how the school compares to similar "peer" schools; progress of individual subgroups of students and the school as a whole over time; whether the school is financially healthy and sustainable; whether the school has equitable admissions and enrollment practices to serve all students; and whether the school offers a safe and structured learning environment.

For more information on the framework go to: <http://www.nj.gov/education/chartsch/PerformanceFramework.pdf>

For more information on charter schools go to: <http://www.nj.gov/education/chartsch/>

School Performance Reports

The new School Performance Reports build upon and replace the previous annual School Report Cards and provide schools and the public with information about school performance in the 2011-2012 school year. These reports, as outlined in New Jersey's NCLB flexibility request, were developed with the input of stakeholders across the state in both informal conversations and through a workgroup that included representatives from the NJEA, New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association (NJPSA), New Jersey Association of School Administrators (NJASA), New Jersey School Boards Association (NJSBA) and the New Jersey Parent Teacher Association (NJPTA). As compared to the former School Report Cards, these reports provide a significant amount of new data in order to present a more complete picture of school performance, with the ultimate aim of helping schools and stakeholders engage in local goal setting and improvement. Among others, this includes metrics at all grade levels to identify the extent to which students are demonstrating skills and behaviors indicative of college and career readiness.

In addition, the reports include for the first time a "peer school comparison" for each school in the state. This tool replaces the outdated and often inaccurate District Factor Group (DFG), and compares schools with similar grade configurations that are educating students with similar demographic characteristics such as free/reduced lunch eligibility, limited English proficiency or special education program participation. This data provides information about how similar schools are performing to help identify strengths

and areas for improvement. Together with additional data available in NJSMART, we hope that this publication provides the opportunity to have meaningful conversations around goal setting at the school and district level for the coming year.

For the first time, the Performance Reports include data on whether students are on track for college and career including the percentage of students chronically absent, students taking at least one AP test, and the percentage of students taking the SAT and PSAT. Measures of student growth are also included for the first time, utilizing the Student Growth Percentile (SGP) methodology. SGP creates a measure of how students progressed in grades 4 through 8 on the NJASK language arts literacy and math assessments when compared to other students with a similar NJASK test score history. A short video explaining the SGP methodology can be found here:

<http://www.state.nj.us/education/njsmart/performance>.

As educators have long stated, looking at proficiency levels alone do not provide a complete picture of school performance because students and schools all begin at different starting points. By partnering that proficiency data with growth information, these new reports can help educators identify where, for example, students are demonstrating low proficiency but high growth, or, conversely, high proficiency but low growth.

The school performance reports will be released to the public in the coming weeks.

Achieve NJ: Teach. Lead. Grow.

In schools, teachers and leaders have the greatest influence on student learning. Since 2010, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) has been working to improve educator evaluation and supports for improving educator practice. These efforts have included a two-year pilot that has involved more than 15,000 teachers and principals. Building on this work, New Jersey's historic 2012 TEACHNJ Act — unanimously approved by the state Legislature and signed into law by Governor Christie — mandates many requirements for the new statewide educator evaluation system and links tenure decisions to evaluation ratings. On March 6, 2013, the NJDOE proposed regulations outlining specific evaluation policies for 2013–14 — the first year of full statewide implementation of this new system, **AchieveNJ**.

AchieveNJ Guiding Principles

Our new **AchieveNJ** evaluation and support system is structured around several guiding principles:

1. **Educator effectiveness can and should be measured to ensure our students have the best teachers in the classroom.** A three-year study by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation recently affirmed the impact of evaluations and showed that huge variations exist between the most and least effective teachers — in some cases, up to an 11-month difference in student learning.

2. **Evaluations should always be based on multiple measures that include both learning outcomes and effective practice.** No teacher or principal should ever be assessed based on test scores alone, much less a single

test. Therefore, **AchieveNJ** includes a combination of student growth on objective measures and observations of a teacher's classroom practices and a principal's leadership practices conducted by appropriately trained observers.

3. **Timely feedback and high-quality professional development, tied to evaluations, are essential to help educators improve.** Evaluations provide educators with more opportunities to engage in high-quality professional conversations and nuanced data that can be used to tailor professional development to staff needs. Evaluations that do not contribute to these types of growth and development offer limited value.

4. **Evaluation and support systems should be developed with significant input from educators.** We have been working every step of the way over the past two years with those most affected: teachers and principals.

5. **Tenure and other forms of recognition should be based on effectiveness.** As codified in the new tenure law passed in 2012, educators should be recognized and rewarded based on the outcome of meaningful evaluations rather than simply time served.

Additional Resources and Contact Information

The **AchieveNJ** website www.nj.gov/education/AchieveNJ includes substantial resources about the new evaluation system, including a comprehensive presentation; overviews for teachers, principals, and FAQs. We are continuing to add new resources and appreciate your feedback. Please contact the Office of Evaluation directly at 609-777-3788 or educatorevaluation@doe.state.nj.us.

Student Spotlight



On a normal day of school two years ago a student rushed into his counselor's office in a state of agitation to announce that he had failed his permit test. To Eric Velasquez, a classified senior in the Special Education Department at Perth Amboy High School, this grade of 78 when he needed an 80 forced his self esteem to take a severe nose-dive. One week later, he retook and passed the test, and was once again at peace with himself.

So describes the continuing saga of Eric Velasquez's career in the Perth Amboy School District — a continuum of successes interspersed with some imagined "near misses" causing volumes of anxiety that would often send Eric into a tailspin. Eric struggles with the challenges that many students with disabilities face.

With each real or imagined slippery slope, someone has been there to catch him — his school counselor, his case-manager, his teachers, his crisis counselor, his clergyman, and most of all his devoted mother and father. Perth Amboy High School is uniquely set up to serve the needs of Special Education students and has one school counselor who specializes in working with this population. The Child Study Team is also located in the high school, which facilitates a close working relationship that has been developed and nurtured through the many years that this arrangement has been in place.

In spite of Eric's ongoing battle with disabilities, because of his support system, he entered his senior year with a grade point average of 4.0, was accepted into the National Honor Society, has SAT scores that total 1550, and was most recently awarded an academic scholarship to attend St Peter's University totaling close to \$90,000.

Common Core Q&A

Q: What are the Standards for Mathematical Practice in the Common Core? How should the Standards for Mathematical Practice be incorporated into instruction?

A: The Standards for Mathematical Practice describe varieties of expertise that mathematics educators at all levels should seek to develop in their students. These practices rest on important "processes and proficiencies" in mathematics education. The first of these are the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) process standards of problem solving, reasoning and proof, communication, representation, and connections. The second are the strands of mathematical proficiency specified in the National Research Council's report *Adding It Up*: adaptive reasoning, strategic competence, conceptual understanding (comprehension of mathematical concepts, operations and relations), procedural fluency (skill in carrying out procedures flexibly, accurately, efficiently and appropriately), and productive disposition (habitual inclination to see mathematics as sensible, useful, and worthwhile, coupled with a belief in diligence and one's own efficacy). (www.corestandards.org)

These mathematical practices, as outlined in the standards, will look different in classrooms at each grade

level. One resource that demonstrates mathematics instruction in the classroom is the Illustrative Mathematics Project chaired by William McCallum who was an author of the Common Core Standards for Mathematics (<http://www.illustrativemathematics.org/>). This interactive blog has videos and tasks that illustrate the practices at different grade levels. The blog is also interactive allowing readers to post questions and engage in discussions about the common core standards with educators from across the country.

Overall, the Mathematical Practices represent an important component of the Common Core State Standards and should be thought of as having equal importance to the content standards. Developing these habits of mind and expertise will allow students to unlock more complex mathematics as the move through their years of instruction. To see how the practices will be assessed on PARCC please click here:

<http://www.parcconline.org/mc/f/mathematics/connections-parcc-assessment>.



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Resources

New Jersey School Climate Survey

The New Jersey Department of Education’s (NJDOE) Office of Student Support Services, in collaboration with the Bloustein Center for Survey Research at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, has developed the New Jersey School Climate Survey (NJSJCS) and supportive materials. The materials available include a Survey Administration Guide, climate surveys for grades 3-12 and surveys for staff and parents.

The NJSJCS is based on the domains for school climate (i.e., physical environment, emotional environment, teaching and learning, relationships, community engagement, morale in the school community) identified in the research literature. The questionnaires are drawn from field-tested survey instruments from multiple sources.

Schools are encouraged but not required to use the free NJSJCS tools to support local school climate and culture improvement activities. The materials are provided as a service to help schools understand and improve local safe and supportive conditions for learning.

The NJSJCS can be used to collect and analyze objective information from diverse school populations (i.e., students, staff and parents) in order to draw actionable conclusions for reinforcing positive conditions for learning and addressing vulnerabilities in conditions for learning. The NJSJCS also can be used to assist schools, particularly school safety teams, in meeting their obligations under the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act to “...develop, foster, and maintain a positive school climate by focusing on the on-going, systemic process and practices in the school and to address school climate issues such as harassment, intimidation, or bullying ...” and to “... review and strengthen school climate and the policies of the school to prevent and address harassment, intimidation, or bullying of students.”

The NJSJCS materials on its Keeping Our Kids Safe, Healthy and in School can be found here:

<http://www.nj.gov/education/students/safety/sandp/climate/>

Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect

Standardized training materials for school personnel on the identification and reporting of child abuse and neglect to meet the requirements of N.J.A.C. 6A:16-11 Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect are currently available for free on the DOE’s website at <http://www.state.nj.us/education/students/safety/socservices/abuse/training/>. The training materials, developed through a partnership with the Department of Education and the Department of Children and Families, include a narrated four-part PowerPoint presentation entitled: Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect: What School Personnel Need to Do, supplemental handouts that support the PowerPoint modules, and four post tests. These materials are designed to provide local school districts with a comprehensive and standardized resource to satisfy the requirements at N.J.A.C. 6A:16-11(a)8, which mandates that all local school district policies include a provision for training school district employees, volunteers and interns on the district’s policies and procedures for reporting allegations of missing, abused or neglected child situations and may be used for individual or group training. Additionally, these training materials include resources that will assist local school districts in creating a system of support for children who may be abused or neglected.

In the News....

Local, State and National Education News

Governor Christie Announces State Takeover of Schools in Camden – March 26, 2013

Governor Christie stood in Camden with a bipartisan group of state and community leaders as he outlined an aggressive plan of action by the Administration to take the lead in the district, assume operations, and bring the reform and resources needed to bring real educational opportunity to the City’s children.

http://www.philly.com/philly/news/20130326_N_J_to_take_over_Camden_schools.html

Officials from Pilot Districts Discuss New Teacher Evaluation – March 18, 2013

Officials from among the 30 school districts selected to pilot a new teacher evaluation system shared their experiences at a statewide forum.

<http://www.njspotlight.com/stories/13/03/17/from-pilot-teacher-evaluation-systems-words-of-encouragement-warning/>

Technology’s Impact on School Design – March 14, 2013

The impact that technology has on classroom instruction how learning environments are designed for new schools.

<http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2013/03/14/25newlook.h32.html?tkn=OZXFAvnL19QeGvd7zPEWalsxL9izzP8o8P7k&cmp=ENL-EU NEWS1&intc=EW-TC13-ENL>

Girls Encouraged to Follow STEM Career Paths – March 14, 2013

Students in Montclair have been participating in a 3-week celebration of STEM in a program called March Mathness. The program is designed to encourage girls to consider the career fields of Science, Technology, Engineering and Math.

http://www.northjersey.com/news/197976301_Girls_flex_their_math_muscles_in_Montclair.html?page=all

In South Jersey, middle school and high school aged girls participated in a Women in Technology Fair held at Gloucester County Community College.

http://www.nj.com/gloucester-county/index.ssf/2013/03/girls_explore_stem_fields_at_g.html#incart_river

More Details Emerging on New State Tests – March 6, 2013

School districts statewide received more information about the types of tests that are planned to be introduced in New Jersey and 21 other states participating in the Partnerships for Assessment for College and Careers consortium. The new exams are scheduled to begin on line during the 2014-15 school year.

<http://www.njspotlight.com/stories/13/03/05/new-jersey-gets-glimpse-of-the-state-tests-of-tomorrow/>

FY 14 Proposed Education Budget Reflects Continued Commitment to Public Schools – February 28, 2013

Governor Christie’s proposed state budget includes an all-time high in state aid for New Jersey’s public schools.

<http://www.state.nj.us/education/news/2013/0228aid.htm>