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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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November 12, 2014

TO: Chief School Administrators
Charter School Lead Persons
School Leaders

ROUTE TO: All District Principals, Assistant/Vice Principals, and Teaching Staff Members

FROM: Peter Shulman, Assistant Commissioner/Chief Talent Officer *PS*
Division of Teacher and Leader Effectiveness

SUBJECT: AchieveNJ Update

IN THIS MEMO:

- I. [Release of 2013-14 Preliminary Implementation Report on Teacher Evaluation](#)
- II. [Notice of Grant Opportunities: New Achievement Coaches Program](#)

I am writing today to share our preliminary findings about the first year of teacher evaluation implementation. I am also pleased to remind you of our grant opportunity to fund districts and educators for taking leadership roles in creating and delivering professional development. Please review this memo and visit the [AchieveNJ website](#) for more information. As always I invite you to send any comments or questions to educatorevaluation@doe.state.nj.us.

I. Release of 2013-14 Preliminary Implementation Report on Teacher Evaluation

Today we have published the [2013-14 Preliminary Implementation Report on Teacher Evaluation](#) based on a variety of data sources, including contributions from partner districts who shared their time and information. **This report does not include analysis of final summative evaluations for all teachers in 2013-14. We will publish an updated version next spring when all statewide data is available.** While much of the preliminary report discusses elements of the evaluation process, what we care most about is the outcome: whether teachers are actually getting more useful feedback and information that helps them do their best work. While it is too soon to draw broad conclusions about the success of any one component – or of the system itself – what is clear from this study is what we hypothesized from the start: New Jersey is home to countless outstanding educators and leaders who do what it takes to help every student achieve at high levels.

Developing a fair and effective educator evaluation system is a multi-year process that depends on local teachers and leaders taking ownership of the work. Even at this early stage, preliminary results from 2013-14 show that AchieveNJ is allowing districts to better identify areas of strength and weakness in teacher practice and to respond accordingly to this information. As the report explains, the most notable findings to date include the following:

- The system is based on and continues to be shaped by **extensive educator input and engagement**.
 - The two-year pilot program included 7,354 teachers, 276 administrators, and 30 districts.
 - Since the spring of 2013, Department staff members have conducted or participated in hundreds of presentations and workshops at the school, district, regional, and association levels, visiting over 350 school districts in the state. Over 25,000 educators attended some form of training, workshop or presentation offered by the Department in 2013-14.
- Many educators are using **SGOs to focus on their practice and on individual student growth**.
 - For the first time, the vast majority of teachers in New Jersey are setting specific and measurable learning goals for their students through the SGO process.
 - Many educators found the process of developing SGOs to be beneficial to their practice.
 - Educators in the report sample commonly used pre-existing assessments for SGOs rather than adding new assessments.
- New Jersey teachers are receiving **more observations and feedback than ever before**, and school leaders are focusing more of their time and talent on instructional quality in schools.
 - The majority of all teachers received at least the three required observations, with an estimated increase of 180,000 observations for tenured teachers in 2013-14.
 - Districts are differentiating between the most and least effective teaching in their schools – and between the most and least effective elements of a specific lesson.
- An analysis of observations can help **administrators see and respond to common areas for teacher and school development**.
 - Leaders are examining the trends across lessons to determine where to focus their efforts for further teacher or observer professional development.
- Feedback from educators is **helping the Department to identify and respond to challenges** with improved guidance, direct district support, and changes in requirements as appropriate.
 - For each major challenge identified, the state has released improved guidance and/or workshop opportunities and granted waivers or made regulatory adjustments as needed.

In the second full year of implementing AchieveNJ, the state continues to examine if and how the system is, in fact, giving teachers more frequent, thorough, and useful feedback; shaping professional development plans for individuals and districts; and increasing the use of data in classrooms, schools, and districts. Particular areas of focus for 2014-15 include:

- Identifying barriers and best practices;
- Offering targeted solutions; and
- Coordinating support and empowering district and school leaders – including teachers.

Just as a teacher grows and improves year after year, building on successes and making adjustments so as to not repeat mistakes, the Department continues to work with the state advisory committee, stakeholder groups, and practicing educators to improve AchieveNJ. I hope you will take time to read this preliminary report and continue to provide us with your feedback and suggestions.

II. Notice of Grant Opportunities: New Achievement Coaches Program

As the preliminary report referenced above shows, new evaluation systems are most successful when local teachers and leaders take ownership of the work. To help support the transition from districts complying with evaluation requirements to owning systems of improvement, we are offering grants to fund a new opportunity. As announced last month and explained in this [October 28 memo](#), the new Achievement Coaches program will place educators at the center of an effort to create high-quality professional development opportunities for their peers across the state. The content for this professional development will be developed by district educators in response to major findings from 2013-14 and to feedback from grant participants about the kinds of supports most needed in schools and districts.

Please take time to review the following information and consider partnering with us in this effort:

- [Press release](#) announcing the grants
- [Achievement Coaches program overview](#)
- Notice of Grant Opportunity (NGO) descriptions and applications:
 - [Achievement Coaches NGO](#): Due November 19, 2014
 - [Achievement Coaches Content Development NGO](#): Due November 25, 2014

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c: Members, State Board of Education
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