



State of New Jersey
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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CHRIS CHRISTIE
Governor

KIM GUADAGNO
Lt. Governor

CHRISTOPHER D. CERF
Acting Commissioner

October 26, 2011

Dear Superintendents:

Last August, we released the results of a survey of over 480 Superintendents across the state. In those results, we heard loud and clear that there were a number of areas that the Department was not operating at the level we would expect. Most troubling to me, we heard from you that the Department was not successfully serving its primary role - to support student achievement and to prepare all students for college and career. You shared that the Department's efforts to provide instructional support were often inadequate, and that the Department's work with you was often not coordinated and at times even contradictory.

We committed then to moving away from a bureaucratic, compliance based organization to one that is singularly focused on supporting your work with students. The first step of that was to completely reorganize the Department around the four key building blocks of success: academics, performance and accountability, talent, and innovation. This shift was much more than a change on an org chart. It was a fundamental shift of our staff and resources around what we think matters the most.

Today, I wanted to share the next step of our reorganization with you. In order to ensure that we are effectively and efficiently supporting student growth, we will be developing seven regional achievement offices throughout the state whose primary goal will be to support our schools, particularly our lowest performing schools, in increasing student achievement. Led by Regional Achievement Directors, these seven offices will consolidate a number of Department teams to provide more coordinated and direct regional support.

By developing these offices outside of Trenton, we are investing in staff that will be on the ground, working with each of you to deliver the resources needed to enhance student performance, including instructional support, professional development, and technical assistance. Ultimately, we believe this work can only be done if staff is out at the district and school level, working closely with you. Each regional office will have specific performance target goals, and in addition to targeted assistance, will work with districts to build capacity at both the district and school level.

These new offices will allow us to do many things at a more intensive level than we have ever done before. We will provide regional offices with data specific to each district, each school, and even student subgroups so that they can clearly identify key areas of improvement and provide the support and resources needed. We will be able to do this without sacrificing the compliance and regulatory support that we already offer. To ensure that this new structure is effective, we will hold the Regional Achievement Directors and their teams accountable for school improvement and driving student achievement results.

These regional offices will partner with the 21 existing county offices. While the county offices have done a great job of working with districts in a range of areas over the last several years, their statutory obligations and compliance responsibilities, along with the complexity of our organizational structure,

have not allowed them to provide the kind of on-the-ground support that many of you have sought from us. So, the new structure will preserve the best of the county offices – namely, their important compliance and regulatory functions – while enhancing them through the curricular, professional development and other achievement-based supports of the regional offices.

Though this change will not fully take place until the 2012-13 school year, we are taking steps today to begin to move the Department of Education in this direction. In the coming days, we will be posting job descriptions to hire new Regional Achievement Directors. We will also be working with existing staff to ensure that our resources are aligned to the types of support that we think will help to support student growth across the state.

This announcement today is just one more step to make sure that we are laser focused on giving the right type of support to you as you work daily with your students. As you are doing at the local level, we at the Department must stay constantly vigilant to make sure that we are deploying our staff and resources in a way that most directly supports student growth throughout the state. As always, I welcome your feedback and any thoughts on additional ways the Department can support your vital work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ch D Cerf', written in a cursive style.

Christopher D. Cerf
Acting Commissioner

CDC/JB/PC/gm

c: State Board of Education

Executive County Superintendents

NJLEE Group and Garden State Coalition