

New Jersey High Schools – Setting a Course for the Future

On September 27, 2005, New Jersey Governor Richard Codey and Prudential Financial CEO Art Ryan convened 60 of the state's education leaders for an entire day to discuss one topic: High School. But they had a lot to talk about.

The recent National Education Summit on High Schools raised public awareness about the need to consider the future of high school. Summit participants and Summit watchers were exposed to some startling statistics, facts that painted a grim future for the U.S. in economic, social and moral terms:

- Although jobs that require at least some postsecondary education will make up more than two-thirds of new jobs, high school graduation rates in the United States have actually declined since the early 1980s. U.S. graduation rates fall below those of many industrialized countries.
- Of the U.S. students who graduate, studies have found that only half are prepared for college-level reading and 40 percent are prepared for college-level math. Comparatively, U.S. high school student performance on international assessments of math and science consistently rank in the lower half or lower quartile of all countries participating.
- The outcomes for poor and minority students in high school and college preparedness are even bleaker. Half of all African-American and Hispanic students will drop out and only 18 percent will graduate from high school ready for college. In addition, children from affluent families are 11 times more likely to earn a bachelor's degree than are children from low-income families.

While describing the urgent need for reform, the Summit also gave participants a sense of optimism. Recent research provided greater clarity about what students needed to know and be able to do to be ready for work or for further education upon graduation. And there are successful strategies that had helped certain schools, communities and states improve graduation rates and student preparedness toward these benchmarks.

At the conclusion of the Summit, the state of New Jersey committed to participate in the American Diploma Project Network (ADP Network). The ADP Network is comprised of 13 (now 22) states who would support each other in making the policy, legislative and programmatic changes necessary to help all students graduate from high school ready for work or for further education.

Three leaders supported New Jersey's commitment: Acting Governor Codey, Prudential Financial CEO Art Ryan and Montclair State University President, Susan Cole. The public/private collaboration behind this group was of long standing.

Art Ryan, in his capacity as chair of the Business Coalition for Educational Excellence, had collaborated with four gubernatorial administrations to help drive general standards-based reform in the state. Susan Cole, President of Montclair State University, had participated in a wide range of public education initiatives, including leading one of the state's best university/public school partnerships.

To begin New Jersey's efforts toward ADP Network goals, this team agreed they must invite other education leaders to help them. Thus, they formed a broader Steering Committee to create a New Jersey Education Summit on High Schools. In turn, that group invited an even wider spectrum of education leaders to the meeting, including those already involved in high school reform in the state. At the Summit, all were invited to join in developing a shared action plan to address high school issues.

Summit participants received an extensive briefing book prior to the meeting (copy attached) that outlined national and state high school data. During the first half of the session, they heard from nationally recognized experts who discussed the need for and successful approaches to high school reform.

The morning's presentations echoed messages from the national Summit. Speakers noted that today's high schools were meeting and even exceeding the goals set for comprehensive public high schools, as outlined in the 1950s. However, it was also clear that the new global society was calling those goals into question, demanding more of students to succeed.

The experts argued that for those charged with the responsibility for high school reform, the question they must answer is: How should high schools change to prepare all students for work, study and citizenship in the future? In the afternoon, Summit participants gathered in small groups to begin to outline an action plan to address that question. They worked in four issue areas: Standards, Assessments, High Quality Teaching and Learning and High School Redesign.

The attached document reflects the recommendations of the Summit participants, updated to reflect progress made in key areas. They are being presented to Governor Corzine and his leadership team with recommendations that they be adopted and that further efforts continue the productive collaborations that have led to this point.

Communications and Stakeholder Cultivation

Goal

To develop a strong public will supporting substantive high school reform at the state and local levels.

At Issue

Broad and deep policy and programmatic changes will be necessary in order to ensure that all students will graduate high school ready for further study or work. State regulations, local district requirements, school curriculum and instruction – and possibly even the design of high schools – will have to change.

National opinion polls have indicated that there is a fairly strong public sentiment supporting the general topic of “high school reform.” However, when some of the particular challenges are explored, this backing fractures. How can New Jersey create a climate that supports necessary revisions in policy, that elicits calls for specific reforms among local stakeholders and that encourages students to pursue more ambitious courses of study?

Challenges

- According to a poll undertaken by Achieve, Inc. as many as two in five recent high school graduates say that there are gaps between the education they received in high school and the overall skills, abilities, and work habits that are expected of them today in college and in the work force. The vast majority of college students and high school graduates without a college degree say that they have gaps in preparation in at least one crucial subject or skill that they will face.
- The same survey found that college instructors and employers confirm graduates’ assessments in even harsher terms, as they estimate that similar numbers of graduates are inadequately prepared to meet their expectations. College instructors are especially critical and are unsatisfied with the job that high schools are doing in preparing students in writing and mathematics. Instructors report that they spend a significant amount of time teaching material that they believe should have been learned in high school.
- Again from Achieve, Inc., large majorities of recent high school graduates say they would have taken more challenging courses if they had either known more about what would be expected of them after graduation or if their high school had demanded more of them.

- A slim majority (51 percent) of New Jersey residents believe that high schools are in need of major changes or a complete overhaul. But more than 40 percent believe that high schools work pretty well or should basically be kept the same.
- In the same poll, in national findings, high school educators and the public differ in their views of high school reform. Although a majority of the public believes that all children should be held to high standards, a larger majority of high school teachers believe that students of poverty should not be expected to achieve the same levels as students from more affluent backgrounds.

Recommendations

1). Action: Develop series of convenings to build awareness of educators and the general public about the need for high school reform in New Jersey. These would be modeled on the events that were created to announce new regulatory requirements on teacher professional development of several years ago.

Accountable: Department of Education, NJ Education Association, NJ Principals and Supervisors Association, Business Coalition for Educational Excellence and New Jersey United for Higher School Standards

Timeline: March, April, May 2006

2). Action: Develop communications campaign for key audiences to build awareness about the need for high school reform and to encourage their support.

Accountable: New Jersey United for Higher School Standards

Timeline: In planning

3). Action: Encourage students to undertake more challenge in high school by expanding State Scholars Program to more school districts throughout state. Communications should include incentive of higher Pell Grants for completion of Scholars curriculum.

Accountable: Business Coalition for Educational Excellence

Timeline: Underway

4) Action: Create a council with multiple stakeholders to help coordinate important issues in education that span public education from preschool to postsecondary education, creating a seamless experience for students. This could use as models similar councils created in states like Indiana, Ohio and Kentucky.

Accountable: Governor's Office. Action could be taken through executive order or legislation.

Timeline: Begins in the Governor's Office and spins off in 5 years.

Standards

Goal

To align New Jersey high school standards and graduation requirements to college and workforce entry expectations.

At Issue

How can New Jersey develop and phase-in higher standards and graduation requirements over time to better reflect the requirements for success in credit-bearing postsecondary courses and well-paying jobs?

Challenges

- According to reviews by Achieve Inc., high school standards and graduation requirements in New Jersey do not reflect requirements for success in credit-bearing coursework in higher education or entry-level, well-paying jobs.
- New Jersey does not require all students to complete a college-and work-ready curriculum to graduate from high school. Instead, graduation requirements focus on time spent studying broad categories of subjects rather than specific knowledge and skills. Local graduation requirements vary widely. Postsecondary and workforce expectations are not well understood or adequately communicated.

Exemplary Solutions

- Higher education systems in California, Kentucky and Oklahoma have established “remediation-free” standards to clarify what incoming students need to know to place into credit-bearing college courses.
- Oregon has identified the level of knowledge and skill needed for college entry and aligned this with the state’s high school standards.
- Only two states (Arkansas and Texas) require all students to complete at least three years of rigorous math through Algebra II. Parents must “opt out” if they wish their students to complete a lesser diploma.
- When the San Jose Unified School District in California required all students to follow the college-preparatory curriculum required for admission to the University of California system, test scores of African-American 11th graders increased nearly seven times as much as those of other African-American students across the state.

Recommendations

- 1). Action:** Higher Education endorses the ADP Benchmarks
Accountable: The (college) President's Council
Timeline: Done
- 2). Action:** Business community endorses ADP Benchmarks
Accountable: Business Coalition for Educational Excellence
Timeline: February/March 2006
- 3). Action:** Joint higher education/business announcement of endorsement of the ADP Benchmarks
Accountable: President's Council and Business Coalition for Educational Excellence
Timeline: March/April 2006
- 4). Action:** Align the Core Curriculum Standards with ADP benchmarks
Accountable: Department of Education
Timeline: February 2006
- 5). Action:** Convene councils of teachers and supervisors of mathematics, language arts and sciences to discuss ADP benchmarks and need for high school reform.
Accountable: NJ Principals and Supervisors Association and NJ Education Association
Timeline: Next 9 months
- 6). Action:** Revise high school graduation requirements to include specific rigorous course content at the recommendation of the DOE
Accountable: Department of Education and The State Board of Education
Timeline: Spring 2006
- 7). Action:** Local districts align curriculum and instruction with revised standards and graduation requirements.
Accountable: Local Districts, Department of Education, Education Associations
Timeline: 2007-2008

Assessments

Goal

To ensure that a high school diploma signifies that students are prepared for postsecondary education and work.

At Issue

How can New Jersey establish an efficient and effective assessment system that not only measures student achievement, but also provides data that enable teachers, school leaders and families to address student learning and performance gaps?

Challenges

- According to Achieve, Inc., New Jersey's High School Performance Assessment (HSPA) does not measure college and work readiness. Sections of the test measure student skills at levels as low as seventh grade.
- Currently, not all New Jersey high school students pass the HSPA. How can an assessment system with higher expectations be used to help raise student achievement instead of raising dropout rates?
- New Jersey's colleges and universities do not use scores on high school tests for admissions or placement because these tests are not tied to postsecondary entry requirements.
- In order for students to be successful in a rigorous assessment system, school curricula must be aligned to state standards and assessments. Currently, the degree of alignment varies from district to district in New Jersey.

Exemplary Solutions

- The California State University system supplements the state's 11th grade test with a set of college-ready questions to use in admissions and placement decisions.
- The US Chamber of Commerce is currently field-testing the Workforce Readiness Credential (WRC) that will be administered in 6 states as a possible condition of employment. New Jersey is one of the six states participating in the study.
- In Indiana business and education leaders have recommended that all high school students complete the "Core 40" college and work readiness curriculum, beginning with the class of 2011. The state's end-of-course exams will tell students, parents, colleges and employers that students have met the "Core 40" standard. The business and education leaders also have called for the state's

colleges and universities to use students' test scores for admission and financial aid decisions.

- Texas uses the same test – but different scores – for high school graduation and college placement.
- Michigan policymakers have agreed to replace the state's high school exam with a college-ready test.

Recommendations

1). Action: Redesign the statewide assessment system.

Accountable: Department of Education, Statewide Assessment Advisory Committee

Timeline: 2006-2008

- A).** Creation of a shared vision for the assessment system.
- B).** Review high school exit exam options that measures work and college readiness.
 - This review will follow the development of grades 3-8 assessments, which began in December 2005.
 - This review will develop alternatives to the SRA and consider students who have difficulty passing the current exit exam
- C).** Implement performance-based assessments in all districts across the state
- D).** Investigate the use of end-of-course exams
 - To begin, the Department of Education in partnership with the other ADP states will fund the design of an Algebra II end-of-course exam. It is recommended that the end-of-course exams be high stakes and the grades be included on student transcripts, used for college placement and requirements for a diploma.

2). Action: Fully implement EdSmart, the student-level database.

Accountable: Department of Education

Timeline: 2005-2007

- During the 2005-2006 school year, the student-level database is being implemented in the Abbott districts. Currently three years of assessments data has been downloaded for all students and is matched with individual students. The database will be rolled out for the entire state during the 2006-2007 school year.
- A policy needs to be developed to determine how data will be shared with outside organizations.
- Investigate how to attain data for Pre-K students in publicly funded pre-schools and how to link EdSmart with higher education data systems.

3). Action: Ensure graduation rates are calculated accurately and consistently throughout the state.

Accountable: Department of Education

Timeline: Underway

- The graduation rate calculation is itself skewed and variable. For example, in many districts, graduation rates are calculated based on students that begin and complete their 12th grade year.
- The SRA also contributes to the misstatement of the graduation rate. Students that fail the High School Proficiency Assessment (which essentially measures eighth grade knowledge) are able to qualify for graduation through an alternative program without passing the test.
- Through implementation of student-level database and participation in NGA pilot, calculate cohort graduation rates starting in grade 8 through grade 12.

4). Action: Help all local districts train for and implement programs that utilize data to improve student achievement.

Accountable: Department of Education, Education Associations

Timeline: Underway

- Train end-users to use the data from the student-level database to improve teaching and learning.
- Districts are currently participating in the Assessment Literacy Institute offered by the NJPSA.
- Develop student performance snap shot to show information about individual students
- Train educators to use data for improved student achievement

High School Redesign

Goal

To implement approaches that ensure that all high schools are designed to prepare students for successful transitions to citizenship, college, and work.

At Issue

How must New Jersey high schools change if their responsibility is to ensure that all of their students graduate with a common core of knowledge and the skills necessary for postsecondary education and well-paying jobs? What can New Jersey do to help bring about the changes as rapidly as necessary?

Challenges

- High schools are fulfilling their historic mission of preparing students for an industrial economy rather than the new global knowledge-based economy. How can New Jersey support a variety of high school redesign approaches that prepare all students for successful transition to careers, college and citizenship?
- Too many students are disengaged and underachieving. In a survey of high school students, about 40 percent reported they were just going through the motions; more than one-third reported they neither tried hard nor paid attention in class. In a national poll of recent high school graduates, 80 percent reported that they should have taken more rigorous classes in high school.
- Because of the way high school graduation rates are calculated in the United States, we do not have an accurate picture of the high school dropout or non-completion rates. However, we do know that high school rates are significantly lower for ethnic and racial minorities and low-income students in New Jersey.

Exemplary Solutions

- Reorganize low-performing high schools first – those that fail to educate a majority of their students to even minimal standards. Several districts in New Jersey are looking to reformat their high schools to help more students succeed. For example, the Abbott High School Reform effort could provide a model for high school reform throughout the state. School districts in California, Illinois, Massachusetts and New York are aggressively closing down large, urban comprehensive high schools that are persistently failing and opening small accountable schools in their place.

- Some high school redesign efforts that exist in New Jersey are:
 - The Business Coalition for Educational Excellence’s State Scholars Program entitled *Learn More, Do More, Earn More* to ensure that students have the critical thinking skills to succeed in school and work.
 - International Baccalaureate Program
 - High Schools That Work
 - Early college high schools
 - Theme-based small schools
 - Career Academies

- Massachusetts, Pennsylvania and Virginia have extended learning opportunities in the 9th grade, including summer school, before and after school, and during elective periods to help students get on track to take college-prep classes by 10th grade.

Texas sponsors a \$38-million competitive grant program to spur its lowest-performing high schools to offer different education options. For example, the state encourages these high schools to restructure into early college high schools, which give students an opportunity to improve their basic skills, take college preparatory and college-level courses and graduate with a high school diploma and an associate degree – all in five years.

Recommendations

1). Action: Move forward with current high school redesign programs underway in state.

Accountable: Department of Education

Timeline: Underway

- High Schools That Work
- Abbott Districts Initiative

2). Action: The Department of Education will work with outside partners to develop a process and recommend consultants to help high schools assess the steps needed to successfully redesign.

Accountable: Department of Education

Timeline: Underway

- Develop a tool that identifies resources for districts
- Ensure that NJ QSAC accommodates new models of high school in its evaluation methods and continuous improvement processes and recommendations.

High Quality Teaching and Leadership

Goal

To create strategies for ensuring all high school students have access to highly effective teaching and school leadership they need to graduate ready for college and work.

At Issue

How can New Jersey ensure that teachers, principals and superintendents have the knowledge and skills needed to teach and lead effectively in high schools that prepare all students for further study and work?

Challenges

- New Jersey is currently facing a shortage of qualified Math, Science, and Special Education teachers, soon to be exacerbated by the retirement of large numbers of veteran teachers.
- Teacher attrition during the first five years of teaching is a national problem that is especially acute in low-performing, high poverty schools where experienced, expert teachers are most needed.
- The systems and tools for improving instruction in high schools are not well developed. There is less evidence about effective curriculum and instruction practices in high school than there is in elementary school. There is also a weaker research base on teaching English language learners and students with special needs.
- In order for all NJ high school students to achieve to high standards, teachers need deep content knowledge and a broad repertoire of pedagogical skills that will enable them to engage and succeed with all learners.
- Research shows that professional development for teachers is most successful when it is sustained, intensive, focused on content and pedagogy, tied to the learning needs of students, collaborative, and job-embedded. Very few high schools are organized and structured to provide professional development that meets these criteria.
- The jobs of high school principals and superintendents -- already demanding -- are becoming more difficult. Expectations and accountability for school performance are increasing and threaten to outstrip the preparation, support and authority principals and superintendents receive. School districts with the greatest concentrations of poverty, the most challenging conditions and the lowest salaries find it increasingly difficult to attract and retain candidates for leadership jobs.

Exemplary Solutions

- Improve beginning teacher knowledge and skills through standards-based teacher education, holding teacher education programs accountable for their graduates' performance, and raising the Praxis passing scores.
- Provide incentives and support for more New Jersey teachers to pursue and attain National Board Certification in their subject areas. New Jersey currently ranks 49th in the states in terms of the number of teachers who have achieved certification.
- Provide incentives to attract and retain the best school leaders and teachers in areas of shortage and in low-performing schools. In other states, these incentives include loan forgiveness, mortgage assistance, and hiring and retention bonuses.
- Provide meaningful instruction, support, and intensive high quality mentoring for new teachers to stem the tide of attrition. North Carolina surveys teachers about working conditions and is using the information to address teacher concerns and better retain teachers where they are needed most.
- Invest in high quality, intensive teacher professional development that is focused on content and pedagogy.
- Improve principal and superintendent recruitment, preparation and professional development. State and local education leaders should work together to define more clearly the roles of high school principals and superintendents, providing them with the necessary authority over budget and personnel to carry out their role effectively, and hold them accountable for results.

Recommendations

1). Action: Create a taskforce for state implementation to identify the obstacles that impede recruitment and retention of teachers.

Accountable: Commissioner of Education and State Board of Education

Timeline: Pending. Report prepared for Commissioner.

- The taskforce would include a diverse group of members

2). Action: Create a taskforce for state implementation to identify the obstacles that impede recruitment and retention of school leaders.

Accountable: Commissioner of Education and State Board of Education

Timeline: Pending action by Department of Education.

- The taskforce will review the general summary of the Critical Friends Report on education leadership programs.

New Jersey Education Summit on High Schools September 27, 2005

Co-chairs:

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Steering Committee:

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Please note: The above committee will be expanded to include more stakeholders once Governor Corzine reviews and approves the draft plan.

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