



Report of the
Education, Access, and Opportunity
Transition Advisory Committee

Submitted to Governor-elect Phil Murphy and Lieutenant
Governor-elect Sheila Oliver

January 1, 2018

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Education Transition Advisory Committee proposes that the Governor-elect consider the following recommendations to accomplish these priorities:

K-12 EDUCATION

- I. Priority: Fully Fund the School Funding Reform Act (SFRA)**
 - i. Analyze the current school funding formula and release the results
 - ii. Review the funding formula's efficacy and recommend improvements

- II. Priority: Prepare every student for the 21st century with excellent and innovative public schools**
 - i. Encourage the State Board of Education to review and update its draft strategic plan
 - ii. Develop guidelines and standards for whole child development and growth
 - iii. Pause new charter school approvals and review current charter school regulation
 - iv. Expand and upgrade vocational-technical education
 - v. Develop a high-quality STEM education curriculum for all students

- III. Priority: Reassess the role of state standardized testing**
 - i. Reduce the role of standardized tests in teacher evaluations
 - ii. Decouple PARCC from high school graduation requirements

- IV. Priority: Train and attract excellent teachers**
 - i. Increase the diversity of our teaching population
 - ii. Provide incentives and training for those teaching hard-to-fill subjects or in under-resourced communities
 - iii. Create new opportunities for teacher leadership

- V. Priority: Increase the number of New Jersey communities offering high-quality pre-school**
 - i. Increase funding for early childhood education as soon as funds are available

HIGHER EDUCATION

- I. Priority: Increase college affordability**
 - i. Start New Jersey on the path towards offering free community college
 - ii. Strengthen the Tuition Aid Grant (TAG) and Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) programs
 - iii. Reform state student loans to alleviate debt burdens

- II. Priority: Increase college completion and enrollment**
 - i. Expand dual-enrollment programs and high school and college counseling services
 - ii. Provide in-school supports to increase retention and completion
 - iii. Improve credit transfer between New Jersey higher education institutions
 - iv. Measure progress using the NJ Earnings to Education Data System (NJEEDS)

- III. Priority: Increase opportunities for experiential learning and on-the-job training**
 - i. Create sector-specific apprenticeship programs
 - ii. Provide funding for low-income students to pursue unpaid internships
 - iii. Create an inventory of paid internships/practicums

REPORT

K-12 EDUCATION

I. PRIORITY: FULLY FUND SFRA

The School Funding Reform Act (SFRA) was enacted in early 2008. When the state Supreme Court deemed it constitutional, it was a landmark moment after 25 years of school funding litigation. SFRA is intended to make school funding predictable and progressive, but it has not been properly implemented. The state has underfunded the formula by over 9 billion dollars, and nearly three-quarters of students have not received their promised state aid. The Murphy Administration and the legislature should reduce the school funding deficit in an equitable and constitutional manner.

i. **Recommendation: Analyze the current formula and publicly release the results**

To ensure public understanding and support for a plan to fully fund the SFRA funding formula, the public needs to fully understand its long-term implications. Such an understanding begins by preparing a detailed report on the proposed funding for each district.

The formula should be used to inform the Governor's FY 2019 budget recommendations, even if financial constraints require that full funding may not be achieved immediately.

Fully funding SFRA is estimated to cost an additional \$900 million. For FY 2018, the state allocated \$7.9 billion in formula aid.

ii. **Recommendation: Review the formula's efficacy and recommend improvements**

After analyzing the school funding formula, the administration can then develop a long-term funding strategy. SFRA reviewers should pay special attention to adjustment aid, special education funding, and early childhood education funding.

Before the FY 2020 budget, this administration should announce its plans for the state to fund education in a progressive manner that alleviates property tax burdens.

II. PRIORITY: PREPARE EVERY STUDENT FOR THE 21ST CENTURY WITH EXCELLENT AND INNOVATIVE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

New Jersey has some of the nation's best public schools. However, there are nearly 700 school districts and enormous variation between them. The state's goal should be to deliver an effective education for all students, and it must implement this goal while understanding that economic opportunities and societal expectations are rapidly changing.

i. **Recommendation: Encourage the State Board of Education to review and update its draft strategic plan for education**

A draft Strategic Plan is awaiting approval by the State Board of Education. This administration should work with the State Board of Education and the Department of Education to review the draft plan, consult with stakeholders, align it to the priorities of the new administration, and adopt the revisions. The state plan review should also include an assessment of education department's structure and focus.

Special attention should be paid to reviewing the Quality Single Accountability Continuum (QSAC) and the school performance report card. The commissioner and state board should assess

the Department of Education's capacity to support and encourage school district quality and improvement.

ii. Recommendation: Develop guidelines and standards for whole child development and growth

The Department of Education should develop appropriate State Standards to support the development of well-rounded residents and encourage all our schools to develop a positive school culture and climate.

Our current NJ Student Learning Standards generally promote academic achievement. Any new or revised standards should promote social and emotional learning (SEL), as well as other 21st century "soft skills", as foundations for student success. SEL includes skills like self-control, perseverance, and reading social cues.

Accompanying guidelines should support the building of capacity in our schools to resolve conflicts through respectful and collective decision-making. It should also increase the usage of restorative justice, which replaces typical disciplinary methods (e.g., suspension) with discussions about why students misbehave, how it harms their peers, and the means of reconciliation.

In addition, the department should review and consider the inclusion of questions about adverse childhood experiences (ACE) in the state's Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Study, as done in several other states.

Finally, the guidelines should also ensure that our schools are inclusive and supportive of our State's diverse population.

iii. Recommendation: Pause new charter school expansion

New Jersey passed charter school legislation in 1995. Since then, critics and supporters of these schools have raised questions about their authorization, funding, admissions, and evaluation.

The Governor-elect should consider a pause on the creation of new charter schools. The commissioner should then review charter schools' history, their impact on New Jersey, geographic distribution, and best practices from other states with leading public education systems.

The commissioner should then make recommendations on the application, sanction, and closure processes.

iv. Recommendation: Expand and upgrade vocational-technical education

New Jersey has excellent vocational-technical schools in each county, but they have not received enough attention or support. They are currently turning away over 15,000 students annually, and many of their facilities now require significant upgrades.

The commissioner of education should develop strategies to help more students receive technical training and improve how these schools work with businesses. The department should also develop high-quality programs for these schools in fields like advanced manufacturing and information technology.

The department should also review teacher certification requirements, funding, and graduation requirements for students in vocational technical schools.

v. Recommendation: Develop a high-quality STEM curriculum for all students

As New Jersey seeks to recapture its role in the Innovation Economy, connecting public education to modern technological change is essential.

The State should collaborate with leaders in science and technology education to develop a curriculum that includes both advanced technical skills (e.g., coding) and skills that are difficult to automate (e.g., emotional intelligence, adaptability and collaboration).

The State should work with philanthropies and educators to develop a “computer science for all” initiative. Computing related jobs are growing at three times the national average, and yet only 40% of our schools teach computer science nationwide. Less than half of New Jersey’s high schools offer AP Computer Science. New Jersey must increase its investment in computer science teachers and pursue other creative strategies to expand computer science offerings.

III. PRIORITY: REASSESS THE ROLE OF STANDARDIZED TESTING IN NEW JERSEY

After No Child Left Behind and other federal initiatives spurred an increase in standardized testing, states have recently started to reflect on the impacts. A national study found that in major cities, students took an average of 112 tests between pre-K and 12th grade. Many states have reconsidered the role of tests in teacher evaluations, and the number of states that require testing for high school graduation has been cut in half. New Jersey has not been at the forefront of these efforts, despite significant grassroots activism against high-stakes testing. This administration should reconsider the state’s reliance on high stakes testing, and reduce the amount of class time spent in testing and test preparation.

i. Recommendation: Reduce the role of standardized tests in teacher evaluations

The Commissioner of Education should reduce the weighting of student performance on the PARCC used in overall ELA and Math grades 3-8 while updated teacher evaluation requirements are being formulated and implemented.

The Commissioner should review best practices for teacher evaluation nationwide and propose new approaches.

ii. Recommendation: Decouple PARCC from high school graduation requirements

The commissioner should develop new recommendations for high school graduation requirements, including multiple pathways towards graduation.

The State should create a task force to evaluate PARCC—its development, implementation, reliability, and fairness—and make recommendations for its successor.

New Jersey’s educational assessment system should be aligned to the Governor’s vision for New Jersey education, satisfy ESSA Requirements, be aligned to the NJ State Learning Standards, and provide reliable results.

IV. PRIORITY: TRAIN AND ATTRACT EXCELLENT TEACHERS

The work of teachers and education support professionals (ESPs) is essential to maximizing our children's opportunities. This administration should make clear that it respects and supports these professionals in order to attract and retain excellent teachers. Although New Jersey's teachers largely earn more than the national average, they are taking home less now than they did in 2010 and have to contend with our state's increasingly high costs of living. Teachers have felt marginalized as governments have bypassed the collective bargaining process. New teachers have also expressed the importance of meaningful professional development and career advancement that still lets them stay in the classroom. New Jersey has the potential to lead the nation in excellent teaching, and this administration should take every step to realize that opportunity.

i. Recommendation: Increase the diversity of our teaching population

Studies show that students learn better when their teachers reflect the classroom's diversity. New Jersey should improve outreach efforts to high schoolers and college students and encourage them to consider teaching in their community as careers.

New Jersey should also work to reduce bottlenecks for talented teachers from other states aiming to be certified here.

ii. Recommendation: Provide loan forgiveness and other incentives for those teaching hard-to-fill subjects or in under-resourced communities

Teacher salaries vary dramatically based on school district, and the average salary in the wealthiest suburban districts can be twice that of urban districts.

Students from poorer communities are also less likely to take STEM classes with teachers who have trained in appropriate fields.

This administration should immediately review where shortages exist, and introduce programs to address those gaps. These should include incentives like loan forgiveness or stipends. It should also include programs that train current teachers to fill the state's needs.

The State should consider expanding current programs or replicating other state's models if appropriate.

iii. Recommendation: Create new opportunities for teacher leadership

New Jersey should reduce teacher turnover by expanding district and statewide leadership opportunities for those in the classroom.

The Department of Education should introduce a "teacher liaison" position to make sure initiatives are being communicated to those most impacted. It should also create a policy fellowship program that allows teachers to create solutions for the problems they see daily.

The State should help districts expand teachers' roles. This might include creating career ladders that allow experienced teachers to remain in the classroom while getting paid for taking on additional responsibilities (e.g., mentoring, curriculum design).

V. PRIORITY: INCREASE THE NUMBER OF NEW JERSEY COMMUNITIES OFFERING HIGH-QUALITY PRE-SCHOOL

New Jersey has one of the country's best public pre-school programs, and the importance of early childhood education has been repeatedly reinforced by child development research. Unfortunately, less than 65 communities in New Jersey have high-quality, full day preschool for our state's three and four year olds.¹ Early childhood education is essential to an effective education system in New Jersey and should be a strategic priority for the Murphy Administration.

i. Recommendation: Increase funding for early childhood education as soon as funds are available

The Governor should provide a modest increase in early childhood education funding in the FY 2019 budget. This could in part be funded by philanthropic contributions or social impact bonds.

The education department should develop a long-term plan for fully funding early childhood education for all New Jersey families.

HIGHER EDUCATION

I. PRIORITY: INCREASE COLLEGE AFFORDABILITY

The costs of attending college have increased dramatically. Over the past two decades, the cost of New Jersey's four-year public schools have more than doubled. Since the great Recession, tuition costs have increased over 17% while state funding has declined by 20%. New Jersey is the country's biggest exporter of high school students, in part due to our high-cost colleges and universities. The Murphy administration should seek to make college more affordable.

i. Recommendation: Start New Jersey on the path towards offering free community college

¹ This is even after the state spent \$25 million on pre-k in the 2018 budget. https://prekourway.org/assets/Expand-NJs-Pre-K_Dec-2017.pdf

The Office of Higher Education should develop funding estimates and implementation plans for the New Jersey College Promise (for younger students who have recently completed high school) and New Jersey College Reconnect (for those re-entering the job market after a job change or long-term unemployment).

New Jersey should aim to begin implementation by the 2020 school year.

ii. Recommendation: Strengthen the Tuition Aid Grant (TAG) and Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) programs

The departing Administration has continually threatened EOF, one of the most progressive aid programs in the country. The Murphy Administration should assess EOF's effectiveness and ensure it helps non-traditional students. Currently four out of 10 college students are older than 25, and approximately half are low-income. The Office of Higher Education should better facilitate connections between EOF students and social services.

The administration should review opportunities to increase TAG amounts and coverage, especially for part-time students. The State should no longer automatically deny TAG to students who have defaulted on loans.

iii. Recommendation: Reform state student loans to alleviate debt burdens

In addition to the Governor-elect's proposal to use the public bank to offer low-cost loans, HESAA should take immediate actions on student loan reform. These should include:

- Creating state income-based repayment (IBR) options and connecting New Jersey borrowers to federal IBR programs
- Requiring a court order in order for HESAA to garnish wages
- Introducing Income Share Agreements (ISAs) and other novel student loan financing ideas at New Jersey schools

II. PRIORITY: INCREASE COLLEGE COMPLETION AND ENROLLMENT

This country has made great strides in increasing college enrollment, and New Jersey is a national leader for residents with college degrees. In late 2017, the state launched a campaign to ensure that 65% of adults will have a post-secondary credential by the year 2025. Currently only 50.2% of New Jersey's workers have some level of education or training beyond high school. The Murphy Administration should commit to achieving this goal. New Jersey should aim to be the best state for supporting students to and through college, as well as re-engaging those with some credit but no degree. Completion initiatives should be closely tied to affordability initiatives.

i. Recommendation: Expand dual-enrollment programs and high school and college counseling services

Effective college completion initiatives depend upon good counseling in high school and college. NJ should improve counseling for high school and college students through on-line and in-person counseling. Such counseling will help students determine appropriate coursework and academic majors related to their interests and the labor market.

The State should also promote dual enrollment programs and increase their usage across the state.

The Office of Higher Education should review and potentially expand the College Readiness Now program.

ii. Recommendation: Provide in-school supports to increase retention and completion

According to a National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education brief, 32% of students entering the State’s four-year colleges and 70% of students entering our two-year community colleges require remediation. Lack of readiness for college is a major culprit in low graduation rates, and data has shown that a majority of students who begin in remedial courses never complete their college degrees.

New Jersey should immediately review and then adopt best practices from across the country. This includes guided pathways, co-remediation, and mentorship programs.

New Jersey should replicate the ASAP model (which includes free textbooks, intensive mentoring, and guided pathways) that has proven to be effective in New York City and is now being piloted in Ohio.

iii. Recommendation: Improve credit transfer between New Jersey higher education institutions

The State should review and improve the enforcement of the 2008 Lampitt Law, which is intended to ensure smooth transfers between community colleges and colleges and universities. The State should also endorse reverse transfer agreement legislation that enables people with the proper credits from a “four-year institution” to receive an associate’s degree.

iv. Recommendation: Measure progress using the NJ Earnings to Education Data System (NJEEDS)

NJEEDS is the state’s P20W (preschool through workforce) longitudinal data system. The system was created in 2012, and publicly launched at the end of 2016.

This will be the first administration that can fully use NJEEDS to track progress on achieving higher retention and completion goals and to improve guidance to students and counselors.

III. PRIORITY: INCREASE OPPORTUNITIES FOR EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING AND ON-THE-JOB TRAINING

Experiential learning, including paid internships and co-operative education are valuable components of post-secondary education that prepare young people for jobs. Such programs are particularly important for lower-income college students, who benefit from skill-building and connections, as well as income.

i. Recommendation: Create sector-specific apprenticeship programs

Expand workforce training initiatives to provide industry (rather than firm) specific training for high-growth fields. The State should aim to launch the first of these programs during 2018.

ii. Recommendation: Provide funding for low-income students to pursue unpaid internships

Student aid programs should support low-income students who are receiving credit/experience for internships with significant employment potential.

This could be funded through public private partnerships, or state-backed no-interest loans.

iii. Recommendation: Create an inventory of paid internships/practicums

Working in collaboration with higher education institutions, New Jersey should create a website/clearinghouse for internship opportunities for college students.

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The Governor, Lieutenant Governor, and the entire senior transition team staff greatly appreciate the immense amount of work, participation and expertise that all our co-chairs, committee members and deputy directors who staffed each committee provided since the transition began in November. This hard work and positive energy about how New Jersey can once again become a national leader has resulted in a robust set of recommended priorities and actions for the incoming administration to consider. As with any collaborative endeavor, many recommendations and opinions were expressed and debated during the committee meetings and the drafting of the reports by co-chairs, committee members, and Deputy Directors. The final reports may contain recommendations that do not reflect the concurrence of all co-chairs or committee members, nor of the organizations they represent. These reports are purely advisory and do not reflect the positions of the Governor-elect or any other elected official.