

COMMISSIONER'S REPORT ON STATE EDUCATION INITIATIVES

by Commissioner William L. Librera

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Introduction

- Governor James E. McGreevey and I recognize that our state education system's effectiveness resides in every teacher's classroom. It is there we must start, if we are to make a difference in education. In that process of helping teachers become more effective, I view my role as a supporter and a collaborator with our local school districts' efforts.
- Education is a dynamic field that never runs short of critical issues. Sometimes they change slightly with the decades, but usually they center around some very basic essentials for success in educating our students.
- Governor McGreevey and I have grouped the state's critical issues into five major themes for us to address:
 - Teacher and administrator quality;
 - Raising student achievement;
 - Diverse and multiple paths for student success;
 - Innovative and outstanding practices/programs; and
 - Public engagement and communication and public accountability.

Teacher and Administrator Quality

- My vision of education is to place the Department of Education in a leadership role to further quality teaching and learning in this state. **Successful teaching is the key to student academic achievement**, and we must work together to find ways to improve teacher and administrative quality.
- We need to recruit teachers, develop student interest in a teaching career, and find ways to keep the 40 percent who leave the profession in the first five years from doing so. Research tells us that the most important way to hold teachers in the profession is to give them **adequate support** in the form of mentoring and collegial interaction.
- Teachers need common planning time, and they need time to observe and mentor each other. Local districts need to look for more imaginative and creative ways to give teachers time together in **school-based professional development**, and the students will benefit greatly from teaming efforts, joint planning, and collegial sharing.
- There are many things that we can do in our separate roles and also collaboratively. The department will work with our higher education partners to develop and implement **uniform standards** for teacher preparation programs.

- The alternate route has been successful in bringing new talent and experience into the classrooms for over twenty years. We will develop another support option for the alternate route that allows prospective teachers to fulfill the requirements through a **Master of Arts in Teaching** program.
- We also will adopt **professional standards for administrators** to ensure that they are prepared to assume critical leadership roles and develop alternative preparation programs, such as an “alternate route” for school administrators.
- We will seek assistance from our **corporate partners**. There are very successful models of professional development that could be replicated, such as the Merck Summer Professional Development Model for Science teachers currently being adapted for literacy and mathematics.
- The department will work vigorously to extend the present 100-hour professional development process to a more rigorous and coherent approach to **professional development** for all teachers.
- To meet our **literacy goal** of having all students learn to read at or above grade level by the end of grade three, we must make sure that our teachers in the early grades know how to teach reading. Therefore, we need to strengthen state requirements to ensure that all elementary teachers know how to teach reading.
- The rigor of a teacher’s preparation is important to his or her performance in the classroom over the long-term. We need to increase the minimum passing scores for **teacher certification** exams and then require teachers to teach in their areas of certification.
- According to a report published by the Education Trust, about 17 percent of high school classes in New Jersey are taught by teachers without at least a college minor in the subject, the seventh lowest in the country. We must collectively work on changing that statistic related to what is known as **out-of-field teaching**.
- We will encourage teachers to pursue **national certification**, which is a rigorous process that requires teachers to assemble professional portfolios, include samples of student work and lesson plans, and submit videos of their instruction and teaching methods. There are currently only 48 teachers in our state who hold a national certificate. Our goal is to have at least 2400, or one per school building.
- Governor McGreevey recognizes the importance of this critical issue, and he has already initiated actions to begin a program to upgrade our state’s teaching staff with their professional input and assistance. He has set up a teacher’s advisory council, and he is currently holding teacher town meetings in every county. We must find more ways to **reward teachers** with much-deserved recognition, such as we did in our recent Milken award events.
- One good piece of news recently was the award of a \$7.9 million state grant from the USDOE over three years to enhance **teacher quality** throughout the state. The grant was

awarded to New Jersey for our proposal to redesign teacher education programs; strengthen the alternate route; and provide mentoring support for novice teachers.

- In addition to teachers in the classroom, No Child Left Behind has specified that **teacher aides** must be upgraded by meeting new more rigorous standards. By 2006, there are 60,000 teacher aides in New Jersey who must have an associate's degree, or have two years of higher education, or pass a proficiency test to demonstrate that they are highly qualified.

Raising Student Achievement

- The second critical area that has taken on a new life under the new federal education act No Child Left Behind (NCLB), along with the development of highly qualified teachers, is the maintenance of high standards aligned with a federally mandated **state testing** program for grades 3-8.
- The goals of the McGreevey administration are certainly in concert with the main thrust of the new federal education act. We simply must do everything in our power to raise student achievement and that requires effort on everyone's part.
- The largest thrust in our efforts to raise student achievement is research-based. We know without a doubt that **early education** is critical to later achievement. Knowing how to read by the end of grade three is essential for success in any subject area in the subsequent school years. Between birth and three years of age, 90 percent of a child's mind develops. We simply cannot miss that opportunity to help children who do not have access to people and resources that help with that early development.
- For its part, the state is working on the quality of the **preschool programs** in the Abbott districts. Participation is way up. New staff that is hired is certified, and those who have been in the program but are not certified are working on obtaining their training and credentials. We have given districts early childhood curriculum guidelines and strategies to assist them in implementing the preschool programs.
- Many districts have been identified under Title I as needing assistance with raising achievement in reading skills. We know that the use of **reading coaches** is one powerful way to help teachers who are working with non-achieving students and may not know some of the most effective ways to reach slow readers. Governor McGreevey has committed \$10 million a year for four years to provide the reading coaches to districts most in need of this assistance. We currently have 30 coaches working with teachers in 80 schools.
- In the summer of 2002, we received a report from the **Governor's Task Force on Improving the Quality of Early Literacy Education** in New Jersey. The task force was charged with the responsibility of identifying best practices in teaching literacy and making sure we in New Jersey are not leaving any child behind because he or she cannot read. The task force report contains valuable recommendations that we must discuss and implement in every district.

- As an added boost to assist us with our reading goal, the New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) has received a six-year \$120 million **Reading First grant** to improve literacy from K-3. Districts with low reading scores are eligible for this grant money, specifically for early literacy initiatives.
- Governor McGreevey has gone a step beyond all of these initiatives and recommendations by creating his **Governor's Book Club** as one example of a strategy to encourage students to read. We call on all of you with young children/students to have your children/students participate in the book club. We also encourage you to find other innovative ways to promote reading, because in order to read well requires lots of practice. We are competing with the visual technological world when we try to get students to read. As important as technology is to society, we still measure our literacy by how well developed our verbal skills are.
- While our major thrust is early reading, all of us have the challenge of improving performance in all areas, especially math and science. Our newly revised **Core Curriculum Content Standards** in math, science and literacy, adopted by the State Board of Education in July 2002, are much more specific than the original ones adopted in 1996. The other four areas of standards are still being reviewed and discussed. We have examined the standards not just from a strictly academic viewpoint, but we have strengthened areas such as character development, self-esteem, and developing good safety habits. Our technology standards are updated and very important in giving districts guidance on preparing students for the workplace, as well as higher education.
- When we discuss student achievement, we must address the various **achievement gaps** and develop strategies to eliminate them. No Child Left Behind says that by 2014 we must eliminate disparities among whites, blacks, and Hispanics. We must work together on this problem. It will take persistence at every level. National issues are being discussed, such as whether all students should be expected to meet high standards. Yet, students themselves tell us that low expectations simply produce lower results, because school is dull and unchallenging.
- As we sort out and clarify the requirements under No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the department will act as a **resource to districts** rather than a monitor.
- Statistics show that about 48 percent of white students have graduated from college by age 24 while only 7 percent of minority students have. According to research from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, by the end of high school, 17-year-old minority students have the same set of reading skills as white students graduating from middle schools. When asked why, adults blame poverty, uncaring parents, and lack of health care. Children attribute it to teachers who don't know their subjects well, counselors who underestimate the student's potential, and low expectations.
- According to Kati Haycock of the Education Trust, common elements of success for student achievement are high standards for all students and support for those who need it. Teachers matter more than anyone else.

- The department is in the process of creating a **student-level database**. It is absolutely essential that we be able to track students individually from year to year, especially to determine whether we are making adequate progress in helping underachieving students. These data are necessary for us to identify trends and patterns of achievement and pinpoint the gaps that still exist.
- As unpleasant as the subject is, **statewide assessments** are mandated. However, we must make our assessment system fair and equitable so that it becomes our best tool in making progress toward overcoming achievement gaps. We must get back to the concept of making test into teaching tools for districts, as well as students. Where there are deficiencies, we need to work to eliminate them. Our assessments will help to identify the deficiencies.
- We are embarking on a new series of assessments that will encompass **grades 3-8** as required by NCLB. We will pay attention to the input we have received from districts on the Elementary School Proficiency Assessment (ESPA) especially. The department, with the assistance of the school community, will try to find ways to develop proficiency testing for students to demonstrate skills that are not measurable by pencil and paper assessments.
- We intend to administer a **new third grade test** this spring to ensure that New Jersey is meeting our third-grade literacy goal. We must establish a baseline to indicate progress in our efforts to have all students reading by the end of grade three.

Diverse and Multiple Paths for Student Achievement

- Reaching our ambitious achievement goals will require hard work, lots of discussion and analysis, deployment of new instructional strategies, upgrading our teaching staff, and keeping excellent teachers in the profession. Accomplishing all of this requires some willingness to unfetter our thinking about how districts construct programs. That leads us to the third critical issue of devising diverse and multiple paths for student success.
- As educators, we must take a look at our education system and what it needs to accomplish in the 21st century. We will always have the basic requirements of education, such as literacy in language and mathematics. However, our economy is now global and the workplace is changing very rapidly. As global business practices advance and create jobs that do not even exist today, we must make sure we have a **future workforce educated** to do such jobs that will require knowledge and skills beyond the basic education we are accustomed to offering in public schools.
- Although New Jersey is a national leader in innovation, research, and development, we face fierce competition from other states – and countries – for skilled workers.
- As our economy changes, we have new challenges and new opportunities to work together with our business community to give our young people the skills they need to compete for the best jobs in the global economy.

- Nationally, approximately 40% of students in college major in **business and business-related areas**, yet we have almost no high school courses that prepare for this career.
- There are tremendous advantages to career-focused programs. While they incorporate all of the requirements of the Core Curriculum Content Standards, including the workplace readiness standards, these programs help students prepare in high school for a specific career that they think they might like to follow.
- We have been encouraging districts to work with the business and corporate world and higher education to create partnerships that develop programs oriented toward specific careers. These **career-oriented programs** have two important functions. If a student has a strong interest in a career and has the opportunity to begin preparation at an early stage in high school, he or she will have a tremendous advantage in picking a college and gaining admission. If a student tries career-oriented courses and finds that it is not what he or she expected, that is a very valuable lesson to learn early also.
- To form a successful school/business partnership, it requires vision and commitment on the part of the school administration and school board, the business community, and higher education. Such vision is rare, but we encourage educators and parents to examine this path to offering our students programs that are challenging and useful for life.
- The job market will continue to place a premium on education and skills as more positions are created in the technical, professional, and management occupations.
- Several major industries have realized that it is essential to build a pipeline into their professions. Some have been aggressive like Cisco, but it is catching on with other companies in areas of construction, utilities, and pharmaceuticals that they need to partner with schools to build the pipeline. Some are creating industry standards and building career programs around them.
- I can proudly say we now have four **career academy programs** operating where they did not exist last year. Each one is different. These four do not count the many successful career academies and programs that have been in place in some of our technical schools such as Bergen, Monmouth, and Union to name a few. All of these programs provide multiple paths to student success and all are important. We will continue to explore and encourage additional partnerships that will benefit students all over the state.
- Our standards are clear and consistent, but we must be willing to look at new ways to help students reach the standards and at the same time be prepared for a future characterized by change and challenge.
- Governor McGreevey and I hope that students who take advantage of these exciting programs will ultimately consider residing in New Jersey and pursuing business here. Wherever students choose to work, it is our hope that career programs will be challenging enough to prepare them to be clear thinkers, ambitious professionals, and model citizens.
- The realm of career-oriented programs is one major avenue to student success. There are many other program approaches that we can develop to help students be successful. For

example, we need to examine the structure of the **senior year**, because for many students, it is a waste of time. Once students have passed the High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA), we must examine the many options we could offer them as they complete high school, such as service projects, internships, online courses, college-level courses, career academies, and there are others.

- We also need to look at **facilities** as assisting us in providing multiple paths to student success. The design of our buildings has a lot to do with how innovative or restricted our programs can be. New construction should be an integral part of the community and incorporate the resources of that neighborhood and community into school life. We intend to initiate five “renaissance schools” as a pilot program. These will be small schools designed to improve learning, as well as improve the surrounding neighborhoods.
- Not only should school buildings be an integral part of the community, but we must view education as integrated from pre-k to the end of college and beyond. It is critical that we create a seamless articulation of programming that keeps building toward complex skills and knowledge for students as they progress through all of the grades and college years.
- Not only should it be personally rewarding to learn, but it is economically rewarding, as well. Average annual earnings with no high school diploma are \$21,314 and over 40 years nets \$853,000. With a high school diploma -- \$30,560 and \$1.3 million over 40 years. With a two-year vocational degree -- \$36,833 and \$1.47 million. With a two-year college degree -- \$38,118 and \$1.52 million. With a Bachelor’s Degree -- \$49,344 and \$1.97 million. With a Master’s Degree -- \$57,676 and \$2.30 million. And with a professional degree or doctorate -- \$71,573 and \$2.86 million. (from the Employment Policy Foundation as reported in Education Daily on March 6, 2002) We can say with certainty that education pays.

Innovative and Outstanding Practices and Programs

- The fourth critical area is the utilization of innovation and awards for outstanding programs, performances, and efforts. If we are to improve instructional delivery, we must identify, reward, and replicate successful approaches and programs.
- The state will do its part in offering and encouraging others to offer **summer institutes and workshops** to give teachers new ways to teach and upgrade their skills. I would encourage all districts to give serious thought to ways it can develop its own innovative ideas to increase the quality and quantity of professional development opportunities.
- Districts should do more networking and sharing. This is much easier to do with the technology resources at our disposal. You can identify your successful programs and trade ideas with neighboring districts. Some districts have formed consortia for these purposes.
- On the state’s part, we will take whatever opportunities we can to improve our own approaches to **educational improvement**. One area I am currently working on is the return of our three state-operated districts to local control. We must do this without preconceived ideas and without the benefit of guidance in the law. I will work with the

three districts until we solve how to accomplish the return in the best interest of the state and the communities.

- In the future, where problems surface in districts, we will intervene sooner and use a greater variety of strategies to solve the problem short of taking over a district.

Public Communication, Engagement and Accountability

- Our fifth critical area centers around public engagement and communication and public accountability. Whether we are spending federal dollars, state aid, or local share, we cannot escape accountability for the performance in schools.
- In the department, we have set a very different course for ourselves in regard to public communication, engagement and accountability. We have completely reorganized the department to be more responsive to local districts' needs.
- We are shifting away from emphasis on compliance and oversight to one of support and technical assistance. The department has undergone a thorough **reorganization** into two functional sectors – central operations and field operations.
- A large part of the field operations will be delivered by our three regional offices that have incorporated the county offices into the regional delivery structure. Another part of the department with extensive field operations is the new Abbott division. The staff of this division works directly with the thirty Abbott districts.
- By having **regional offices** in the north, center and south of the state, we will be better able to deliver direct services and technical support to all districts. Some of the services that will soon be available in your regional office are statewide planning; creation of a seamless system of education pre-k to 14, 16, or 20; shared services; county AVA commissions, Educational Technology Training Centers (ETTCs), and Educational Services Commissions; certification examiners; replication of effective programs; and technical assistance for problem areas.
- The department will use technology to reach as many in the public as possible to keep everyone informed about what is happening in education in the state. Our Web site not only contains state-level information, it connects to local districts, as well.
- We have plans for many initiatives in these five critical areas for which we will enlist your support. Together we can make a difference.