



Acting Commissioner Cerf Applauds Work of Educators, Calls for More Comprehensive and Transparent Graduation Data

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Trenton, N.J. – Applauding the work of New Jersey’s educators and describing soon-to-come federally mandated changes to the state’s graduation rate methodology, acting Commissioner Chris Cerf today issued the following statement in response to Education Week’s *Diplomas Count* report. The report, which provides comparative graduation rate data across the 50 states, placed New Jersey at the top of nation with a graduation rate of 86.9 percent for the 2007-2008 school year.

“New Jersey’s graduation rate is a source of pride, indicating that we have excellent school programs and teachers who are doing a great job in helping our students graduate. However, it is important that we know if our students are truly college-ready by generating more comprehensive and transparent data. It’s the reason why New Jersey is currently improving the way it collects and reports graduation rate data to comply with federal requirements for uniform methodology among all states.

“Our most important goal must be to see that students who graduate from New Jersey’s high schools are college- and career-ready. Statistics show that’s not the case. In 2009-2010, 91 percent of first-time Bergen Community College students tested into remedial math or English. In fall 2009, 61.2% of full-time, first-year students at Union County College were enrolled in at least one remedial class. In fall 2007, 89.5% of Essex County College students tested into remedial math, 58.2% tested into remedial reading, and 82.9% tested into remedial writing. We’re very proud of our graduation rate – but other studies show that we still have much work to do.

“The state currently uses a system of calculating each district’s graduation rate that relies on their self-reported data. The shortcomings of that system can result in graduation rates that are not an accurate representation of what is actually occurring in some districts. New Jersey is moving to an improved system that will require schools to use student records and hard data to justify the reported rate, increasing both the accuracy and reliability of the graduation rates for each district.

“As a consequence, when New Jersey’s graduation rate data is reported under the new, more transparent and accurate methodology, it is likely that the reported graduation rate will experience a decline.”