



NJDOE News

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***â€œWelcome Back to School!â€™***

**New Jersey Schools Begin New School Year with New Graduation Requirements,  
Academic Standards and Reforms in Many Areas**

As children say goodbye to another summer vacation and begin the familiar rituals that lead up to the return to school, educators throughout the state are hard at work preparing for a year that will be punctuated by major reforms on many levels. These reforms are led by changes in state academic standards to reflect the expectations and challenges of the 21st century, and more rigorous and relevant high school graduation requirements to better prepare graduates for higher education and the workplace.

"We are fortunate in New Jersey to have Governor Corzineâ€™s unwavering support of our schools and students," said Commissioner of Education Lucille E. Davy. "In the face of a fiscal crisis that has resulted in crippling cuts to education in other states throughout the country, Governor Corzine has kept education funding intact and in fact has increased it by \$1.2 billion since he assumed office.

"Beyond that, he has sponsored programs designed to assist our neediest and most vulnerable students, including students with autism and preschool age children who are economically disadvantaged," Commissioner Davy added.

"Perhaps most of all, he has committed our resources to ensure a bright and prosperous future for New Jersey students and the stateâ€™s economy by supporting the teaching and learning of 21st century skills that are demanded by our institutions of higher education and the workplace," she said.

***NEW SCHOOLS***

An estimated 1,370,000 public school students will return to school in early September. Openings are planned for 12 newly constructed schools that are replacing unsafe or inadequate facilities. Funding for many of the new projects was made possible as the result of Governor Corzineâ€™s successful efforts to have the Legislature reauthorize \$3.9 billion in additional funds for new school building projects under the School Construction Act.

***NEW HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS***

New high school graduation requirements began last year for incoming freshmen (the class of 2012) and will be phased in over time. The new requirements include a total of 120 credits and the integration of 21st century skills across all content areas.

"The term â€œ21st century skillsâ€™ represents a movement away from the 20th century emphasis on rote learning and skills geared to specific jobs, towards skills now required by colleges and employers," Commissioner Davy said. "These skills include the abilities to work collaboratively, solve multi-step problems, think analytically and have technological literacy.

Visit <http://www.nj.gov/education/code/current/title6a/chap8.pdf> for New Jerseyâ€™s high school graduation requirements.

***REVISED STATE STANDARDS***

Local educators throughout the state are familiarizing themselves with revised state academic standards in several content areas adopted earlier this year by the State Board of Education. The standards, known as the Core Curriculum Content Standards, are statements of expectation about what students should know and be able to do at different grade levels. They also serve as the standard for measuring student achievement to determine whether individual schools and school districts are making adequate yearly progress under the No Child Left Behind Act.

New content standards were approved over the summer in science, visual and performing arts, comprehensive health and physical education, technology, 21st century life and careers, world languages, with social studies scheduled for adoption in September.

Decisions regarding revised language arts literacy and mathematics standards will be made after work is completed on a multi-state effort focused on ensuring that standards meet international benchmarks, also known as "the Common Core." That work is expected to be completed by the end of the year, and New Jersey officials and stakeholders will review it early in 2010 before a final decision is made.

School leaders will examine their curricula to ensure that students will be taught the required knowledge and skills. Local curricula must be aligned to the revised content through a multi-year phase-in beginning this September.

Visit <http://www.nj.gov/education/aps/cccs/> for New Jersey's Core Curriculum Content Standards.

### ***PERSONALIZED STUDENT LEARNING PLANS***

An exciting new component in the state's plan to transform secondary schools is personalized student learning plans (PSLPs). This concept involves using adult mentors, including parents, teachers and counselors, to help students recognize and achieve their education goals.

PSLPs will be piloted in 6 middle schools and 10 high schools in 2009-10. The pilot will guide future efforts to expand the program.

### ***CHANGES IN ASSESSMENTS***

Changes in the state's assessment schedule are closely tied to New Jersey's reform efforts and are ongoing. Since research indicates that it is becoming more difficult to measure student preparedness for college and careers at one specific grade level, the state is shifting its assessments to specific end-of-course exams. An end-of-course exam in biology already has replaced a state-level high school science exam.

Pilot end-of-course exams for Algebra I and Algebra II were administered earlier this year, and the first official Algebra I exams will be administered to middle and high school students who take the course in 2009-10. The Algebra exams will ultimately replace the current High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA) in mathematics. Additional end-of-course exams are expected to be developed in the years to come.

The Special Review Assessment (SRA), the state's alternate program for satisfying the HSPA graduation test requirement, has been replaced with a revised alternate assessment, in keeping with plans previously endorsed by the State Board of Education. The administration and scoring procedures for the new Alternative High School Assessment will be tightened considerably to ensure the integrity and validity of the SRA program and of diplomas attained through the SRA process.

### ***HIGH QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION***

Although the fiscal crisis has forced the state to temporarily postpone plans to expand public preschool for economically disadvantaged students, the idea of providing high quality public preschool programs for 3- and 4-year-olds continues to gain momentum.

Some school districts are beginning to move toward the state's high quality preschool program standards and guidelines by adopting research based, comprehensive preschool curricula, going from half-day to full-day programs, ensuring that intervention and referral services are provided in general education classrooms, offering additional services for families, and expanding the number of preschool children served.

Bound Brook (Somerset County) and Bellmawr (Camden County), for example, plan to implement a research-based curriculum (Creative Curriculum) this year. Franklin Township (Somerset County) and Hillside (Union County) are adding community parent involvement liaisons to better address the needs of families, and Beverly City (Burlington County), Logan Township (Gloucester County) and Linden (Union County) are examples of districts opening additional preschool classrooms or increasing to full-day educational programming for three- and/or four-year-old children.

In 2009-10, the Department of Education expects to serve a record 51,100 low-income general education preschool children statewide. Specialists from the Division of Early Childhood Education have been meeting with school districts and visiting classrooms in support of local public preschool programs. The division is also offering regional workshops to assist local school officials in their efforts to maximize young children's learning and development.

DOE staff members are developing guidelines on best practices in kindergarten classrooms which local school districts can use to improve their kindergarten programs and to create a smooth transition for young pupils

coming to them from high-quality public preschools.

### **ASSISTING AT-RISK STUDENTS**

Finding new and more effective ways to increase student attendance, discourage cutting school, and engaging students in learning is at the heart of the Truancy Reduction Pilot Project. Six cities – Asbury Park, Camden, Newark, Paterson, Trenton and Vineland – are hosting a pilot interagency project designed to address unexcused absences and truancy.

Each city has created a Truancy Planning Committee to oversee and coordinate truancy prevention and intervention activities and to coordinate with appropriate municipal agencies that have a stake in city-based at-risk behavior prevention, to share information and to establish cooperative and coordinated working relationships.

A "Tool Kit for Creating Your Own Truancy Reduction Program" can be found on the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's Web-site at: [http://www.ojjdp.ncjrs.gov/publications/truancy\\_toolkit.html](http://www.ojjdp.ncjrs.gov/publications/truancy_toolkit.html)

Improved coordination with the Department of Children and Families (DCF) is expected to result in greater assistance for children who may be at-risk and children who already are being served by DCF, such as children in out-of-home placement.

The two departments are finalizing a memorandum of agreement that will ensure quality training of school staff in child welfare matters, address out of home placements, and support a broader range of children in need of prevention, intervention and referral services. The agreement is expected to be issued to local school districts this fall.

### **NEW PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT MODELS**

New Jersey's efforts to raise student achievement require a shared commitment from all stakeholders. Chief among them are teachers, who in most cases will be teaching students content that is quite different from the knowledge and skills they learned when they were students.

"The classroom emphasis can no longer be on rote learning, in which memorization of dates, names and other facts were paramount," said Deputy Commissioner of Education Willa Spicer. "Some reports predict that more than half of the students now in high school will work in careers that haven't been invented yet. If that is the case, how can we best prepare our children for the world they will live in?"

"We believe that the answer lies in teaching students to acquire more universal skills, such as problem-solving, working in teams and becoming technologically literate," Dr. Spicer said. "We must place the emphasis on teaching students how to learn."

This year, the DOE launched a three-year professional development initiative to ensure that teachers and administrators are up-to-date in the best ways to provide their students with appropriate, high-quality instruction in safe and welcoming learning environments.

The initiative, *Creating 21st Century New Jersey Schools: the New Jersey Statewide Systemic Model for Continuous Professional Learning and Growth*, will consist of three phases: Awareness and Familiarization (2009); Critical Transformations(2010); and Sustaining the Change(2011).

Training in Awareness and Familiarization will focus on:

- Creating a sense of urgency of the need for change;
- Understanding students as digital learners;
- Modeling a state vision of 21st century learning, teaching and leadership;
- Facilitating communication through on-site sessions, and through face-to-face and virtual professional learning communities;
- Initiating the "habits of mind" for technology use; and
- Providing current information about the changes necessary to educate students in a rapidly changing world.

Another key professional development activity is being tried out in 33 "lab schools" throughout the state. Through this initiative, New Jersey has become one of the first states to implement a school-based professional development requirement which calls for school-level planning and school-based training.

School-based planning for professional development is now required in new regulations adopted by the State Board of Education. These regulations are designed to shift the focus from a district-level in-service model to a school-based collaborative learning model known as a professional learning community (PLC), whose work will be more closely tied to student learning goals within schools. DOE will evaluate the success of the lab school experience to support state-wide, school-based professional learning opportunities.

A related school-based program specific to high schools is now underway. *Secondary School Leadership in a Time of Change* is an initiative designed to ensure that high schools are ready to implement changes that support the kind of learning needed for students who will be working in a global economy.

Supported by a grant from the Wallace Foundation, the Department of Education has been working with 21 school districts across the state to implement changes to support the transformation of their high schools.

To effectively prepare students for life and work in the global era, 21st century high schools need to:

- Increase the rigor and relevance of the subjects taught and align them to the expectations of a 21st century economy;
- Use data effectively to inform instruction;
- Infuse technology into the learning process; and
- Provide for deep personalization in learning to allow all students to learn and to create learning cultures in schools that promote high levels of achievement for all.

Language arts literacy is considered by educators to be the most critical factor in a successful academic career. The Department of Education's Office of Language Arts Literacy Education is continuing its commitment to provide professional development and technical assistance in the coming school year.

Literacy specialists will support effective classroom instruction through job-embedded (classroom modeling) professional development and interactive workshops at the school and district level. In addition, specialized training will continue to support local efforts to teach language arts literacy to special education students and English language learners.

To promote quality language arts literacy instruction beyond the early grades, Department of Education staff are working with local educators who have adopted the Literacy is Essential to Adolescent Literacy and Success (LEADS) model, the state model for literacy instruction grades 4-8. Currently, 18 districts have been trained and specialists will train other school and district staff during the next year.