

# NJBIA

## AT ISSUE *By Christopher Emigholz, Director of Education Affairs*

### A Greater Sense of Urgency in Education Reform

Most schools in New Jersey function reasonably well, but for those that do not, the consequences are devastating. Not only are too many of New Jersey's kids denied a quality education that will impact their future, poor schools cost us money, deprive business of quality employees and hurt our business climate. Past administrations understood this and made some positive changes to New Jersey's system. But with Governor Chris Christie, there is a sense that education reform will take on a sense of urgency. NJBIA is excited about supporting his education agenda.

Consider the statistics. At 28 percent of New Jersey's elementary schools, more than half of the 4th graders did not pass the state's language arts test. At 21 percent of the state's middle schools, more than half of the 8th graders could not pass the standardized math test. At 16 percent of the high schools in the state, more than half of the 11th graders could not pass the math portion of the high school proficiency assessment (HSPA) on their first attempt. At 27 percent of New Jersey's high schools, more than a quarter of the students could not graduate via the high school proficiency assessment (HSPA) at all after several attempts. As these statistics show, most schools in New Jersey are meeting at least the minimum requirements. But hundreds of schools fall woefully short of even the minimum proficiency standards, leaving students' hopes for higher education and opportunities in the workforce greatly diminished.

In recent years, education policy in New Jersey has taken steps forward. The Corzine Administration, for instance, ushered in tougher high school graduation standards, made progress toward regionalization of schools, demanded greater accountability on local school district spending and enacted a school funding formula that focuses more on kids, not buildings. NJBIA supported all of these reforms because they represented steps towards a higher quality education to help the future workforce and more education cost controls to help the taxpayer.

Christie, meanwhile, is tackling the problem of underperforming schools and classrooms like the crisis it is. First of all, Christie believes in school choice, and there is no more urgent assistance to a student in a failed school than allowing them to pick a new one. Whether it

is expanding charter school options, providing tax credit scholarships or growing the existing choices within public schools, the Governor has advocated for more options for students in failing schools to leave and find a better place for their education.



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Second, Governor Christie has advocated for real accountability for educational performance and outcomes, so that teachers and administrators in failing schools will have to change.

Governor Christie's urgent solutions to these urgent problems will encounter opposition because they represent reforms, that much to the chagrin of the education establishment, would actually change the education status quo. The status quo has not worked for all New Jersey students for too long, leaving many stuck in a broken school or classroom. The focus needs to be on helping the students who need it most, so despite any criticism that these reforms may negatively impact the education establishment, these reforms must be done right now.

Governor Christie's education reform agenda will help students immediately, and will eventually help taxpayers as education efficiency improves. NJBIA looks forward to continuing to work with Governor Christie to address these urgent problems that have lingered for so long. **NJB**