

NJBIA

AT ISSUE *By Melanie Willoughby, Senior Vice President Government Affairs*

Preparing Students for the Modern Workplace

An excellent educational system is a critical part of a strong business climate and a growing economy. That's why NJBIA devotes a significant amount of its time addressing education issues at all levels, K-12, higher education and workforce development.

NJBIA's involvement in education issues began in the 1990s when member companies were complaining about the lack of basic business skills among new workers. The Association assigned one of its government affairs professionals to work on education issues and formed a committee of member companies to identify key education issues from a business perspective.

Over the years, NJBIA successfully pushed for new laws adding financial literacy to K through 12 curriculums, implementing public-school choice and making it easier to create charter schools. Furthermore, NJBIA's research affiliate, NJPRO (the New Jersey Policy Research Organization) developed a small business curriculum to help school children learn the basics about business plans, budgeting, and pricing goods and services.

Today, reformers throughout state government are trying to improve the worst performing schools by employing practices that have worked well in business—competition, accountability and reward.

Governor Chris Christie has called for tying teacher tenure to objective measures of effectiveness, such as their students' academic improvement during the school year. Under the current system, once a teacher gets tenure, it is practically permanent, regardless of student performance. Similarly, Christie has called for merit pay for teachers, creating a system that rewards teachers who can demonstrate their effectiveness in student learning.

Christie is also backing a pilot program, Opportunity Scholarship Act, which would allow students from poorly performing public schools to attend non-public schools, thereby providing a measure of competition. Private-sector businesses would contribute to a scholarship fund in return for a tax credit to pay for the program.

NJBIA has been a strong supporter of these initia-

tives and will continue to work to see them enacted.

But now more than ever, it is important that students understand how the lessons they learn in the classroom will help them when they enter the working world. That's why NJBIA also partners with Junior Achievement to bring business ideas directly to the classroom.



>We have to make sure our students receive **an education that will allow them to meet the challenges** of the modern workplace.

Junior Achievement was founded in 1919 to better prepare students for the working world. Junior Achievement volunteers go into the classroom and show children how business operates through one of the two dozen classroom programs the group has developed. Volunteers educate children about their jobs and then work to instill basic business concepts like marketing a product or service, calculating the operating costs of doing business and taking advantage of economies of scale.

They also promote business role models with programs like the Business Hall of Fame initiative, which honors New Jersey business leaders who have made an outstanding contribution to the business community. It is a joint venture between NJBIA, Junior Achievement and *The Star-Ledger* newspaper. The Business Hall of Fame Dinner will be on April 19.

Technology and the global economy are making the workplace more demanding. In New Jersey, we have to use every tool at our disposal to make sure our students are receiving an education that will allow them to meet those challenges. **NJB**