

The following Action Plan provides detailed strategies and specific actions, serving as a technical guide for implementing the recommendations of The Plan. These action plans are intended to be living documents, being revised and updated as Together North Jersey works with various partners on implementing recommendations in The Plan.



Focus Area 9: Create a system of public education that prepares all students for the 21st century economy.

What and why. New Jersey has always been a leader in public education and innovation. We consistently score in the top 10 percent of states on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), a nationally administered standardized test that assesses what students know and their ability to perform certain tasks in various subjects. Nearly three-quarters of high school students take at least one Advanced Placement exam and our students graduate high school and obtain bachelor's degrees at a higher rate than the national average. At the same time, we have one of the country's highest rates of educational disparity in academic achievement. Simply put, in New Jersey, low-income students are far less likely to perform well academically than wealthier peers.

One key explanation for this has to do with concentration of poverty and lack of housing mobility. Families of limited means often can afford to live only in areas served by poor performing schools. For many students in lower income areas, graduating from high school is a struggle. They will likely attend schools where the majority of other students are also low-income and face significant challenges, including overcrowding, lack of resources, few extracurricular programs, limited or no Advanced Placement courses, and fewer experienced, highly qualified teachers.

The future of our region's economy depends on improving outcomes for these low-income students and we must focus on preparing all of our children for the 21st century economy. By fulfilling the promise of equitable funding stated in the School Funding Reform Act of 2008, increasing access to high quality schools, and preparing all of our children for college and careers, New Jersey will be able to maintain our position as an innovative state with a highly skilled labor force.

HOW This Focus Area recommends five strategies to support the creation of a public education system that prepares all North Jersey students for the modern economy. By emphasizing creativity, innovation, cross-cultural communication, problem solving and other 21st century skills, we can leverage the existing system of public education and push forward innovations in education policy that have proven to be successful in other parts of the country. These include public/private partnerships, rethinking school district boundaries, expanding STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, math) programs, establishing universal pre-kindergarten and implementing community school programs.



Strategy 9.1: Address school funding disparities


What and why. With one of the most progressive school funding formulas in the nation, New Jersey already has a strong framework for providing equitable funding for all of our schools. Ensuring that all schools have the needed funding will allow, among other things, for schools to maintain smaller class sizes, retain highly effective teachers, and provide supplemental services to high needs students. Unfortunately, while we have a progressive formula in place, the State of New Jersey has not executed

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that formula to the full extent, under-funding schools and not living up to the formula's potential to provide equitable funding. In order to address current school funding disparities, we need full and adequate state funding for the existing formula. In addition, our region should also encourage the development of outside funding sources to supplement public funding, including the development of public-private partnerships, and experimenting with other innovative ways of sharing costs across municipal/school district lines.

| | <u>Actions:</u> | <u>Suggested Responsibility:</u> | <u>Timeline:</u> |
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| 1. | Provide full and equitable funding for New Jersey public schools by a) Protecting the current weighted school funding in SFRA; and evaluating every three years, as mandated in the legislation, the efficacy of funding for all districts and b) Providing additional funding as needed based on triennial evaluation, including costs association with Common Core State Standard (CCSS) implementation. | Governor, New Jersey Legislature, NJDOE, local school districts, Commissioner | Short to medium term |
| 2. | Encourage the development of public-private partnerships to <i>supplement</i> limited public funding for school programs and services by easing barriers and providing technical support for partnership development. Specifically, existing partnerships that have proven to be effective should be strengthened to encourage a greater role for the private sector. | NJDOE, NJ Office of the Secretary of Higher Education, local school districts, Chambers of Commerce and Business Associations, Institutions of Higher Education | Mid to long term |
| 3. | Study the viability of sharing services on a county-wide basis. | NJDOE, County Superintendent of Schools, local school districts, county elected officials, municipalities, municipal service providers | Medium term |

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| <p>4.</p> | <p>Create a common tax pool across county to alleviate intra-county disparities. Conduct study with multiple stakeholders to determine the feasibility of implementing a common tax levy across county to alleviate intra-county disparities.</p> <p>The state should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide for fiscal analysis and technical assistance to districts and counties to assist in the reorganization process. • Provide financial support for local districts and counties to undergo study of the possibility of reorganization. <p>School Districts and Counties:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold open public forum to discuss concerns and benefits of reorganization and a common tax levy with attention to the financial pros and cons, as well as the possible impacts on academic outcomes, diversity, safety, administration, and faculty/staff protections. | <p>New Jersey Legislature New Jersey Association of School Administrators, County Superintendent of Schools, NJ Dept. of Treasury, county and municipal officials</p> | <p>Medium to long term</p> |
| <p>5.</p> | <p>Provide support for districts and municipalities to explore consolidation, regionalization, and reorganization of school districts as a cost saving and sharing strategy.</p> | <p>Municipalities, NJDOE, NJ School Board Association, NJ Principals and Superintendents Association, NJDOE, NJ Office of the State Auditor, nonprofits, NGOs, advocacy groups</p> | <p>Medium to long term</p> |



Strategy 9.2: Expand school programming for 21st century economy

What and why. STEAM programming—science, technology, engineering, arts and math—helps to prepare students for the new high-tech, information based economy by blending design and creativity into the hard sciences. Our region should expand access to STEAM programming to all students, with special consideration given to underserved districts and schools. Expanded programming will require extended learning time, meaningful partnerships with area employers and colleges/universities, and financial and technical support for school districts to develop STEAM curriculum.

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| | <u>Actions:</u> | <u>Suggested Responsibility:</u> | <u>Timeline:</u> |
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| 1. | Support local school districts in developing STEAM integrated curriculum and programming to increase access among minority and low-income students. Provide additional financial and technical support for school districts. | NJDOE, Legislature, New Jersey Chamber of Commerce, business associations | Short to medium term |
| 2. | Develop partnerships with businesses, colleges/universities and non-profits to support STEAM programming and share equipment and facilities. | NJDOE, Legislature, institutions of Higher Education, businesses, nonprofits and NGOs, local school districts | Short to medium term |
| 3. | Evaluate current alternative route teacher training programs for efficacy in recruiting, training, and retaining highly skilled STEAM professionals to teach in low-income, high minority districts. | NJDOE, intuitions of higher education | Short to medium term |
| 4. | Provide support and professional development for traditional route teachers to become and remain STEM/STEAM teachers – including dedicated funding for the program costs and technology to extend programs that have proven successful in training and retaining highly qualified teachers. | NJDOE, local school districts, nonprofits | Short to medium term |
| 5. | Support the maintenance and development of STEM/STEAM programs that are not limited to high achieving students and are inclusive of all students. | NJDOE, local school districts, nonprofits | Short to medium term |
| 6. | Pilot a school-based ‘maker space’ in an area high school. | NJDOE, local school districts, nonprofits | Medium term |


What and why. Funding pre-K education for all low-income students in the region, as mandated by the School Funding Reform Act (SFRA), would contribute significantly to reducing the region’s performance disparities between districts. Investing in early childhood education yields high long-term returns, both in financial and academic terms, and reduces the need for costly educational interventions in the future. To improve access to early childhood education, our region needs awareness campaigns to demonstrate the value of early education. Programs are also needed to help parents support young children in the development of prerequisite skills such as language acquisition, number and pattern recognition, and developmentally appropriate command of spatial intelligence.

| | <u>Actions:</u> | <u>Suggested Responsibility:</u> | <u>Timeline:</u> |
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| 1. | Increase awareness of and access to high quality pre-K for low-income families. | NJDOE, local school districts | Short term |
| 2. | Improve channels for data sharing among social service providers and school districts/pre-K providers to enable all to better assess student and family needs for particularly vulnerable students (homeless, new immigrants, migrants, children in the foster system and military families). | NJDOE, NJDOH, NJ Department of Health Services, NJ Department of Children and Families, The Early Learning Commission | Short to medium term |
| 3. | Provide for full funding of the SFRA mandate to expand preschool to high needs districts and at-risk children in targeted districts across the state. | NJ legislature and Governor | Medium to long term |
| 4. | Provide funding to produce new pre-K classrooms. | School Development Authority | Medium to long term |
| 5. | Provide funding for wraparound services to extend the preschool day for low-income families. | NJ legislature, Governor, and NJDOE, NJ Department of Children and Families | Medium to long term |

What and why. The community schools model maximizes the use of existing school buildings—places that are familiar to members of the community—by using them as bases of operations to provide wraparound services for students, families and communities. Our region should implement public-public and public-private partnerships that transform our public schools into community centers, where children, youth, families and community members can access a wide range of support services that improve the child’s ability to perform in school. For example, community schools can offer adult education courses, on-site preventative health services, mental health counselors, food pantries, early childhood education, and citizenship and English language classes. Some community schools even include farmers markets and laundromats.

| | <u>Actions:</u> | <u>Suggested Responsibility:</u> | <u>Timeline:</u> |
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| 1. | Ensure that all Title I schools are held accountable for the Effective Family and Community Engagement standards based on federal Title I requirements. | NJDOE, school districts, superintendents | Short to medium term |
| 2. | Utilize family-friendly data collection instruments to collect data on family and community engagement: student service consumption, referrals, community based partnerships, school climate and school satisfaction | NJDOE, school districts | Short to medium term |
| 3. | Create closer partnerships and shared services within county offices, including county parks, libraries, and community based organizations, etc. | Counties, school districts, schools, municipalities | Short to medium term |
| 4. | Encourage the development of parent led groups in schools and the use of special purpose ('ad hoc') committees at the school board level (can also be 'study group' or 'task force') to create greater ties to the community, increase input and engagement among parents and community stakeholders, and review new policies or programs. | Local school districts, schools, social service providers, non-profits | Short to medium term |
| 5. | Conduct a feasibility study to evaluate university and college based extension programs based on population served, outcomes, possibility of targeted expansion, and fostering partnerships with school districts. | NJDOE, NJ Office of the Secretary of Higher Education, institutions of higher education | Short to medium term |
| 6. | Create wrap-around Integrated Student Support services through partnerships with social service providers. | NJDOE, NJDOH, NJDCF, local school districts, foundations and private funders | Short to medium term |

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| 7. | Provide funding for extended day and extended year programming through partnerships with the private sector, municipalities, and schools. | School districts, municipalities, nonprofits/NGOs, foundations and private funders, business community, legislature, NJDOE, local elected officials | Short to medium term |
| 8. | Implement pilots of successful full service community school models. | NJDOE, legislature, NJDCF, nonprofits/NGOs, foundations and private funders, advocacy groups | Medium to long term |



Strategy 9.5: Expand boundaries and access to high performing schools

What and why. Currently, educational opportunities for poor and minority students are limited by where they live. Helping students access a quality education, regardless of their zip code, is critical to our region’s long-term success. New Jersey has a fragmented system of school options that includes traditional public schools, charter schools, magnet schools and the Inter-district Public School Choice Program. North Jersey needs a more coherent approach to school options, stronger partnerships geared towards shared services, and a thorough review of the current options available for improving access to high quality schools. This approach should include a feasibility study to evaluate options for district consolidation and regionalization.

| | <u>Actions:</u> | <u>Suggested Responsibility:</u> | <u>Timeline:</u> |
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| 1. | Evaluate and make Changes to IDPC Program <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate current Interdistrict Public Choice Program for enrollment of low-income students and academic gains. • Create a dedicated pool of new Interdistrict Public Choice Program seats for students that qualify for free and reduced lunch. | NJDOE & Local school districts | Short to medium term |
| 3. | Highlight existing successful partnerships as models. | NJDOE, Department | Medium term |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clarify current legislation and policy around shared service provision. Open SHARE grant funding to include local school districts that partner with nongovernmental organizations. | of Community Affairs, Local school districts, County Superintendent of Schools | |
| 4. | <p>Conduct feasibility study to evaluate pathways to district consolidation and regionalization- focused on expanding countywide vocational school district model or other models deemed efficient based on local needs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offer matching grants to help fund feasibility studies at the local level. | NJDOE, Local school districts, NJ Legislature, governor | Medium term |
| 5. | Evaluate current student enrollment to determine feasibility of expanding magnet school model to additional districts. Magnet school expansion should be aimed at creating integrated student bodies and providing specialized curricular programming (such as STEM/STEAM). | NJDOE, County Superintendent of Schools, and local school districts | Medium to long term |

