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## Governor Chris Christie's Remarks On New Jersey Academic Standards As Prepared For Delivery

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Burlington County College  
Pemberton, New Jersey  
May 28, 2015

Thank you, Commissioner Hespe, for that introduction. I am very pleased to be with you.

Now that Memorial Day has passed, we are in the home stretch of the school year. I know that students, faculty, and staff are all finding it hard to believe that another school year is almost over but are eager for the start of summer break. I know my kids are.

I think back to my own days at Livingston High School – as hard as it is for me to believe, my class just had its 35th reunion – but I look back at those years with a great sense of gratitude.

Gratitude for the job that my teachers did in preparing me for the life that lay ahead and for the commitment they showed their students day in and day out.

I am thankful to every one of them for their dedication to launching me and my classmates into adulthood, ready to meet the challenges to come.

And really, isn't that what education is all about?

It's about helping the youth of our communities, our state, and our country become productive, capable, engaged citizens.

And it's about helping our children become knowledgeable and skilled adults who can build a better future for themselves and for our society.

Everyone in this room – and everyone in this state – shares the same goals for our students.

We all want to ensure that our children receive the quality education that is their right to receive and our obligation to provide. A quality education that I strongly believe requires both high educational standards and accountability.

That's why I have invited you here today to talk about how to build this better future for our children – a future that is, without question, tied to the value of the education we give them.

Never before in American history has the role of education in building that better future been more important.

We live in an era of rapid and enormous change – a time in which many of the careers our current students will pursue don't even exist yet.

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We live in a dramatically shrinking world – a world in which our students will be competing against their peers from every corner of the globe as never before.

And we live in an evermore demanding world – a world in which the skills and knowledge students will need to succeed are becoming tougher to obtain and more difficult to maintain.

So the challenge we face is this: How do we ensure that our students leave our schools ready to meet the challenges they will face as they begin the rest of their lives?

As I have said, New Jersey has a long history of embracing rigorous educational standards, and my goal, with your help, is to carry on that New Jersey tradition, and improve upon it.

Where do we start? We start by beginning an examination and discussion on New Jersey-focused, educational standards that better prepare our students for the challenges that they will face in the years ahead.

And so, today, I am directing the Commissioner of Education, David Hespe, to begin immediately to assemble a group of parents and educators to consider developing New Jersey educational standards – New Jersey College and Career Readiness Standards.

I want New Jersey parents and teachers to be the driving force behind the establishment of these new standards. I want New Jersey business partners, New Jersey school administrators, and New Jersey school boards to work together in this important effort.

I have heard from far too many people – teachers and parents from across the state – that the Common Core standards were not developed by New Jersey educators and parents. As a result, the buy-in from both communities has not been what we need for maximum achievement. I agree. It is time to have standards that are even higher and come directly from our communities.

And, in my view, this new era can be even greater by adopting new standards right here in New Jersey – not 200 miles away on the banks of the Potomac River.

But before I get into the details, I want to give you some background.

We have long understood in New Jersey the need to change our standards and our testing as the demands of the world changes. In fact, we have been doing it for at least four decades.

From the Eighth Grade Early Warning and the High School Proficiency tests of the 1980s, through the HSPA and the NJASK of the 1990s and 2000s, to the current PARCC test, New Jersey has been a leader in setting educational standards and measuring student achievement.

Clearly, we know that setting standards should not be a one-time process, but instead should be revisited from time to time, as circumstances require.

Over the past four decades, New Jersey's commitment to rigorous standards and measuring results – and our ability to evolve as the world changes – has produced results.

The National Assessment of Education Progress, which is known as “the nation's report card,” consistently ranks New Jersey at or near the top in terms of student achievement.

In 2013, New Jersey ranked first in the nation in eighth grade reading and second in eighth grade math. And in a pilot program conducted that same year for twelfth grade students in 13 states, New Jersey ranked second in math and was tied for fourth in reading.

It would be easy to look at these numbers and conclude that we're doing the job we need to do here in New Jersey.

It would be easy, but it wouldn't be the whole story.

It isn't good enough to close the profound and persistent achievement gap between economically advantaged and disadvantaged students and between white students and African American and Hispanic students.

It isn't good enough to graduate students that meet the demands of New Jersey's employers.

In short, better isn't good enough to prepare all our students for their own future success and the success of our state and our country.

The statistics that back this up are sobering.

Look at the graduation rates at our two-year community colleges and our four-year colleges. They strongly suggest that our students are entering these institutions unprepared for college-level work.

For example, we have community colleges where fewer than 10 percent of students pursuing a two-year course of study graduate within three years.

This is not surprising when you realize that across our entire community college system, anywhere from 60 percent to 82 percent of the students need remedial education before they can even begin to tackle college-level work.

A look at our four-year colleges and universities is equally unsettling. We have four-year institutions where fewer than 50 percent of students earn a degree in six years – not four years, six years.

It's not enough to attend college – we want students who go to college to actually graduate from college.

A look at the achievement gap in reading and math between poor students and those who are not and between white students and minority students shocks the conscience.

According to the state assessments, far fewer of New Jersey's poor students and of our minority students are proficient in math and language arts than their counterparts. The gap ranges from 25 percentage points to 31.

It's not enough for most of our students to become proficient – we want all of our students, no matter their economic status or their race or ethnicity, to acquire the skills they need to compete in the 21st century.

And a look at the projected demands of employers in 15 years indicates that we will not be able to meet their needs unless we do a better job educating our children.

By 2030, it is projected that 55 percent of all new and replacement jobs will require people with a post-secondary degree. Yet in New Jersey today, only 42 percent of individuals over 25 have at least an associate degree.

Unless those numbers change – and they must change – that means that 15 years from now, nearly six out of every ten students will lack the basic requirement for a good job.

In my view, it's not enough for our students to find a job – we want our students to be able to find good jobs.

We cannot continue to graduate students from our high schools who are unable to take on first-year college-level work.

We cannot continue to distribute high school diplomas that employers tell me do not reliably indicate that our graduates possess the entry-level skills required in new hires.

And we cannot continue to send some of New Jersey's students to the starting line of their adult lives hobbled by a fundamental inability to even run the race, let alone win it.

So what can we do – what must we do?

My vision for education is simply stated:

- I want every classroom to be a place where learning occurs for every student;
- I want every teacher to be invested in meeting parents' expectations for their children every day in the classroom; and
- I want to return to New Jersey's leaders—our parents, teachers, administrators, and boards of education -- control over the education our students receive and wrest it away from Washington, DC bureaucrats.

As Washington has increased its control over our students' education, our children have fallen further and further behind their peers around the world.

When Washington, DC took over Common Core in the Obama Administration, it pulled education away from our neighborhoods..

That is not what is best for the investment New Jersey is making in our children's education.

This should not come as a big surprise. Whenever this federal government has crowded out local control, things have only gotten worse.

We must embrace again the uniquely American idea that the people closest to the problem are usually best equipped to find the solution to that problem.

That is especially true in education.

Ask someone to name an educator who had a profound impact on his or her life.

Everyone can come up with the name of a teacher who helped change his or her life.

Learning doesn't happen in conference rooms populated by federal functionaries.

Learning happens in classrooms, sparked by teachers whose passion and high expectations for their students motivates and inspires kids to learn and to excel.

Learning happens at home, when parents sit at the kitchen table to motivate their children and help them achieve the very best of their potential.

And that's where we must focus our attention – in every New Jersey classroom and home. That's where higher standards can be developed.

We do not want to be the first generation in our Nation's history to leave our children less equipped and less prepared to build for themselves and their children a nation stronger and more prosperous than the one our parents gave to us.

We owe our kids the educational foundation they need to thrive, not just survive.

As I mentioned earlier, New Jersey has been a national leader in setting standards for the education of our children. We have also been a leader in evaluating whether our students are meeting those standards.

Governor Kean in the 1980s and Governor Whitman in the 1990s established standards and testing to meet the demands of those times. In each case, those efforts produced results.

More recently, in 2010, New Jersey agreed to participate in the federal Common Core State Standard Initiative.

It's now been five years since Common Core was adopted. And the truth is that it's simply not working. It has brought only confusion and frustration to our parents. And has brought distance between our teachers and the communities where they work. Instead of solving problems in our classrooms, it is creating new ones. And when we aren't getting the job done for our children, we need to do something different.

Under Commissioner Hesse's leadership, I am instructing the Department of Education to convene teams of New Jersey educators and parents to conduct a point-by-point review of New Jersey's previous state standards and to consider recommending changes that make our standards higher and New Jersey based.

This review will be completed by the end of 2015.

This educator and parent review of the standards must address what I view as the most important questions facing us:

- Do the current standards reflect New Jersey's real and distinct needs?
- Do they measure up to previous New Jersey standards?
- Do they reflect the expectations of New Jersey's colleges and employers? and
- Will they close the persistent and profound achievement gap?

In addition, our review teams also must answer more specific questions about curriculum choices and instructional practices.

This process will be comprehensive and transparent.

And as this effort unfolds, Commissioner Hesse will give members of the community not directly involved in the review the opportunity to offer their ideas.

He will also work to broaden the public's understanding of how New Jersey's educational system works and what we intend to accomplish through this effort.

This will in no way affect our efforts to continue effective testing and measurement of our students through the PARCC test. We must continue to review and improve that test based on results, not fear or speculation. I will not permit New Jersey to risk losing vital federal education funds because some would prefer to let the perfect get in the way of the good. We must test our children because federal law requires it and because it is the only way to objectively judge our progress. Bringing educational standards home to New Jersey does nothing to change those obligations.

We also must continue with our teacher evaluation initiative through our Teach NJ Tenure reform statute. On this we will be unyielding. No one should stand for anything less than an excellent teacher in every classroom—not parents, other teachers, administrators or our students. Accountability in every classroom must be one of the pillars of our New Jersey based higher standards.

We all want to do everything we can to make certain that our students are equipped with the knowledge and skills they will need to thrive in rapidly changing workplaces in a rapidly changing world.

And we all want to provide to our students an education based on standards that the people who know them best have developed and implemented with energy, passion, and an eye toward the future.

That is the purpose of my actions today.

Thirty-five years ago, when I walked into the football stadium at Livingston High School, shook the principal's hand, and received my diploma, I couldn't know that someday I would have the honor of being twice elected by my fellow New Jerseyans as governor of this great state.

But I did know this: I knew that the education I had been provided helped make me ready to pursue my hopes and dreams for the future, whatever they might be.

That is something all children, when they make that same walk across the stage at their high schools, also deserve to know.

So today, I ask for your help in achieving this ambitious and worthy goal for the future success of our students and for

our state.

We must reject federal control of our education and return it to parents and teachers. We need to take it out of the cubicles of Washington, DC where it was placed by the Obama Administration and return it to the neighborhoods of New Jersey.

That new era in our state begins today.

Let's make sure that our standards set the bar high, so our children can reach even higher.

Thank you.

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**Press Contact:**

Kevin Roberts  
Brian Murray  
609-777-2600



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Office of the Governor  
PO Box 001  
Trenton, NJ 08625  
609-292-6000